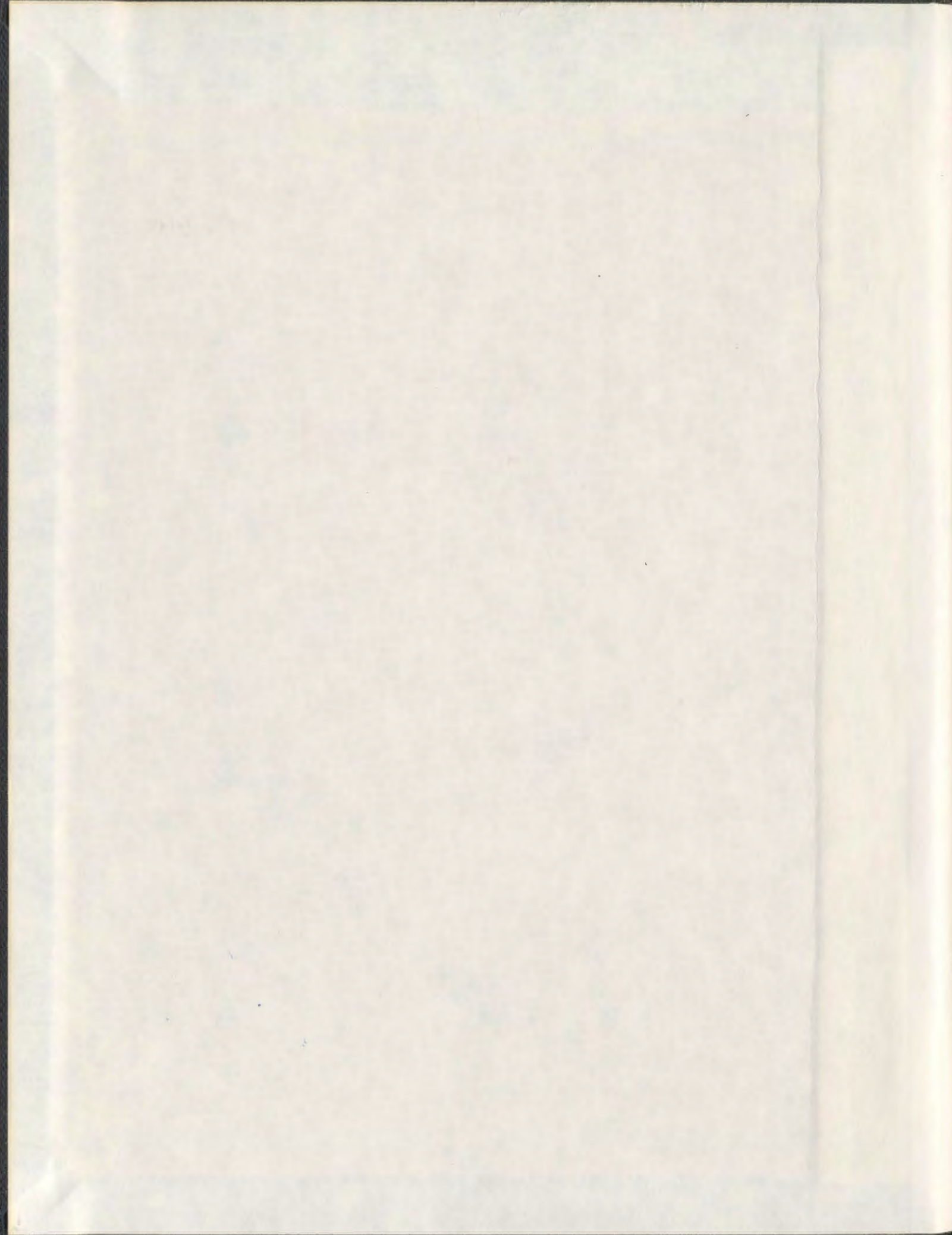


ENCODING SONG:

FAITHFUL DEFIANCE IN MEXICAN MENNONITE

MUSIC MAKING

JUDITH MARIE KLASSEN



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ENCODING SONG: FAITHFUL DEFIANCE IN MEXICAN MENNONITE MUSIC
MAKING

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Abstract

Encoding Song: Faithful Defiance in Mexican Mennonite Music Making

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Between 1922 and 1926, over 7,000 Old Colony Mennonites left Canada to settle in northern Mexico. In addition to prioritizing religious education, rejecting “technology,” and maintaining Low and High German as their vernacular and worship languages, respectively, this pacifist religious group practiced nonconformity by proscribing particular forms of song practice. This meant the singing of *lange Wies* (“long way” or “long melody”) in worship, and the forbidding of musical instruments in public and domestic spheres. While musical prohibitions have lessened in recent years, instrument use, genre choices, and performance styles remain contentious.

The Mennonite colonies in northern Mexico are currently comprised of Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and Evangelical churches. Despite their shared Anabaptist heritage, diverse – and sometimes conflicting – understandings of what it means to “be Mennonite” among these churches have meant that for Old Colonists, “worldly” influences have not only come from beyond their communities, but from within the Mennonite colonies themselves.

This dissertation is grounded in research conducted in Mexico in 2006, and explores how analyses of song repertoire, performance style, social interaction, and the assigning of musical meaning might inform understandings of Mennonite faith communities. Narratives of covert musicking in conserving domestic spaces, defiant song practices among Old Colony youth in the more public *Singstunde* (“singing hour”),

and careful musical decisions made by evangelical Mennonites in their efforts to “share the gospel” with conserving Mennonite neighbours, demonstrate that essentialist depictions of Mexican Mennonites, emphasizing conservative values and resistance to change, frequently cloud efforts to the contrary from within Mennonite colonies themselves.

Building on past research that has emphasized the didactic function of song among non-conformist religious communities, and engaging diasporic theory to emphasize the agency of conserving Mennonites within these communities, this study demonstrates that devout belief and defiant song practice are not mutually exclusive. Further, by examining the overlapping roles of church community and family in the performance of faith, it expands models for religious experience that rely on individual-collective dialectics. Finally, by engaging ethnography in relation to Mennonite song practice and belief, this study complicates the easy polarization of evangelical and conserving faith experience.

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Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: Mennonite History, Sacrality, and Diasporic Stance

1.1 Historical Prelude

Legends of the revolutionary Pancho Villa and stories of Mennonite migration may seem to occupy wholly disparate historiographic realms; however, political upheavals in Mexico and discontent among Canada's Old Colony Mennonites led to their collision in the 1920s.¹ Northern Mexico's peasant class had just engaged in a successful revolution, and was ready to claim its place in a Mexican nation worth fighting for. Canadian Mennonites were ready to claim their places in a Mexican nation that exempted them from military service and freed them from governmental interference such as they experienced in Canada.² On the one hand, the success of the Mexican revolution

¹ The Reinländer Mennonite Church was formed in Manitoba, Canada, in 1875 by immigrants from Fürstenland and Chortitza colonies in Russia. Johann Wiebe, from Fürstenland Colony, became their bishop (J. Friesen 2007, 29). The official adoption of the "Old Colony Mennonite Church" moniker occurred only after the Reinländer Church emigrated to Mexico in the 1920s. The name was chosen because many church members had roots in the Chortitza Colony, or "Old Colony," in Russia (J. Friesen 2007, 77). Colloquial use of *Alte Kolonie* (High German; "Old Colony"), however, predates this. According to Cornelius Krahn, the term was first used "to distinguish the Chortitza Mennonite settlement of Russia (founded in 1789) from the later Molotschna settlement (founded in 1803)" (1955). Krahn goes on to explain that when Manitoba's West Reserve was settled by Mennonites from Russia's Chortitza and Fürstenland colonies, they were referred to as *Altcolonier* "since they had come from the Old Colony (Chortitza) in Russia. Although the official name of the Old Colony group is 'Reinland Mennonite Church', it has generally become known as the Old Colony Mennonite Church, and the people are referred to as Old Colonists" (1955). In this dissertation, I use "Old Colony" in this more general sense.

² The *Privilegium* was a document endorsed by the Mexican government that assured the

brought with it possibilities of new lands and resources for poor peasant farmers in northern Mexico. On the other, the instability caused by civil uprising put the sparsely populated region in a state of vulnerability and made it an easy target for land-hungry *gringos* to the north. Hoping to simultaneously reconcile the peasant population and populate the country's north with hard-working immigrants who would make the desert bloom, then president Alvaro Obregón welcomed the arrival of over 7,000 Mennonites from Canada between 1922 and 1926 (O. Klassen 1997).³ Purchasing 225,000 acres of land from wealthy landowner Carlos Zuloaga, these pacifist Anabaptists would not only curb the threat of American invasion, they would model for native Mexicans the agricultural possibilities currently untapped in the region (Will 1997, 359).

Obregón's plan was only partially successful. In addition to the patronizing elements in this vision for northern Mexico, political leaders failed to consider the non-conformist community structures that agrarian Mennonites would bring with them. While, as hoped, their presence served to stabilize the region and to alter its agricultural landscape, integration with local residents – necessary for sharing ideas about farm sustainability and agricultural development – was incongruous with Old Colony

Mennonites certain privileges in Mexico. These included such things as freedom of religious practice and expression, independent authority in matters of education, and exemptions from military service and the taking of oaths (Will 1997, 356-57).

³ John J. Friesen places the number of migrating Sommerfelder and Reinländer Mennonites from Manitoba at 3,500 (2007, 63). Most of the other migrants came from Saskatchewan. The decision by many Old Colony Mennonites to migrate from Canada to Mexico was based on the recommendations of delegates Klaas Heide, Cornelius Rempel, Julius Loewen, David Rempel, Benjamin Goertzen and Johann Loeppky. Four visits to Mexico occurred in 1921, with migration following from 1922 to 1926 (Harms 2001, 119). Further details about the Old Colony search for land and religious freedom is found in H. L. Sawatsky's *They Sought a Country: Mennonite Colonization in Mexico* (1971).

Mennonite belief systems. It was in fact the very thing they left Canada to avoid. Subsequent misunderstandings between Mennonite landowners and native Mexicans frequently resulted; what was for Old Colony immigrants a new beginning on land acquired through legal sale was interpreted by many peasant farmers as government sanctioned theft (Quiring 2003, 64; Will 1997).⁴

When their paths first crossed, Spanish Mexicans and Canadian Mennonites shared an anticipation of a new beginning for and in Mexico. The subsequent paths of Mennonites and Spanish Mexicans, their intersections and departures, comprise an important part of Mexico's history – but only part. Equally valuable are the myriad expressions of “Mennonite” and “Spanish” Mexican identity within each group.

Northern Mexico is currently host to different Mennonite groups, some with ties to early conserving migrations, and others connected to evangelical and other denominations in the United States and Canada. Diverse, and sometimes divergent, understandings of what it means to “be Mennonite” among these churches have meant that the struggle to remain faithful is shaped not only by influences from Spanish Mexico, but also by interactions among Mennonites themselves. Because church, work, and home life are largely integrated in Mexico's Mennonite communities, ideological divergences around worship, education, technology, and music praxis are part of this struggle.

⁴ According to Martina Will, hostilities directed towards Mennonite immigrants were not motivated “in nationalist or religious terms, but tremendous agrarian conflict came to a head after their arrival in the region” (1997, 359).

In this dissertation, I follow the musical pathways of northern Mexico's conserving Mennonites,⁵ considering the complex relationships at work within colony, church, and family as they struggle to remain faithful in the face of challenges both in- and outside their communities. While music is rarely described as an agent in negotiations among Mexico's Mennonites, it is significant in this context. Grounding my observations in fieldwork conducted in northern Mexico in 2006, I consider musical practices among Mennonites that defy those officially sanctioned by the church. By examining the implications of repertoires and performance styles in domestic and public music making, I explore the paradox of "Christian" songs that at once unify and challenge family and community.

1.2 Introduction and History

Between 1922 and 1926, over 7,000 Anabaptist Mennonites left Canada to settle in northern Mexico. Concerned by increasing governmental control of language and education in their settlements, this pacifist religious group sought to distance itself from

⁵ I use "conserving" here to refer to Old Colony-derived Mennonite groups like the Old Colony, Reinlander, and Sommerfelder churches in Mexico. My use of this designation follows that of John Friesen, who writes of Old Colony, Reinland, Sommerfeld, Zion, Interlake Mennonite Fellowship, and Chortitzer churches in Manitoba, "They are conservative in what they accept of the lifestyle of the society, and usually adopt some visible features, like head coverings, as signs of distinction from it. However, the designation 'conservers' might be even more appropriate since each of these churches sees itself as trying to 'conserve' or continue their Anabaptist Mennonite heritage" (2004, 141). Friesen goes on to write, "Innovation and change is not their goal" (2004, 141). In the same way that Rogers Brubaker (2005) deciphers between diasporic "entity" and "stance," so I decipher between "conservative" and "conserving." Whereas a "conservative entity" implies stasis, a "conserving stance" requires engagement. While "innovation and change" are perhaps not sought out by conserving groups, a "conserving stance" allows for agency and change to co-exist with a valuing of the past.

governmental pressures and “worldly” influences in Canada. Musically, this meant the reintroduction of *lange Wies* (Low German; “long way” or “long melody”) singing in worship, and the forbidding of musical instruments in public and domestic spheres.

While musical prohibitions in northern Mexico are no longer strictly monitored and enforced, instrument use, genre choices, and performance styles remain contentious; radios and musical instruments are no longer hidden under the bed, but song repertoires and performance styles in contexts of education and worship are carefully scrutinized.

My research extends my master’s project (J. Klassen 2003), which involved extensive dialogue with 20 Mennonite families living in southern Manitoba. Here, the vital role of Protestant hymns and *Evangeliums Lieder* (High German; “gospel songs”) in the shaping of the family became clear. Frequently acknowledged as a symbol of unity, the collective singing of a particular sacred repertoire was described as a trigger of memory, a tool for meaningful worship, and a means of reinforcing family beliefs and values. While my M.A. focused on careful ethnographic description within Canadian families, this project extends to diasporic Mexican Mennonite experience at community and family levels.⁶ It challenges conceptions of musical unity that assume sameness by exploring diverse, and sometimes contentious, song practices among conserving Mennonites in Mexico’s northern region. Further, while my focus remains with conserving practice, the extent to which conserving and evangelical expressions of belief are connected to music praxis requires that their interactions also be addressed.

⁶ In this dissertation, I refer to diasporic Mennonites in Mexico as “Mexican Mennonites.”

This work is organized around two questions; namely: “How can analyses of repertoire, performance style, social interaction, performance context, and the assigning of musical meaning inform understandings of Mennonite faith communities?” and “What are the sonic encodings in Mennonite song that facilitate these understandings?”

Through the analysis of specific performance contexts and repertoires, and with particular consideration of personal experience narratives and the ideologies about musical function and performance style that they convey, my research offers a new perspective on what constitutes “sacred” musical repertoire, and how this repertoire functions in public and domestic contexts. In responding to these questions, I engage diaspora theory, ethnography, and musical analysis to challenge essentialist depictions of Mexican Mennonites in academic and non-academic spheres.

Studies of conserving groups frequently employ binaries of complacency and resistance. The negotiation of respect and challenge in conserving religious life, however, is not so easily categorized. In this study, I challenge resistance models that polarize defiance and accommodation by exploring musical practices among Mexican Mennonites that simultaneously engender devout belief and defiant practice. Focussing on musical practices that challenge conventional assumptions about acceptable song practice among conserving Mennonites in Mexico, my research suggests that defiant song practice does not preclude family and community unity. Rather, it demonstrates the creative resilience of individuals, families, congregations, and communities.

1.2.1 Mennonite Music Literature

A substantial literature about Mennonite music has been directed at worship leaders in Canadian and American Mennonite churches with a view to encourage thoughtful worship planning (B. Kropf and Nafziger 2001; Neufeld 1998; Oyer 1980). Much can be gleaned from this body about the goals and values of these churches, as well as the myriad ideas that liturgy signifies for them. Still, the diverse – even divergent – expressions of “Mennonite” in congregations outside of the United States and Canada are not addressed in this literature, nor has it contributed to an engaged discourse about music making among Mennonites beyond the walls of the church building. Recent efforts by Canadian and American scholars have broadened this scope considerably (Dueck 2003; 2005; D. Klassen 1990; 1995), with efforts like the 2004 Sound in the Land conference and subsequent publication (Epp and Weaver 2005) reconfiguring the boundaries of Mennonite music scholarship.

The work of scholars like Peter Letkemann and Wesley Berg has contributed to an historical appreciation of choral singing among *Kanadier* (1870s migration) and *Russländer* (1920s migration) Mennonites. Letkemann’s doctoral thesis (1985) focuses on Russian Mennonite hymnody and choral music between 1799-1915, and also provides valuable historical details dating back as far as the 16th century. Berg charts the origins of choral music in the Russian Mennonite colonies, and subsequent arrival in Canada during the 1920s. Celebrating the influences of Russian Mennonites in Canada, he contends that they were “a vital infusion” in Canadian congregations previously unaware of choral singing’s potential (Berg 1985, 54). The valuing of music for its social and

cultural capital among *Russländer* Mennonites in Canada is implicit in Berg's work, and explicitly articulated by Doreen Klassen in her examination of musical borrowing and socio-political power in the melody borrowing practices of immigrant Mennonite communities (1990). By observing the folk melodies chosen by Low German Mennonites in Ukraine, and later upon their arrival in southern Manitoba, Klassen suggests that associations with established groups in the region were made – intentionally or otherwise – through the adoption of specific tunes (1990, 95-97).

While the close integration of religious values into family life has been recognized (Bauman 1976; R. Loewen 1993; Redekop 1989), rarely has the role played by sacred song been considered a factor that shapes identity outside of public worship. For instance, sacred music in the home – a vital “micromusic” (Slobin 2003) – has been little explored.⁷ Writing about the absence of domestic music in ethnomusicological discourse, Anthony Seeger contends that too much attention “has been focused on public performances by adults, at the expense of documenting and learning to understand domestic performances by women, children, and families” (2006, 218). Addressing Mennonite historiography specifically, Royden Loewen has written that the household has acted as a valuable undergirding – “the dynamic everyday world” – for Mennonites as they are transplanted into new places and negotiate relations with ‘the world’ beyond their communities (2001, 105-06). The failure to recognize varied domestic and public

⁷ Doreen Klassen's *Singing Mennonite* includes a chapter on Low German *Jeistliche* or *Kjoakjeleeda* (“spiritual” or “church songs”) among Mennonites in southern Manitoba. While the domestic singing of hymns is beyond the scope of her study, this work provides meaningful insight into ideas about worship in relation to language use in church and at home (1989).

music making in scholarly and popular discourse about Mennonites fosters an assumption that divorces sacred from secular, private from public, church worship from home – circumscribing perceptions of music within Mennonite traditions.

Ethnographic studies have frequently articulated the strong didactic function of song among Anabaptists families and villages (Elder 2001; V. Friesen 1988; D. Klassen 1989; Martens 2002). While such studies offer valuable insight into the role of song in the validation of culture, education, community maintenance, and amusement – Bascom’s four functions of folklore (1954) – my study of music’s functions in domestic and public contexts extends beyond, and indeed challenges, these foci. By considering musical choices among Mennonites in northern Mexico that do not *validate culture* but rather defy it, musical practices that belie conflicting *educational* ideals, embody disparate frameworks for *community maintenance*, and point to seemingly incongruous conceptions of *amusement* among community members, the complex functions of song in community are underscored. While I do not equate agency with self-determination for Old Colony Mennonites, a danger carefully articulated by Kerry Fast (2004), I contend that by challenging norms of conformity, Mennonites in domestic and public contexts demonstrate agency in identity creation, an agency that holds significant implications for how individuals, families, and communities are understood.

1.2.2 A Word on Terminology

Whereas ethnographies of resistance and studies of song in social protest are prevalent in popular music studies and ethnomusicology (Collin 2001; Denisoff 1983; Erlmann 1992; Fischlin and Heble 2003; Gerstin 2003; Muller 1999), seldom has a

language of social protest been adopted in studies of conserving North American religious movements.⁸ In a discussion of what she calls “rituals of resistance” (1999, 65) among Nazarite women in South Africa, Carol Ann Muller frames resistance as “a process of boundary definition between groups, and cultural (re)construction within a group, which, in the South African context of conquest and domination, has assumed a highly politicized face, and in that sense constitutes actions of resistance” (1999, 278 endnote 17).

While terminologies of resistance have been used in reference to conserving Mennonite groups, seldom do such references encompass the active, politicized face described by Muller. To the contrary, they exemplify common perceptions of non-conformist Mennonites as being “resistant to change” or “resistant to worldly influences.” From this vantage point, musical resistance might describe the absence of secular musical forms, radios, and musical instruments; the absence of these “worldly” objects and repertoires highlights the nonconformity for which conserving groups are known.

The musical resistance described by many Mexican Mennonites, however, moves beyond this latter framework for resistance, and aligns more closely with Muller’s definition. Boundaries between Mexican Mennonites and “the world” are important, but so too is “cultural (re)construction” (1999, 78) within the group. During my fieldwork, narratives of “resistant” musicking more often referred to illicit musical practices that resisted church norms than to those resisting societal pressures. Resisting or

⁸ The political protests of pacifist Doukhobors in Canada are an exception here. See, for example, *Spirit Wrestlers* (Tarasoff and Klymasz 1995) or *The Message of the Doukhobors* (Evalenko 1913).

withstanding “the world” was not extraordinary, but a way of life for many conserving Mennonites; it was rather the disobedience of church protocol that constituted true resistance for church members.

Even this inverted conception of musical resistance, however, does not fully encompass the musical practices that I encountered while in northern Mexico. Not only did church members resist musical boundaries set forth by conserving church leaders, they initiated and actively engaged in diverse and creative song practices within their families and communities. Narrative accounts revealed myriad subject positions assumed by participants in defiant song practices. Whereas some laughed at the playful mischief signified by illicit musicking, others expressed resentment at personal feelings of guilt. What was for some a familially-condoned departure from church protocol was for others an individual act of disobedience. These practices, whether overt or covert, were informed by church policy but not explicitly governed by it.

Here, the introduction of new song practices goes beyond binaries of refusal and complacency to encompass hybrid processes of engagement. That is to say, the impetus and motivation for activities of illicit musicking in private and public contexts among conserving Mexican Mennonites are not intrinsically defensive or “resistant,” but neither are related musical choices arbitrarily determined. For example, song practices that perform “difference” from accepted church practice are not inherently subversive; they take on subversive qualities in particular contexts. Further, whereas common uses of “subversive” suggest an intention to undermine, the challenging song practices of conserving Mennonites in many ways do the opposite. Defiant musical practices in

conserving contexts pose alternative ideas about song practice that are initiated within the community and are themselves part of efforts to rejuvenate that community. With Muller, I emphasize the processual nature of related practice.

In order to account for varied nuances of musical meaning and to challenge resistance models that polarize compliance and resistance, I have chosen to engage a terminology of *defiance*. I do not use the term to imply contempt, but to recognize intent in Mennonite song practices that deviate from expected norms. In so doing, I emphasize the engagement involved in musicking that contradicts officially sanctioned practice. Musical choice and musical meaning are subtly nuanced and never static among Mennonites in northern Mexico. By choosing defiance, I aim to avoid the polarizing associations of “resistance” or “refusal” terminology, the intent to undermine suggested by “subversion,” as well as the arbitrariness of “difference.” While private and public musicking may at times exemplify these characteristics, it is not bound by them.

1.2.3 Mennonite History and Belief

The Mennonite story is said to begin in Switzerland during the early 16th century. It was here that a group of Anabaptist radicals under the leadership of Felix Manz, Georg Blaurock and Conrad Grebel asserted their belief in the controversial distinction between church and state, adult baptism by confession of faith, and non-violence (Berg 1985, 13). Menno Simons, from whom the Mennonites take their name, was a Dutch Catholic priest before joining this radical Anabaptist movement in 1536. While the Catholic Church and most Protestant denominations maintained a belief in a “central religious authority” (V. Friesen 1988, 6) and a union between church and state, Anabaptists held the conscience

and the Bible as supreme authorities in the enactment of Christian belief and discipleship. Uncomfortable with the opulence of the church, hierarchical power structures, and the use of coercive force in conflict, early Anabaptists felt that the Reformation had not gone far enough in separating church and state. Further, they believed that Christian baptism should be a matter of choice and not a ritual enacted at birth. It is from this belief that the term “Anabaptist” (*Wiedertäufer*, or “re-baptizer”) comes.

The early Mennonite church strove towards simplicity in life and worship, a simplicity characterized by love and nonresistance and centred on the example of discipleship modelled by Jesus. In keeping with these convictions, Mennonite people refused to participate in war and violence, swear an oath, or hold public office. The emphasis on simplicity also brought with it the rejection of the ornate Roman Catholic liturgy, resulting in the exclusion of all music from services of worship in the early Anabaptist church. Conrad Grebel (ca. 1498-1526) – among the earliest Anabaptist leaders – argued that there was no scriptural basis for its use in worship, following the example of Ulrich Zwingli who advocated for a complete prohibition of music from the liturgy (Berg 1985, 14). While singing has since become a significant part of Mennonite worship,⁹ the rejection of ornateness in architecture and iconography is maintained in conserving churches. These convictions and practices, and the continued emphasis on the

⁹ As early as 1564, the Swiss Brethren published a hymnal called the *Ausbund*. Among others, it contained martyr hymns that were written by Anabaptists who had been imprisoned in Passau (Berg 1985, 14).

priesthood of all believers, have proven significant in my efforts to understand sacrality in vernacular Mennonite belief.¹⁰

The ensuing paths of the Mennonites are many and varied, with religious persecution and threats to community living frequently acting as catalysts for transnational group migrations. As early as 1530, the exile of Dutch Anabaptists began, with many arriving in Danzig (at the Delta of the Vistula River) as refugees.¹¹ Settlement in this region was extremely difficult, and it has been suggested that up to eighty percent of the population was lost to swamp fever during the struggle to transform the delta marsh into farmland (V. Friesen 1988, 7). Despite these initial hardships, however, it was here that they spent the next 250 years.¹²

By 1772, the Mennonites of the Vistula Delta numbered 12,000. At the same time, Frederick the Great gained control of the region, and was eager to strengthen his militaristic rule. Inconvenienced by the autonomy the Mennonites had enjoyed for over two centuries, Frederick offered them continued religious freedom in exchange for the loss of their military exemption and a prohibition on further acquisitions of land. Unwilling to concede, the Mennonites of Danzig were again without a home.

¹⁰ My use of “sacrality” aligns with that suggested by William Paden. He writes, “a concept of sacrality can identify and illumine the way a specific kind of cultural system shapes human experience according to its own categories and reference points, and it can do this without foreclosing on metaphysical issues” (1999, 102).

¹¹ The roots of the Mennonite movement may be traced back to Switzerland and the Netherlands. While Dutch and Swiss Mennonite groups held much in common, I focus here on the Mennonites of the Netherlands, as it is their descendants who eventually settled in Western Canada, and later, Mexico.

¹² According to Krahn and Reimer, these Mennonites “adhered to their Dutch language” until the latter part of the 18th century. In worship, German was eventually introduced, with the first German hymnal to replace the Dutch printed in 1761 (1989).

This time it was Catherine II of Russia who extended an invitation of land and religious freedom to the Mennonites (1786), an invitation that brought them to the steppes of Ukraine. Within two years, the first of over 6,000 immigrated to the designated region. Altering not only their geographical location, this transition reconfigured the practical layout of the Mennonite community as well; instead of individual farms, small *Darpa* (Low German; “villages”) of approximately 30 families were established for reasons of safety (V. Friesen 1988, 10).

In the years that followed, Mennonites on the steppes of Russia experienced prosperity, owning vast properties and numbering 45,000 by 1870. Again, however, their autonomy was restricted when a government edict was put forth dictating the mandatory use of the Russian language, a halt on the acquisition of land, and mandatory military participation. Sensing Mennonite discomfort with the proclamation and fearing the vast economic loss that would accompany a mass exodus, the Russian government re-articulated its edict, offering forestry service as an alternative to participation in war. While this offer appealed to Mennonite landowners who could afford the financial burden of such a compromise, a large number looked to promises of land and religious freedom in North America.¹³

It was this gaze that brought the first group of what would be 8,000 Prusso-Russian Mennonites to Canada on 31 July 1874, with an additional 10,000 settling in the United States. Here, Mennonites established farms and villages modelled after those they

¹³ Whereas wealthy Mennonite families were able to hire farm labourers to do the work of family members participating in forestry service, many did not have financial means for such compensation.

had left in Russia, enjoying the religious freedoms and military exemption they had migrated to maintain. It was not until the 1920s that civil unrest forced another 21,000 Mennonites to leave Russia, fleeing to Canada and South America.¹⁴ Coincidentally, just as these Russian, or *Russländer*, Mennonites were arriving in Manitoba, many of the province's Old Colonists were leaving. This out-migration, initiated by perceived threats to religious freedoms associated with the School Attendance Act of 1916, created vacancies in many prairie villages, vacancies filled by Russian Mennonite immigrants.¹⁵ The resultant mixing of *Russländer* and conserving *Kanadier* Mennonites in Manitoba's villages was significant, as Mennonites separated fifty years prior due to differences in belief and financial situation became neighbours once more.¹⁶

¹⁴ These Mennonites had been part of what John J. Friesen calls "the Mennonite commonwealth" in Russia, "which up to the Bolshevik Revolution (1917) was wealthy, and had created an impressive array of churches, schools, health care centers, and financial institutions" (1990). The Russian Revolution, Civil War, and anarchy in the early 20th century caused most Russian Mennonites to lose their possessions and to flee the Soviet Union as refugees (J. Friesen 1990).

¹⁵ Religious education was an important part of community sustenance among conserving Mennonites in Canada, and for many years they ran their own schools. However, as Canada entered WWI, the Mennonites' pacifist stance and use of German unsettled their relationship to governments and non-Mennonite neighbours. According to Cornelius Krahn and Adolf Ens, the School Attendance Act "did not prohibit the attending of private schools, provided they conformed with the standard set up by the school administration, but once a private school was condemned, a public school was established with compulsory attendance" (1989). The imposition of the Canadian government via public education was not welcomed by Old Colonists in Manitoba, and "When repeated petitions to give the Mennonites the right to conduct their own schools were of no avail, a decision was reached to look for another country" (Krahn and Ens 1989).

¹⁶ I use *Russländer* and *Kanadier* with caution, recognizing that by engaging categorical designations to these migration streams without acknowledging the diversity within each group the terms become tools of essentialism. Aware of this dissonance, Frank Epp describes some points of tension historically ascribed to the groups: "For the early *Kanadier*, ... the *Russländer* were too proud, too aggressive, too enthusiastic about higher education, too anxious to exercise leadership, too ready to compromise with the

Mennonite peoples have encountered frequent challenges since their emergence in the 1500s and currently encompass a diverse body of churches configured under equally diverse denominations. Due to conflicting perceptions of theology, education, and lifestyle, the church has splintered at numerous points in its history, leading to diversity in worship, dress, language, and congregational structure between and within Mennonite communities. The forced exile, dispersion, and subsequent regeneration of Mennonites throughout Europe and into North America bear many trademarks of diaspora. Later movements, including the 1920s migration of Mennonites from Canada to Mexico, only heighten the group's apparent diasporic location. Still, the application of the concept of diaspora is complicated. While some challenges to conserving Mennonite lifeways have come from governmental persecution and civil unrest, others have been internal. While some Mennonite groups maintain a rural agrarian existence, others have moved to, and function within, urban environments. In order to prepare a discussion of Mennonites and diaspora, the following section deals with vernacular belief and conceptions of sacrality in a broadly conceived Mennonite theology. It suggests that common lenses for understanding so-called "vernacular religion" be used with caution in the case of Mexico's Mennonites. It further suggests that assumptions of uniformity among Mennonite groups are misleading and contribute to essentialist portrayals that disguise

state, too ready to move to the cities, and too unappreciative of the pioneering done by the *Kanadier*. As far as the *Russländer* were concerned, the *Kanadier* were too withdrawn, too simple-minded, too uncultured, too weak in their High German because of their excessive dependence on Low German, too afraid of schools and education, and too satisfied to follow traditions, social or liturgical, generation after generation without modification or change" (1982, 243-44).

both careful negotiations between groups, and demonstrations of agency among them. A subsequent overview of diaspora theory prepares my discussion of how the concept is engaged in this study.

1.3 The Trouble With Dichotomies: Conceptions of Sacred and Profane

1.3.1 Defining Vernacular Religion

Studies of “unofficial” religion within the Roman Catholic and other orthodox traditions have abounded in recent years (see, for example, Badone 1990), with “folk religion” frequently defined by its divergence from a perceived “official” model of religion. Understood to demonstrate “the religious dimension of folk culture, or the folk cultural dimension of religion” (D. Yoder 1974, 2), Yoder’s definition of folk religion reflects Redfield’s model for “little” and “great” traditions in order to get at “the interrelatedness of types of culture in a complex society” (D. Yoder 1974, 5).

Recognizing that this interrelatedness problematizes dependence on an “official/unofficial” dichotomy, Yoder classifies folk religion as “the *totality* of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion” (1974, 14 italics mine). Primiano echoes this notion and takes it one step further, suggesting that “vernacular religion” replace “folk religion” in folkloric studies (1995, 41). Primiano’s emphases on individual belief systems (1995, 49-51) and religion “as it is lived” (1995, 44) challenge assumptions that make the recognition of an “official religion” or lived “ideal type” possible and are therefore valuable to this study. In his own words, “Since religion

inherently involves interpretation, it is impossible for the religion of an individual not to be vernacular” (1995, 44). Primiano goes on to suggest that the “official” religion referred to in scholarship does not exist:

While it may be possible to refer to various components within a religious body as emically “official,” meaning authoritative when used by empowered members within that religious tradition, such a designation when used by scholars is limited by the assumption that religion is synonymous with institutional or hierarchical authority. (1995, 45)

While other scholars have articulated similar sentiments (Badone 1990; Byrne 1988; Christian 1987; Danielson 1986), a perceived duality between “official” and “lived” religious practice has continued to provide the framework from which much folkloric scholarship about vernacular religion has emerged.¹⁷ My use of “vernacular” in many ways follows that of Primiano. I emphasize that vernacular belief is significant not for an imagined divergence from a constructed “ideal type,” but for its encompassing of lived belief.

1.3.2 Religion, Sacred Politics, and Anabaptist Mennonite Theology

Conceptions of “the sacred” in religious life have been debated at length by religious scholars, theologians, and sociologists, and range in substance from Otto’s “wholly other”¹⁸ to political readings of religion as “manufactured” (McCutcheon 1997,

¹⁷ Scholars are not alone in recognizing this false dichotomy. During an interview with Scott Morton Ninomiya, a baptised Mennonite who grew up in the Catholic tradition, he more than once prefaced his comments with “at least *officially*” when referring to Catholic Church doctrine. Morton Ninomiya also articulated a distinction between “high church” and “low church” (2004).

¹⁸ In his introduction to *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, Mircea Eliade refers to Rudolf Otto’s use of the *ganz andere* (“wholly other”), to describe the numinous and irrational elements of the sacred (1961, 10-11). Building on this concept,

7). In light of the potentially polarizing debate surrounding the concept, it is important that disciplines emphasizing ethnography and experiential narratives (like folklore and ethnomusicology) bear this literature in mind when approaching vernacular religious contexts. By considering the layered meanings associated with “sacred” terminologies, one is better equipped to recognize and address individual and disciplinary biases when measuring the term against “secular” counterparts; ethnographic points of departure have as much to do with the bounding of terminologies as do the terminologies themselves.

Given the diversity in conceptions and experiences of vernacular religion, it is not surprising that vocabularies used to describe religious experiences are varied. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim asserts that

all known religious beliefs, whether simple or complex, present one common characteristic: they presuppose a classification of all the things, real and ideal, of which men think, into two classes or opposed groups, generally designated by two distinct terms which are translated well enough by the words *profane* and *sacred* (*profane*, *sacré*). This division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane, is the distinctive trait of religious thought. (1965, 52 italics his)

Durkheim goes on to write, “in all the history of human thought there exists no other example of two categories of things so profoundly differentiated or so radically opposed to one other” (1965, 53). He deems the sacred and the profane as universally contrasting (1965, 54).

For scholars like Paul Tillich and Mircea Eliade, however, sacred and profane are not divorced from one another, but rather meet in sacred religious experiences. Just as

Eliade asserts a wider breadth in his own analysis, suggesting that his concern “is not in the relation between the rational and the nonrational elements of religion but the *sacred in its entirety*” (1961, 10).

Tillich recognizes “the presence of profanized elements in every religious act” (Thomas 2000, 141), so Eliade asserts that “any hierophany is a revelation of the sacred *hidden* in a profane object” (1981, 10 italics his). Here we find the simultaneous presence of sacred and profane. Russell McCutcheon – who has criticized Eliade’s conception of religion for being *sui generis* (or “irreducible”) – writes that for Eliade, “religion is the personal experience of the sacred in one of any number of its manifestations in the profane world, for example, as a powerful force of nature, as a deity, as a special location” (1997, 52). Inherently connected to the sacred, religious experience becomes in some ways responsible to it; in Eliade’s own words, “it is unfortunate that we do not have at our disposal a more precise word than ‘religion’ to denote the experience of the sacred” (“Preface” 1969, unpaginated).

McCutcheon’s criticism of Eliade’s model is premised on the argument that a transcendent understanding of religion renders it obsolete in academia (1997, 76). If religion transcends nature, the argument goes, it can be reasoned to exist on a level of *real-ity*¹⁹ outside of human experience. As such, it becomes exempt from the critical manner of questioning to which other fields of study must answer. Further, McCutcheon contends that a *sui generis* approach to religion disregards the political aspects of belief systems. Peterson and Walhof agree, arguing that by prioritising the sacred, “the *sui generis* definition extracted religious actions out of their social and political contexts, truncating their meanings and segregating religion from the real” (2002, 5).

It is at this juncture that ethnographic study offers an angle both unique and

¹⁹ In much of Eliade’s writing, we find an emphasis on the sacred as “the only *real* and *real-ly* existing space” (1961, 20 italics his), a perspective reminiscent of Plato’s “cave.”

relevant. By taking individual and collective vernacular experience seriously, it is possible to move beyond binary conceptions of the sacred and the profane; in lived experiences of 'religion,' the sacred may be conceived of in numerous and seemingly contradictory ways. Through ethnography, spatial, temporal, and material understandings may be explored without reverting to valuative comparisons that depend on stereotypes and essentialized subjects. Related critique is not conceived as disregard for transcendental experience, but recognizes that such experience affects and is affected by social and political realities.

Additional problems with the equation of transcendent and religious experience emerge in the case of Mennonite belief. While McCutcheon implies that an emphasis on the sacred elements of religion (or religion as a sacred element) negates the recognition of its social and political agency, this distinction is complicated if not impossible in the Anabaptist paradigm. As disciples of Jesus, whose "political relevance" ultimately led to his crucifixion, Anabaptist life is intrinsically political. The writings of John Howard Yoder and Chris K. Huebner are informative in this regard. Both scholars articulate the political nature of discipleship and Christian pacifism, yet each reconfigures the ways in which these concepts are conceived. In *The Politics of Jesus*, for example, Yoder describes Christian faithfulness not in terms of political effectiveness, but "rather simple obedience" (1972, 238). He suggests that the point of Christian pacifism "is not that one can attain all of one's legitimate ends without using violent means" (1972, 237), but that a "vision of ultimate good [is] determined by faithfulness and not by results" (1972, 238). In a similar vein, Huebner argues that for Mennonites it is precisely the vulnerable nature

of the peace struggle that makes it vital. Of the peace of Christ, Huebner writes, “It is radically unstable and risky precisely because it exists as gift. Not only does it recognize that there are no final guarantees for the securing of peace, it understands that the pursuit of such guarantees is just another form of violence” (2006, 36).

This tension is magnified when considering the Old Colony Mennonite churches in Mexico. For conserving Mennonites, McCutcheon’s concern with religion’s disjuncture with academia is moot. Using Primiano and Yoder’s definitions, the Mennonites might be defined as a religious folk group in the purest sense. Placing emphasis on the lived aspects of faith community, conserving Mennonites enact ‘vernacular religion’ every day. This enactment is informed by pacifist convictions and geographical separation from ‘worldly’ influences, but is equally connected to familial bonds and the veneration of agrarian lifeways enacted by early settlers in Canada and abroad (R. Loewen 2001, 70).

Alternate conceptions of sacrality among Mennonites have seen the church and religious institutions “as sacred forms of social structure” (Driedger 2000, 86). Conserving Mennonite communities are compared with the Quakers of the southern United States for whom ‘religious’ and other aspects of life are interwoven (Terry 1988). Drawing on Otto’s conception of the “numinous” – experiences that are simultaneously terrifying and awe-inspiring (Eliade 1961, 9) – Driedger suggests that communal Mennonite life in the nineteenth century was characterized by “a numinous trust relationship, filled with a mysterious sense of the presence of the sacred” (Driedger 2000, 72). With sacrality no longer an experiential phenomenon based on individual

transcendence, and with group solidarity experienced as more than a collection of individual parts, the “sacred society” may come into being. In this sense, one might argue that in the living out of Mennonite belief, the space between the sacred and the mundane is where sacred acts of worship take form, a rendering that seems to defy the polarizing assertions of Eliade and McCutcheon.

Some argue that the vernacular expression of Anabaptist faith to which conserving Mennonites conform is so strong that dogmatic templates of their belief systems have not been written.²⁰ Instead, as John J. Friesen has observed about Old Colony Mennonites in Manitoba, such documents have usually been compiled by outsiders to the tradition (2004, 132).

For Old Colony Mennonites, the Bible and the catechism are guides, but it is through lived experience and participation in the church that the sacrality of religion is experienced and relayed. Roland Sawatsky, exploring early 20th century Canadian Mennonite domestic architecture as a setting for religious expression, refers to this concept as *orthopraxis*, or “correct practice.” Contrasting it with *orthodoxy* (“correct belief”), he suggests that throughout Mennonite history, it is the practice of discipleship that has served as a primary authority (R. Sawatsky 2006).

²⁰ By way of unifying the church with regard to matters of Biblical interpretation, various confessions of faith have been written over the centuries; these documents represent, however, a guide for believers and not a measuring stick. The Schleithem Confession of 1527, for example, outlines seven basic tenets of Mennonite belief that have remained central to later confessions. These include 1) adult baptism by choice, 2) the use of the ban to hold community members accountable to one another, 3) the communion of baptized believers, 4) separation from the world, 5) the priesthood of all believers, 6) refusal to bear arms or hold public office; the separation of church and state, and 7) the refusal to swear an oath (J. Yoder 1977).

In some ways, *orthopraxis* resonates with the “folk religion” proposed by Yoder, or Primiano’s “vernacular religion,” with theology and lived belief subsumed in a single definition. The importance of dismantling an “official/unofficial” (or “institutionalized/lived”) dichotomy in studies of vernacular belief, however, is amplified in the Mexican Mennonite case. Whereas the doctrinal clarity and hierarchical structure of orthodox traditions like the Roman Catholic Church make a distinction between “institutionalized religion” and “lived belief” possible, Mennonite churches emphasize rather “the priesthood of all believers,” wherein all members of the church hold an equal voice in the interpretation of Scripture; the Mennonite church does not have an “official,” or even “institutionalized,” religious stance from which to diverge. Where folk definitions fall short, then, is in their failure to account for the Anabaptist rejection of an ultimate human or doctrinal authority outside of the Bible. “Folk” religion makes room for, and indeed emphasizes, the day-to-day enactment of religious belief, but it nevertheless depends on the existence of an “official” religious construct from which to depart. *Orthopraxis* and vernacular religion, by contrast, are not divorced from or set against belief, but defined by its daily enactment.

Of course, my assertion that there is no over-arching “Mennonite position” to which all denominations adhere does not explain exceptions implied by the practices of specific Mennonite communities. The following section speaks to this apparent contradiction.

1.3.3 Is Nothing Sacred? Old Colony Mennonites and Complications in Utopian Orthopraxis

If *orthopraxis* and guidance rather than ultimate authority are proposed as key elements of conserving Mennonite belief, a number of questions arise. For example, how do we talk about the authoritative parts of a vernacular religion whose confessions of faith do not claim authority, but rather affirm communal discernment and the authority of the Bible? How do we account for the use of the *Ütschluss* (Low German; “ban” or “ex-communication”) to discipline church members perceived to have broken faith with their community in some Mexican Mennonite churches? And how do we account for the existence of Old Colony *Ältester* (High German; “bishops”),²¹ or the power afforded conserving religious leaders in determining breaches of faithfulness?

In the case of Mexico’s Old Colony Mennonites, it would be misleading to suggest that the holding and teaching of belief is entirely non-directive. Further, a conserving Mennonite emphasis on *orthopraxis* should not suggest an individualistic or anarchist model of church doctrine. While young children do not attend Sunday school or church with their parents on Sunday mornings, distinction is made between *sindeosche* (Low German; “Sunday-like”) and *auldeosche* (Low German; “everyday”) realms in terms of dress, language use, and appropriate activity.²² Further, the Old Colony

²¹ The translation of *Ältester* (Low German “*Elltesta*”) as “bishop” has been harshly critiqued by some scholars (Jaquith and Pennacchio 1970, 891). Alternative translations of the term include “deacon,” or “elder of a (Menn.) church congregation” (Rempel 1995; Thiessen 2003), although Thiessen also includes “bishop” in his definition. For this dissertation, I have chosen to follow the recent examples of John J. Friesen (2007, 77) and David Quiring (2003, 31), who use “bishop” in their writings about Old Colony church organization.

²² Kelly Hedges discusses this distinction at length in her 1996 doctoral dissertation.

education system is based upon the teaching of biblical principles not only through the Bible, but also the memorization of the *Katechismus* (High German; “catechism”). Compiled as a series of questions and answers connected to Anabaptist faith, this book outlines biblical narratives and Mennonite beliefs. Portions are recited daily in school, with the entire corpus memorized by all youth wishing to be baptized into the Old Colony church. Baptism, a formative rite of passage, must occur before marriage among Old Colony Mennonites, again demonstrating integral connections between church and home life.²³ These implicit connections and ambiguous distinctions underscore the social, political, and spiritual significance of living in church community.

Accountability and faithfulness remain central to Mennonite church communities with the Bible held as authoritative. In Old Colony churches, church leaders are elected, and understood to hold theological and disciplinary authority. Writing about the place of the *Lehrdienst* (High German; “religious leaders”) in the structure of northern Mexico’s colonies, Quiring explains,

Most colonies have one bishop or elder, the head of the colony, although the large Manitoba colony utilized two bishops for the past several decades. Once elected, the bishop and the ministers can hold their positions for life. Even though some spend up to seventy-five percent of their time on church work, they receive no pay. Neither do those elected to civil positions receive a wage or salary. ...

... Although they remain accountable to the colony members, the church leaders carry considerable power, including final authority over secular matters. It might be argued that giving wide powers to the clergy violates one of the early Anabaptist principles, that of separation of church and state. Yet, the colonies’

Here, she suggests that Low German is the language of “every day” with High German serving a *sindeosche* capacity.

²³ In most cases, outsiders to Old Colony communities do not join Old Colony churches. According to Quiring, “If the unusual circumstance arose where an outsider lived among the Old Colonists, the community could decide to admit that person to their church” (2003, 40).

political organization remains minimal in most respects. Also, each colony operates under its own organization, and no larger structure ties the various colonies together. (2003, 31-2)

The authority granted the *Lehrdienst* has sometimes been a source of tension in Old Colony communities. Still, church discipline is not solely their responsibility, as meetings like *Donnadach* (Low German; “Thursday”) and *Nachkirche* (High German; “after church”) demonstrate. These meetings, during which the church gathers to deal with issues and discipline transgressing church members, are led by the *Lehrdienst* but also involve the participation of church members. In at least one conversation during my own fieldwork, a church member spoke of voting to determine how a breach of faithfulness would be dealt with in his Old Colony church community. Still, the leadership role of the *Lehrdienst* is significant; Quiring writes, “Once the *Lehrdienst* decides something and the community seals it with prayer, no persons should change the decision” (Quiring 2003, 32).

For critics of conserving life, these efforts do not represent a sacred enactment of Christian community, but are deemed to be exercises in social control. Bruce Guenther writes about evangelical *Kanadier* Mennonites who returned to Canada, but his observations are equally relevant to differences in perspective between Old Colony and evangelical Mennonites in Mexico:

Regardless of how and when people entered an evangelical church, almost all testified that the discovery of God’s grace resulted in a life of “freedom and joy.” This new experiential reality was made possible in part, by having obtained the vitally important “assurance of salvation,” that is, the subjective confirmation of forgiveness and acceptance before God. For those *Kanadier* Mennonites who adopted evangelicalism, “assurance of salvation” highlights a transformation in the subjective character of their religious experience: they testified that they had moved from fear, anxiety, and uncertainty towards emancipation, joy and

confidence. ...

... This ... stands in contrast to the emphasis within Old Colony soteriology in which salvation is less certain and more dependent upon the individual's ability to sustain life-long faithful obedience to Christ and the church. In Old Colony soteriology the lines between justification and sanctification are more intertwined, as the individual cooperates with God in living a life of righteousness, measured in part by faithful adherence to the ideals demanded by the community of God. As the respect for church leadership weakened, ... their confidence in Old Colony theological teachings also weakened. (Guenther 2004, 155-56)

Thus what is "faithful adherence" and community accountability for Old Colonists is seen by many evangelical Mennonites to undermine the spiritual aspects of faith. Perceived as faith based on works rather than belief in God's grace and assurance of salvation, conserving practice is interpreted as prescribed, and not spiritually vital.

Returning to Quiring, we find the tension between social control and religious faithfulness articulated further:

Particularly the bishops have worked to maintain the old ways. Sources close to the Old Colony say some bishops made a vow to their predecessors that they would not allow changes, a promise they have taken seriously. Outside observers, unsympathetic to the goals of the leaders, interpret this dedication to tradition as a desire to keep the people ignorant and under control. Some outsiders describe the leaders as arrogant. From the bishop's point of view, following the traditions of their ancestors forms an instrumental part of living according to the will of God in their communities. (2003, 31)

Despite the absence of an international authoritative head, the hierarchy in the organizational structure of the Old Colony church suggests that individual congregations may experience the contrast between "official" (as set forth by the *Lehrdienst*) and "vernacular" religious practice outlined earlier.

As Quiring's words suggest, however, the "official-ness" of this practice is not static, nor is it consistent with other models. Community involvement in decisions around church discipline points to this. Also, that church officials are community

specific, elected, and unpaid, marks their difference from many “official” religious hierarchies. The system is in a process of constant negotiation by church leaders and church members.²⁴

For Mennonites, then, there is not a universally adopted “official” religion from which to depart. For Old Colonists, however, there is a notion of “*correct practice*” in *orthopraxis*. In some contexts, Bible studies are suspect because they are understood to reveal a distrust of church leadership and a quest for knowledge that is out of keeping with the simple faithfulness of *orthopraxis*. In others, the playing of musical instruments has been forbidden for its worldly associations. While the *Ütschluss* is no longer common practice in many churches, it remains an important means of discipline – with the hope of restoring right relationship – for some conserving congregations. Faithfulness is not individually determined, but rather its parameters are set out by church leaders and monitored by preachers and church members.

The ethnographic engagement that comprises this dissertation demonstrates that for many Mexican Mennonites, faithfulness is about more than adherence to specific proscriptions, but it is also about more than challenges to those proscriptions. Engagement with, and defiance of, so-called acceptable song practice are woven into life events in ways that are vital to individual, familial, and community sustenance.

²⁴ Writing in 1971, Harry Leonard Sawatsky describes the process whereby Old Colony community members who contravene church prohibitions are disciplined, and “if thought necessary, placed under the ban” (300). He goes on to write, however, that “when the tide can no longer be stemmed, the church quietly ceases to apply the ban, but does not withdraw its interdiction” (300). Or, in Quiring’s words, “When change comes, the community often does not retract or change the rules, but only stops punishing offenders” (2003, 32). In much the same way, most proscriptions around music remain part of Old Colony frames of reference, but are no longer enforced.

It is in contexts like these, where varied and seemingly incompatible representations of Mennonite faith are presented, that ethnographic study is especially valuable. While ethnography may not reconcile apparent inconsistencies, neither is it encumbered by them; it takes “vernacular” belief seriously in considerations of community practice. Without it, attempts to engage sacrality within and among Mennonite congregations rely on essentialized ideas about what constitutes faithfulness and sacred experience. By upholding a sacred-secular dichotomy, so-called “religious” experiences are polarized, and begin to be measured in terms of transcendental success – the extent to which they enable a mysterious, or “cosmic” experience of the sacred – rather than by their particular place within a community of believers. This measurement is disengaged from communal experiences of the sacred and therefore inappropriate in this context. As fellowships committed, not to facilitating ecstatic or transcendent experience among members, but rather to “being the church,” particular measures of “success” are not pertinent. More central is a commitment to faithful living, to accountability, and to Christian discipleship.

1.3.4 Conclusions

In addressing questions of sacrality within a Mennonite framework, it is important to consider the connotations of vocabularies and the implications that language holds for academic discourse. Putting it rather plainly, Raymond Firth asserts, “to express thought in language often creates great difficulties” (1999, 119). Indeed, the language engaged in explorations of belief and religious life affects our interpretations of them. Furthermore, worldview shapes not only the way we articulate our world, but also the filters through

which we perceive the worlds of others.

This discussion of Mennonite belief, particularly as it pertains to understandings of a sacred-secular duality, not only affirms the diversity of experience within this oft-essentialized group, but suggests diverse receptions to, and interpretations of, these experiences among Mennonites themselves. This multiplicity of experience suggests that the “problem” of sacred-secular terminology is not inherent in the vocabulary itself, but in conceptualizations of these terms as intrinsic binaries. While their juxtaposition is sometimes useful, it is by exploring spaces between the so-called sacred and secular that the richness of varied individual, familial, and group belief systems becomes recognizable.

1.4 Theories of Diaspora

Because of their emphasis on nonconformity and *orthopraxis*, conserving Mennonite groups have frequently migrated to locations promising religious freedom and community autonomy. While these relocations are sometimes portrayed as chosen migrations, for traveling groups they are more often understood as forced exile spurred by broken governmental promises. These experiences of rupture, dispersal, and subsequent regeneration have led to the invocation of diasporic language in studies of Mennonite history and experience (R. Loewen 2006; Sneath 2004). Writing about the maintenance of connections across transnational boundaries through personal letters submitted to an international Mennonite newspaper, Robin Sneath contends that “the Mennonite diaspora” may be conceived as a people dispersed in space and time, “but a

people nonetheless” (2004, 4). The diverse membership of the global Mennonite church complicates this mapping. However, given the emphases on travel and connections over time and space that run through much literature in Mennonite studies, diaspora remains a useful concept and point of departure in considering transnational connections and music practices among Mennonite families and communities.

1.4.1 The Roots of Diaspora

Any theoretical discussion of diaspora must begin with a clarification of its history and usage. Etymologically speaking, the Greek *diaspeirein* refers to an “abrupt, but natural process, the fruitful scattering away of seeds from the parent body that both dispersed and reproduced the organism” (Tölölyan 1996, 10). While the experience of rupture, scattering, and reproduction is useful in its simplicity, the concept of diaspora has since moved through many transitions.

Before 1968, the “Jewish-centered definition” as described by Tölölyan included six characteristics: coerced exile, clearly delimited identity, collective memory, boundary maintenance, maintenance of communication between diasporic communities, and maintenance of contact with homeland (1996, 12-15). A later framework by Cohen conceived of diaspora typologically, outlining five types of diasporic community, and seven criteria for determining inclusion (Anthias 1998, 562). While the use of a checklist to determine a group’s diasporicity has since fallen out of favour for its inductive nature and reliance on origin or “intentionality of dispersal” (Anthias 1998, 563), the Jewish and African diasporic models remain significant reference points for many theorists, with the

recent work of Paul Gilroy (1993; 2000) and Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin (2003) reconfiguring these diasporas in meaningful ways.

1.4.2 Contesting Diaspora

Despite careful attentions paid to diasporic terminologies and their application, many theorists contend that its overuse has led to the concept's diminished utility. Ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin contends that "like a rubber band, 'diaspora' obligingly extends itself, but one wonders when it will either go slack or simply snap under pressure" (2003, 289). Slobin is not alone in his assertion that the concept of diaspora has been stretched nearly beyond utility, with diaspora theorists like Tölölyan (1996), Anthias (1998), Brubaker (2005), and Braziel and Mannur (2003) expressing similar frustrations in the past decade. According to Brubaker, the term's excessive use in descriptions of dispersal has created a 'diaspora' diaspora, effectively weakening the concept's utility as a theoretical tool. Tölölyan, too, deems problematic the equation of 'diaspora' with 'dispersal.' Offering two examples of this misuse, he cites the "corporate diaspora" of newly unemployed executives forced to find employment in new cities, and the New York Times reference to the "egg cream diaspora" – a beverage bottled with the intent to serve markets outside of New York (1996, 10). While humorous on some level, the careless use of diaspora as a catchphrase for all things dispersed weakens its ability to function in a manner theoretically meaningful or politically significant.

1.4.3 Dangerous Equations: Transnationalism and Diaspora

The equation of dispersal with diaspora is not the only arena in which the concept has been contested. A second catch in the diasporic equation is its relationship to transnationalism. Numerous theoretical examinations of diaspora have asserted its significance as a tool for undermining the power of the nation-state. Whereas national borders were once imagined to tie a population together (strengthening the power of the state), globalization and transnationalism have resulted not only in the transport of goods across political boundaries, but the movement of peoples as well. While human migration is not new, perceptions of this movement have changed. Discussing this transition in thought, Tölölyan (1996) suggests that while undermining the power of the nation-state may be perceived as an empowerment of 'the people,' the consequences of destabilizing a nation without establishing an alternative leaves the corporate elite at the helm – a sentiment echoed by Braziel and Mannur in their introduction to *Theorizing Diaspora*. Here, they argue that while the erosion of the nation-state may upset the "rich nation/poor nation" paradigm, it will not effect an end to poverty, but create instead '1st world' and '3rd world' "zones" (2003, 11). Brubaker follows an important tangent to this discussion. Responding to cries for an end to essentialist categorizations of diasporic groups, he points out that nation-states are neither homogenous entities: "'The' nation-state is the primary conceptual 'other' against which diaspora is defined ... But there is a risk of essentializing 'the' nation-state, a risk of attributing to it a timeless, self-actualizing, homogenizing 'logic'" (2005, 10).

Providing an additional perspective on the relationship between transnationalism and diaspora, Floya Anthias argues against assumptions of homogeneity in diasporic experiences: “The forms of the transnational movement have no necessary social effects and any patterns must be discovered through substantive research” (1998, 563). Just as a diasporic stance is not equivalent to dispersal, so connections between people across national boundaries is not equivalent to diaspora. Diaspora may impact these connections, but they are not identical processes.

1.4.4 Diaspora Theory and Method: Race, Ethnicity, and Essentialism

Observations that transnationalism and the undermining of the nation-state are not empowering in and of themselves are important in considerations of diasporic utility; however, the issue perhaps most pressing for diaspora theorists has been that of essentialism and the pervasive dependence on ethnicity and race in imaginings of cultural identity. Tölölyan cites the transition of diaspora’s functional use from that of posing a challenge to racial and ethnic essentialism, to evoking a “non-territorialized essentialism,” writing, “little is gained if we escape from one teleology only to fall into another” (1996, 12-13).

Recognizing the essentialism implicit in many assignations of diaspora, Rogers Brubaker is careful to distinguish between understandings of diaspora as an “entity” and as a “stance” (2005). Citing dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance as fundamental elements in a diasporic stance, Brubaker aligns himself with other diaspora theorists who have argued that participation in diaspora is not an accident of birth (Tölölyan 1996), nor is identity an inevitable inheritance (Clifford 1992); instead,

members of a diaspora participate in that diaspora intentionally. If, as Brubaker suggests, diasporic stance entails intentionality, the unfruitful equation of 'diaspora' with 'dispersion' becomes clear; to be dispersed does not require an intentional commitment to those with whom one has experienced dispersal.

While theoretical studies of diaspora do much to identify and inform issues born of the concept's excessive or careless use, methodological engagement is equally important. Music scholars have demonstrated this. Jane Sugarman (1997), working with Prespa Albanian communities in the United States and Canada, does not explicitly engage diasporic terminologies. In writing about a Prespa Albanian wedding event, however, she describes the 'system' of cultural identity enacted by participants in Prespa Albanian immigrant communities as a site of negotiation between Albanian and North American influences (1997, 298-307). Cultural experience is not static in her analysis, but nor is it a direct response to North American media and culture (1997, 302). Instead, changes are shown to re-enforce the moral code of the Prespa community, or alternately, to challenge that code. Rituals that seemed to grow "naturally" from life events in Albania, for example, may function differently in North America. The enactment of rituals in new spaces, then, involves more than new contexts, but also a new self-consciousness and an intentional connection to another time and place. Sugarman does not rely on "ethnic" identity in her analysis, but rather affords agency to Prespa Albanian community members as they reinforce, reflect, and challenge a Prespa Albanian moral code in a new context (1997, 286-345).

A second example of musicological engagement with diaspora is found in the work of popular music scholar George Lipsitz. Lipsitz uses the concept explicitly in *Dangerous Crossroads* (1994), where he contends that diaspora be understood as a site for cultural conflict and political contestation. Because of “a diaspora’s” familiarity with dislocation and displacement, he argues, its members are best equipped to shape a post-colonial world. Pointing specifically to hip hop artists Queen Latifah and Afrika Bambaataa (Zulu Nation), Lipsitz describes musics that offer positive images of blackness that are at once political, subversive, and transformative (1994, 25-26). Both artists invoke connections between audiences and a greater African American story: Latifah – honouring the struggles of African American women through history, and Bambaataa – forming the “Zulu Nation” in an effort to direct the energies of South Bronx youth “away from gang fighting and into music, dance, and graffiti” (1994, 26). Here hip hop is more than a commodity as it carries “images, ideas, and icons” of political import (1994, 27) and uses consumer technologies for political ends (1994, 36-37). In these examples, shared musical memories of diaspora are created and engaged in ways that emphasize their functions over specifically musical elements. The implied reciprocity and the engaging of diaspora as a political tool of empowerment are appealing in Lipsitz’ work because they presume agency.

The centrality of music in the construction and maintenance of transnational identities has been discussed at length by scholars of the African diaspora. Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993) has been pivotal in this regard, cautioning against binary oppositions and examining instead a “multiplicity of

cultural flows” (Monson 2000, 4). Gilroy also cautions against assumptions of sameness based on shared history. Problematizing the idea of Africentricity (despite the agency it assumes), Gilroy begins,

The first aim of this chapter is to rethink the concept of tradition so that it can no longer function as modernity’s polar opposite. This necessitates a brief discussion of the idea of Africentricity, which may be useful in developing communal discipline and individual self-worth and even in galvanizing black communities to resist the encroachments of crack cocaine, but which supplies a poor basis for the writing of cultural history and the calculation of political choices. (1993, 188)

Stuart Hall (2003) and Homi Bhabha (1994) have addressed similar struggles between difference and continuity (Hall), pedagogy and performance (Bhabha), in examinations of cultural and national identity, stressing a dialectical relationship between historical and lived, homogenous and heterogeneous imaginings. For Gilroy too, the polarization of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ as antithetical terms is problematic, as it leads to primordial conceptualizations of groups.²⁵

Throughout his work, Gilroy is careful to distinguish between a ‘*negotiated*’ sense of cultural authenticity’ and ‘*static* African essence’ in order to challenge essentialist paradigms of race; Africentric understandings of tradition as ‘black power’ may meaningfully function as tools for community building, but remain problematic “for the writing of cultural history and the calculation of political choices” (1993, 188). In neither case does Gilroy undermine the importance of tradition in African American diasporic experience, however. Instead, he articulates the potential dangers of romanticizing a

²⁵ Building on this work, and using African diaspora as a paradigmatic case for the end of the 20th century, Ingrid Monson warns that the attribution of black power, superiority, and unified identity through music can prove problematic, as it feeds conceptualizations of an “essential black subject” (2000, 2).

perfect, but static, African past that existed undisturbed until the trauma of the Middle Passage (1993, 189).²⁶ Gilroy's alternative is to emphasize "flows, exchanges, and in-between elements that call the very desire to be centred into question" (1993, 190). His allowance for hopeful imagination gives an openness and vision to invocations of lived identity. Here, the interplay between static and fluid notions of identity – often discussed theoretically – are played out in a way that utilizes the concept of diaspora beyond dispersal.

That the concept of diaspora has not been successful in dismantling essentialized notions of race and ethnicity is supported in the work of Floya Anthias. Anthias addresses ethnicity specifically, suggesting that "indeed, one conclusion from this discussion is not so much that diaspora is an alternative to 'ethnicity', but rather that it requires a much clearer delineation of the latter's articulations" (1998, 570). Contrasting sociological approaches to diaspora that utilize the concept as a descriptive typological tool (wherein adherence to a list of characteristics determines whether a group is, or is not, a diaspora) and 'postmodern' incarnations of the concept as a social condition that challenges ethnic absolutism and the stability of the nation-state, Anthias suggests that the problems of primordialism associated with ethnicity are not overcome in diaspora theory (1998, 569):

My argument is primarily that the concept of diaspora, whilst focusing on transnational processes and commonalities, does so by deploying a notion of

²⁶ After capture by slave traders in Africa, captives were placed aboard ships for transport across the Atlantic Ocean in order to serve as slaves in America. This came to be known as the Middle Passage. The atrocities endured by captives during this voyage have been written about at length. See, for example, Taylor (2006) and Klein (1999).

ethnicity which privileges the point of 'origin' in constructing identity and solidarity. (1998, 558)

The complications of Anthias' argument are demonstrated in the Mexican Mennonite case, and explored in the section that follows.

1.4.4.1 "My Citizenship is in Heaven": Complicating Geography in the Mennonite Diaspora

Long before I had even conceived of a study exploring Mennonite song, transnational family migration, and diasporic stance, but only shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, I was told a story about the experience of a Mennonite woman from Manitoba (the mother to my husband's aunt) who traveled through American customs at a Canadian airport. A customs officer requested from her a passport or proof of citizenship, neither of which she had on her person. When pressed for these documents, the woman became adamant that she did not in fact need them, as her citizenship was in the Kingdom of Heaven and passport, for her "Heavenly Home." No matter the intensity or frequency of requests made by customs officials, her response remained consistent and unwavering. In the end, her version of citizenship prevailed, and the woman was allowed to enter the country.

This primary affiliation with church community – the Kingdom of God on earth – is significant in relation to Mennonite identity, and invites another layer of complication to studies of diaspora among conserving Mennonite peoples. As David Quiring has written,

Members of the Old Colony group view themselves primarily as members of the Kingdom of God, and not as citizens of a specific country or of the world. Their main earthly connection is with other members of their

group. While they find it impossible to live outside the boundaries of national states, they have not viewed the various countries where they have lived as homelands where they belong and to which they feel loyalty. (2003, 13)

Hence, while connections across national boundaries are frequent and valuable to Old Colony Mennonites, the geographic borders of the nation-state do not function as primary points of reference.²⁷

Here, James Clifford's imagining of community consciousness is perhaps useful. Clifford writes, "Diaspora discourse articulates, or bends together, both roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy describes as alternate public spheres (1987), forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference" (1994, 308).

By de-emphasizing specific geographic location, Clifford's framework enables the possibility of Mennonite diaspora. This conception of diaspora is meaningful for its recognition and allowance of diverse experiences, and even diverse practice, among participants.

1.4.5 Shifting the Gaze to Mennonite Mexico

In many Canadian Mennonite churches, changes in dress, occupational choices, ideas about education and challenges to pacifist convictions are evident, with theological

²⁷ This is not to imply that geographic borders are incidental for Mennonites in Mexico. As Sawatsky described in 1971, and as other scholars have articulated since (Castro 2004; Guenther 2004; Janzen 2004; Quiring 2003, 2004; Sneath 2004), connections between Mennonites in Canada and Mexico are ongoing and have affected Mennonite communities in both countries.

conviction no longer tied to separation and rural community life.²⁸ For conserving Mennonite groups, on the other hand, migration has often been the response to such changes, which are viewed as conformity to worldly pressures.

The re-settling of Mennonites in areas like Mexico that promised religious and political autonomy has created what some call a Mennonite diaspora, with Mennonite churches scattered across the globe (Mennonite Media; Tölölyan 1996, 18).²⁹ Shelemay has written that multiple geographic centres created by the Syrian Jewish diaspora have allowed for both strong ties and strong differences to be built between groups (1998). Similarly, migration and conflicting visions about Mennonite lifeways have not entirely isolated Mennonite groups from one another, with family connections frequently maintained across geographic distance.³⁰

²⁸ It is worth noting here that for many *Russländer* Mennonites – who did not migrate to Canada to maintain non-conformist rural life but rather fled persecution during the Russian Revolution – urban living was already commonplace in Russia.

²⁹ In addition to re-settlement, the work of service organizations like Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has led to the establishment of Mennonite congregations among peoples connected not by “cultural” Mennonite ancestry, but rather their commitment to the theological stance espoused by Menno Simons. While the tension between Mennonite “culture” and Mennonite “religion” has been addressed at length (R. Sawatsky 1991; Werner 2005), its significance in relation to ideas about diaspora and related issues of inclusivity for Mennonites not associated with Mennonite lifeways requires further attention. For Sawatsky, the separation of faith and ethnicity is highly problematic, as to separate “life” from religion – especially a community wherein communal discipleship is at the heart of lived belief – is to abstract (1991, 118). Similarly, but with a view to making participation in Mennonite faith and life more accessible, Werner suggests that the Mennonites in North America require a new way of telling stories, creating a “useable past” that does not involve the superseding of corporate culture by personal belief, but is neither exclusively dependent on ethnic boundaries characterized by particularly “Mennonite” traits (2005, 28).

³⁰ The effects of unpredictable climate patterns and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on agricultural sustainability in Mexico, in conjunction with a rapidly increasing population of Mexican Mennonites and subsequent scarcity of land

Whereas Shelemay posits that music of the homeland in the Syrian case has served as a locus for sustaining positive historical memories and to reinforce traditional values, its function is less straightforward in the Mexican Mennonite case. Despite musical parallels and the undisputed maintenance of connections across transnational borders, the severing of geographical ties between Mexican and Canadian Mennonites was intentional on the part of migrating groups; the impetus to leave Manitoba and Saskatchewan is cited as governmental in origin, but remains implicitly connected to divergent visions for the Old Colony church in Canada.

The sometimes tenuous relations between Canadian and Mexican Mennonite groups, organizations, and churches are emblematic of these divergent visions. Writing about the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico, David Quiring argues that Canadian Mennonites have not respected their desire for separation (2004). Whereas Old Colony Mennonites have struggled to remain apart from the world in order to live faithfully and to pass on beliefs to their children, Quiring contends that Canadian Mennonites have been united and persistent in building uninvited bridges between Old Colony Mennonites and the world around them (2004, 85). Others, like Bruce Guenther, have called for greater respect between Mennonite groups, suggesting that to vilify evangelical-Mennonite faith practice and its emphasis on assurance of salvation is to deny the validity of their Christian expression (2004).

and income, have also contributed to ongoing contact. Mexican Mennonite families frequently travel north to work on tobacco and vegetable farms in Canada during the summer months. Still, it is only recently that concepts of transnationalism and diaspora have been invoked in Mennonite studies.

Interventions among Mexican Mennonite communities have been variously motivated. Poverty has led to Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC) involvement in the Mexican colonies – sometimes at the request of conserving Mennonite groups themselves.³¹ Other interventions are theologically motivated. Whereas evangelical Mennonite churches encourage evangelism and hold assurance of salvation as central to Christian belief, Old Colony Mennonites are not evangelical, and understand separation from the world to be a central component of remaining faithful to God's word. While belief remains a central component of Old Colony practice, salvation is not assured in this paradigm; instead, followers of Christ are called to live in faithfulness and to hope in God's love (J. Friesen 2004, 136; Guenther 2004, 156).

The migration from Canada to Mexico was arranged and orchestrated by the Old Colony church, and functioned to enable the continued practice of conserving Mennonite life, worship, and education. However, when considered against a backdrop of multiple prior migrations and intentionally severed relations with the Old Colony church in Canada, the easy application of diaspora to Mexico's conserving population becomes less clear.

1.4.6 Diaspora: A Responsive Stance

Participation in a diasporic group is frequently defined by engagement in cultural folk- and foodways, affiliation with an umbrella organization that crosses national

³¹ According to their website, MCC's mandate is "to demonstrate God's love by working among people suffering from poverty, conflict, oppression and natural disaster. MCC serves as a channel for interchange by building mutually transformative relationships. MCC strives for peace, justice and the dignity of all people by sharing our experiences, resources and faith in Jesus Christ" (Mennonite Central Committee 2007).

bounds, and in the dependence – to some extent – of identity on association with a particular group (Brubaker 2005; Tölölyan 1996). Mexican Mennonites demonstrate many of these characteristics. However, for many conserving Mennonites, the continued association with “Mennonite” lifeways is not so much a means of connecting with groups left behind as it is a means of reconnecting with the values and lifeways deemed central to faithful living – a “discrepant cosmopolitanism” wherein ‘dwelling’ and ‘traveling’ both connects them to and distances them from environments perceived to encourage conformity.³² Still, Brubaker’s stance-based concept of diaspora complicates the inclusion of all Mennonites in a “Mennonite diaspora.” Rupture, dispersal, and regeneration are part of their story, but absolute dependence on this narrative invites exclusivity and essentialism. Here, diaspora becomes more than “dispersal” or “deterritorialized ethnicity” (Anthias 1998, 569); if one must choose to participate in a diasporic community, membership cannot be assigned.

For the purposes of this study, I write against a notion of diasporicity that assumes connection based on historical ties alone. With Brubaker, I conceive of diaspora as a stance and not an entity because this application of the concept recognizes community agency, and also the diversity of associations represented among members of a group or church polity. Further, I use the concept because it accounts for connections to North American church denominations in the years since the first migration to Mexico

³² In his 1992 consideration of ethnography and place, Clifford reclaims “travel” as a term of cultural comparison. Challenging binarisms that polarize traveler and native, cosmopolitan and local, and routes and roots, Clifford invokes the recognition of “discrepant cosmopolitanisms” that account for the “everyday practices of dwelling and traveling, dwelling in traveling” (1992, 108).

occurred. New churches introduced in the region, seasonal migration to Canada and the United States, and musical developments similar to or different from those in Canada figure into these crossovers. Still, I proceed with caution; overlaps between Mennonite groups have not always occurred with mutual consent and “Mennonite” remains an imprecise measuring stick within a single congregation, let alone across continents. By voicing points of intersection and dissent among Mexico’s Mennonite churches, individual church congregations, families, and community members, and by approaching these sites through ethnography, I write against a concept of diaspora that functions as repackaged genealogy. Here, *stance* may proceed as both engaged and defiant.

1.5 Dissertation Outline

The layering of musical meanings in Mennonite Mexico is reflected in the ordering of chapters in this dissertation. In Chapter 1, I have introduced my study, and explored various literatures on sacrality and belief as they relate to Mexican Mennonite experience. Engaging the work of various diaspora theorists, I challenged portrayals of diasporic Mennonite communities that depend on essentialist understandings of Mennonite identity. I demonstrated that despite shared ancestry, shared narratives of travel prompted by religious conviction, and cultural markers of shared identity, the idea of an essential Mennonite subject is problematic. By examining the strengths and shortcomings of diasporic language in relation to Mennonite migration and experience, the extent of its usefulness as a framework for the current study was debated.

In Chapter 2, I outline my fieldwork methodology, and offer more detailed contextual information for Mexico's northern Mennonite colonies, specifically in the regions of Chihuahua and Durango where my fieldwork took place. In addition to context and methodology, I use a framework of "circumstantial activism" (Marcus 1998) to explore issues around my fieldwork and community participation while in the region.

Chapter 3 introduces *lange Wies*, the melodies and associated singing style that together function as a point of reference for acceptable song practice among Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico. In it, I explore various hypotheses for the origin and development of the *Wies*, before introducing related repertoires, performance styles, and social effects.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 engage different, but related, aspects of music practice and defiance in northern Mexico. Chapter 4 considers narratives of "private" musicking, often located within the home, and the implications of illicit song practice within and among conserving Mennonite families. By exploring the myriad relationships at play in the negotiation of domestic song practice – specifically those that defy parameters set out by church leadership – the common representation of "sacred music" as meaningful insofar as it enables experiences of individual or collective worship is challenged.

Defiant song practice is not restricted to private domains of domestic home and family, and this is the subject of Chapter 5. In recent years, "public" song practices that stand in opposition to accepted church practice have emerged. *Singstunden*, where Old Colony youth meet to study the Bible, learn Spanish vocabulary, and to sing a varied repertoire that includes hymns with Spanish texts, provide one such example. The

negotiation of conflicting viewpoints within Old Colony communities forms the basis for Chapter 5's inquiry.

Chapter 6 explores another layer in Mexican Mennonite music practice by focusing on a family that embodies many of the conserving-evangelical tensions at work in the region. By following the musical pathways of a family that left the Old Colony church to join an evangelical congregation, and for whom music is central to faith and family ministry, the easy polarization of "evangelical" and "conserving" among Mexican Mennonites is complicated. As the family seeks to share the Christian gospel with conserving Mennonites in northern Mexico, their song practices demonstrate respect for and critique of the conserving life that they left behind.

Engaging themes and ideas developed in the body of the dissertation, Chapter 7 revisits some of the overarching issues introduced at the outset. It examines the concept of diaspora in relation to specific fieldwork examples and suggests areas for further exploration.

Chapter 2

Situating the Fieldwork: Context, Methodology, and Circumstantial Activism

2.1 Introduction and First Impressions

2.1.1 *Introduction*

My decision to conduct fieldwork in Mexico was influenced largely by previous experiences in South American Mennonite colonies. In 1998 and 1999, I taught violin lessons in the Chaco region of Paraguay, where Mennonite children and youth were encouraged to take advantage of musical opportunities that had been unavailable to their parents one generation earlier.³³ Here, and among extended family members in the more conserving colonies of East Paraguay, I was intrigued by music's ability to forge connections across linguistic and geographical bounds. With my German skills still relatively unrehearsed and English a second or fourth language for many with whom I conversed, it was frequently the singing of familiar hymns and gospel songs that enabled

³³ The Chaco colonies (Menno, Fernheim, and Neuland) were settled by three distinct Mennonite groups between 1928 and 1947. The Menno Colony was founded in 1928 by Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan who opposed Canada's war effort at the time, and were uncomfortable with the ramifications of the 1915 Canadian School Act. Fernheim Colony was founded in 1930 by Mennonite refugees that had been given temporary asylum in Germany after their flight from Russia. Unable to remain in Germany, they sought but were refused refuge in Canada. It was at this time that they were directed to Paraguay, SA. In 1947, a second group of Mennonite refugees arrived in Paraguay's Chaco region. Having fled Russia to Germany and Poland during WWII, these Mennonites subsequently founded Colony Neuland with assistance from the members of the Menno and Fernheim colonies who had arrived before them (Duerksen and Braun 1987; Dyck and Klassen 1987).

communication. While most of my grandmother's cousin's children and grandchildren in East Paraguay had never seen a violin or viola before my visit, the horsehair on my bow was immediately recognized, and the singing of "Der Friedensfürst" ("The Prince of Peace") overcame many a conversational hurdle.³⁴ It was this process, and a personal fascination with the possibility that music played a key role in the maintenance of family connections across transnational bounds, which led me to consider studies in ethnomusicology more seriously.

When my contacts in East Paraguay suggested that they would welcome wholeheartedly my return visit but "did not have enough music" to warrant doctoral research in their community, I decided to pursue other fieldwork possibilities. The delay of international telephone connections and postcard communication made the extrapolation of intended meaning difficult to confirm. However, I felt sensitive to the possibility that extended family and friends were uncomfortable with my proposed project, and chose to err on the side of caution.

It was only days later, in the spring of 2005, that I again found myself in the midst of a direction-altering phone call, this time with my sister in Winnipeg, Manitoba. After relaying to me the goings-on among family members on the prairies, she told me of a Mennonite school in Mexico that was in need of music teachers. My uncle Jack and aunt Mary (Froese) Siemens³⁵ had run the music program at the *Centro de Capacitación Cristiana* (Centre for Christian Training), now the Steinreich Bibelschule, or Steinreich

³⁴ The Sommerfeld Colony in East Paraguay was settled by Mennonites who left Canada in the 1950s. Some of my grandmother's extended family members were among them.

³⁵ Mary (Froese) Siemens lives in Manitoba with her husband, Jack Siemens, and is a sister to my mother, Margaret (Froese) Klassen.

Bible School (SBS) for six years by 2005, and due to drastically increased enrolments would welcome assistance in facilitating the diverse musical needs of the school. Given my background in violin/viola instruction, my husband's (Simon Neufeld) willingness to try his hand at teaching guitar, and my interest in establishing some manner of reciprocal fieldwork arrangement, work in Steinreich held great promise. Should my fieldwork prove unwelcome, the colonies would at the very least enjoy some months of free music lessons. My logic demonstrates a certain naiveté, given the contested space occupied by music in the colonies. Still, our presence in Steinreich enabled dialogue and engagement with multiple perspectives during the course of my research.

2.1.2 Overview

Whereas Chapter 1 considers Mennonites in a global context and introduces the 1920s migration to Mexico, this chapter focuses more specifically on the Mexican Mennonite communities where my fieldwork took place. The overview given in Chapter 1 will be augmented here, with a deeper contextualization of the northern region of Mexico and the churches, peoples, and spaces that fill it. Following geographical contextualization and a brief review of academic studies that challenge common stereotypes of Mexican Mennonites, I will outline my fieldwork methods and the auspices under which I arrived in Mexico. Finally, I will address the process of navigating tensions between 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' during my time in the region.

2.1.3 Departure and Arrival: On the Road

Steinreich (Campo 38 ½) is located five hours south of El Paso, Texas, making a wintry January drive from Manitoba a particularly enjoyable endeavour. Having completed the six-day trek from St. John's, NL to Winnipeg, MB less than two weeks prior, Simon and I had grown accustomed to long days of travel; this, combined with sunny skies and snow-less highways, contributed to an overall sense of calm. We travelled in tandem with my uncle Jack and aunt Mary, who had installed two-way radios into our respective vehicles for ease of communication (and entertainment) en route.

In addition to the climate changes we met before crossing the Mexican border, a transition to higher elevation greeted us after we passed through Mexican customs. Chihuahua's Mennonite colonies are situated in the Bustillos Valley, atop a plateau in the eastern foothills of the Sierra Madre. This means that the most efficient way to get to Steinreich is to follow a winding road that leads through the mountains. A drive of about one hour, this route is home to blind spots, careless drivers, and dangerous drop-offs. It is also exceedingly beautiful, reminiscent at times of the Appalachians of the southern United States. After passing through this ridge, signs of Mennonite life begin to appear (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1. View of Mennonite village home, farmland, and surrounding mountains in Steinreich, Nord Colony, Mexico.

The first Mennonite store we entered on the way to Steinreich was filled with Mexican candy and people speaking Mennonite Low German – sharp reminders of our new contextual reality. Farms with tractors, trucks, and rubber tires offered clues to the changes that have come to this place since the Mennonites arrived in 1922. In recent years, Mennonite entrepreneurs in the area have begun to leave agrarian lifeways, learning to speak Spanish, and doing business with Spanish-Mexican clients. And this cultural interface is not unidirectional – at least one Spanish-Mexican grocery clerk in Colonia Alvaro Obregón (Rubio)³⁶ is conversant in Mennonite Low German.

Business signs for Yanke Loewen (a Mennonite-owned junkyard) or Los Arcos Pizzeria (where one can order ‘Italian’ food in both Spanish and Low German) contribute to this pastiche, signalling an overlap and contact with ‘the world’ that was once unheard of. The businesses along this highway, extending between Cuauhtémoc and Rubio,

³⁶ The town’s official name is Colonia Alvaro Obregón; however, most Mennonites refer to it as Rubio. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the colloquial “Rubio.”

present a portrait of Mennonite Mexico rarely expected by Canadian Mennonite visitors. While the odd dead animal carcass may be seen abandoned on the road's shoulder and stories of Mexican Mennonite poverty and struggle (interspersed with the occasional tale of drug smuggling) continue to be told and written, the financial prosperity of certain Mennonite businesses is evident from this vantage point. Here, amidst the factories and the gleaming "Mennonites only" Credit Union is another side of Mennonite Mexico.³⁷ Pizza places and *Jugo Menonita*,³⁸ *Peters Construcción*,³⁹ and a museum that houses antique farm implements still used in some colonies, depict a changing landscape – a landscape that narrates changing relationships between Mennonites and their environments in the past and present (Figure 2.2).

³⁷ The Credit Union is noteworthy on a number of fronts. Modeled after but larger than the Credit Union of Rosenort, Manitoba, would-be members of Mexico's Mennonite Credit Union must, in addition to being Mennonite, purchase \$1,000 in shares before opening an account. The exclusivity of the establishment is amplified by the bevy of Spanish-Mexicans in its employ. Unable to become shareholders, they are among the few in the region who have the education necessary to service such an establishment.

³⁸ This brand name translates from Spanish as "Mennonite juice." The juice is a combination of cabbage, cactus extract, and garlic, and is marketed as a natural healing tonic.

³⁹ Peters Construction (owned by Johan and Tina Peters) is one of the leading fibre optics installation companies in Mexico.



Figure 2.2. Scenes from Cuauhtémoc and surrounding area. *Left to right from top*, A junkyard, Manitoba Colony; Statue of a farmer holding a sheaf of grain erected in Cuauhtémoc in honour of contributions made by Mennonites in northern Mexico; Sign above arch for John Deere dealership, Manitoba Colony; Billboard advertising *Jugo Menonita* along highway leading to Bustillos Valley; *Union de Crédito Agricultores de Cuauhtémoc* (Agriculturists Credit Union of Cuauhtémoc, the “Mennonite Credit Union”), Manitoba Colony.

2.2 The Place

2.2.1 Colony Settlement

The Mennonite colonies in Chihuahua, Mexico, were settled by Mennonites from the Canadian prairies (Manitoba and Saskatchewan), and these geographic connections are evident in the names given to some of the earliest settlements.⁴⁰ Old Colony Mennonites from Manitoba, for example, settled the Manitoba Colony while the Swift Current Colony was settled by those from Saskatchewan. Sommerfelder Mennonites settled Santa Clara, a colony North of Cuauhtémoc.

In 1948, the formation of the Ojo de la Yegua Colony, or Nord Colony, by settlers from the Manitoba and Swift Current Colonies again prompted community reconfigurations.⁴¹ In the same year, Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites from Manitoba, Canada, arrived in the region, and settled the Los Jagueyes Colony (Quellenkolonie) to the North.⁴² Santa Rita Colony, just East of Los Jagueyes, and nestled between Santa Clara and Nord Colonies, was settled a decade later by Mennonites from the Manitoba,

⁴⁰ Most Mennonite villages are identified in two ways: by the German names given them upon the Mennonite's settling in Mexico, and the numbers assigned these villages by Mexican authorities. According to vernacular belief, the unfamiliarity of the colonies' German names complicated the work of Spanish surveyors, resulting in the assignation of numbers. The overlooking of certain villages when numbers were assigned accounts for the presence of variants in the numbering system (e.g. Steinreich: Campo 38 ½).

⁴¹ Settlement of Ojo de la Yegua began as early as 1946, but its independent colony status as Ojo de la Yegua Colony, or Nord Colony, occurred in 1948. It was at this time that members elected their own bishop and *Vorsteher*, or head of municipal affairs (Krahn and Ens 1989).

⁴² Quiring cites 1947 as the approximate date for the founding of the Los Jagueyes Colony (2003, 135). According to H. L. Sawatsky, this is when an agreement for the purchase of land and active fundraising for the project began in Canada (1971, 90).

Nord, and Swift Current Colonies (Schroeder 2004).⁴³ The congregations currently associated with these colonies include, but are not limited to: Old Colony, Reinlander, Kleine Gemeinde, *Conferencia Menonita de México* (CMM), Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC), and Sommerfelder.⁴⁴

The majority of my research occurred in the Swift Current, Nord (Ojo de la Yegua), and Manitoba Colonies in Chihuahua, with meaningful connections also made in Chihuahua's Santa Rita Colony and Nuevo Ideal (Patos), in Durango, Mexico (See Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4 for colony maps).

⁴³ David Quiring also outlines details of land acquisition and colony establishment in his book *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision: Under Siege in Mexico and the Canadian Connection* (2003, 24-26).

⁴⁴ In addition to the Mennonite denominations operating in northern Mexico, there are a number of German churches, *Gottesgemeinde* in particular, that have attracted members from the Mennonite colonies.



CODE TO COLONIES - with approximate founding dates.
 (A partial listing of past and present Old Colony and other Mennonite settlements)

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1 Manitoba - 1922 | 14 Monclova - 1974 |
| 2 Swift Current - 1922 | 15 Nueva Padilla - 1983 |
| 3 Nord (Ojo de la Yegua) - 1946 | 16 Villa de Casas - 1981 |
| 4 Santa Rita - 1962 | 17 Gonzalez - 1951 |
| 5 Santa Clara - 1922 | 18 Durango - 1924 |
| 6 Quellenkolonie (Los Jagueyes) - 1947 | 19 Yermo - 1950 |
| 7 Las Virginias - 1980 | 20 La Honda - 1964 |
| 8 Buenos Aires - 1958 | 21 La Batea - 1961 |
| 9 El Cuervo - 1979 | 22 Yalnon - 1983 |
| 10 Buena Vista - 1985 | 23 Chavi - 1986 |
| 11 El Capulin - 1962 | 24 Nuevo Progreso - 1987 |
| 12 Sabinal - 1990 | 25 El Temporal - 1995 |
| 13 Villa Ahumada - 1992 | |

Figure 2.3. Map of Mennonite Colonies of Mexico. Map by David Quiring 2003, 135.

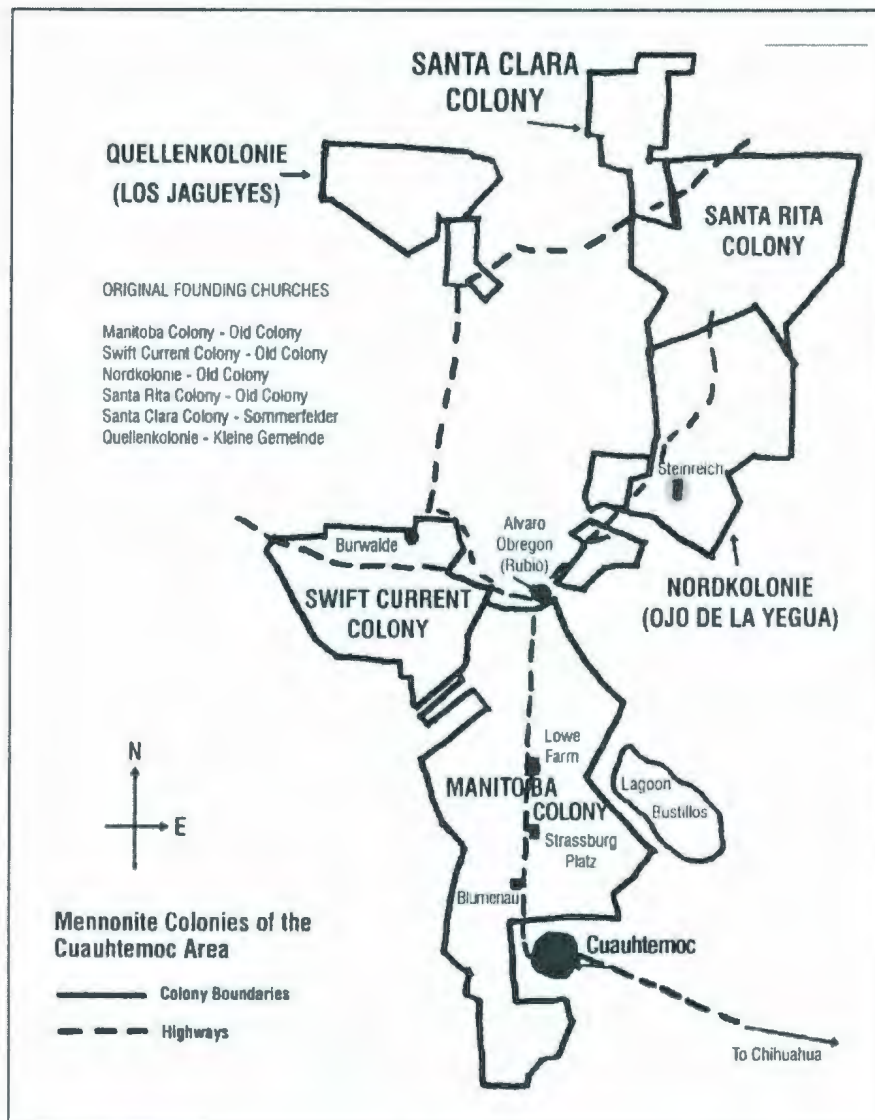


Figure 2.4. Map of Mennonite colonies in the Cuauhtémoc area. Map by David Quiring 2003, 136.

While community accountability is primary in Mexico's Mennonite colonies, they differ from Anabaptist colony models that hold all possessions in common (e.g. the Hutterites).⁴⁵ Northern Mexico's Mennonite colonies were settled along

⁴⁵ Despite differences in colony operation, there are similarities between Hutterite and conserving Mennonite views around music. Helen Martens' *Hutterite Songs* provides a closer look at musical practices among Hutterites (2002).

church/denominational lines, but they are not communes. Instead, they represent large settlements that are made up of smaller villages known as *Darpa* in Low German, and *campos* in Spanish.⁴⁶ According to Fretz and Sawatsky, Mennonites settled in patterns “according to agricultural villages very similar to the pattern brought from Russia by way of Canada. New land has always been bought in large blocks and redistributed to the purchasers in family-sized farms” (1987).

By 2002, the number of Mennonites in Mexico was estimated at 80-100,000. Of this group, a large majority (60-80,000) were identified as Old Colony Mennonites, with 35-40,000 living in the state of Chihuahua and another 10,000 in the state of Durango (Fretz 2003, 68). Citing figures from a few years prior, Larry Towell breaks down the Mexican Mennonite population by state: Chihuahua 44,000; Durango 6,000; Zacatecas 4,850; Tamaulipas 1,700; and Campeche 5,000 (2000, unpaginated).

2.2.2 Mexican Mennonite Churches: an Overview of Canadian Influence

Given that the impetus for Mennonite migration to Mexico was explicitly connected to the country’s governmental promises of freedom of religious belief and practice, it is not surprising that initial settlement patterns in the Mexican colonies occurred around lines of church affiliation. Changes, however, have occurred with the introduction of new church conferences in recent years. As was alluded to in Chapter 1, David Quiring suggests that the influence of General Conference Mennonite churches,

⁴⁶ A direct translation of *el campo* from Spanish to English is “field.” Larry Towell defines *campos* as “strips of houses surrounded by fields” (Preface to *The Mennonites* 2000, unpaginated).

MCC, and other evangelical Mennonite denominations have been significant in this regard (2003, 26).⁴⁷

MCC, with offices in Canada and the USA, began offering aid to Mennonites in Mexico in the late 1940s and 50s. According to Fretz and Sawatsky, they established a centre in Cuauhtémoc in 1947 as a response to crop failures that had affected Old Colonists in Chihuahua:

This center expanded to include medical services and, ultimately, under the auspices of the General Conference Mennonite Church (GCM), state-accredited primary schools, a secondary school, and the Blumenau congregation (GCM). During the 1950s the Mennonite Brethren established a clinic at Nuevo Ideal (Patos), in Durango State, which offered services to the Old Colonists on the same basis as the Mexican populace. Gradually, a Mennonite Brethren congregation, supporting an elementary school, since 1973 located within the Patos colony, emerged. (1987)

It was a General Conference presence in Mexico that eventually led to the organization of the Mennonite Church of Mexico in 1963, and the subsequent founding of the *Conferencia Menonita de México* (CMM; Conference of Mennonites in Mexico) in 1991 (Quiring 2003, 76). The three churches that form this conference are Blumenau (Manitoba Colony), Burwalde (Swift Current Colony), and Steinreich (Nord Colony). While Quiring writes that General Conference, Kleine Gemeinde, Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC), Evangelical Mennonite Missions Conference (EMMC), Reinländer,

⁴⁷ Mennonite church conferences are organizational bodies comprised by Mennonite church congregations. Representatives meet regularly to discuss issues and to act in an advisory capacity for member congregations. The General Conference Mennonite Church has since amalgamated with two other North American church bodies: the Mennonite Church (MC) and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC). At a joint assembly in 1999, it was determined that Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada) and Mennonite Church USA (MC USA) would be formed, with inaugural meetings held in 2000 (Mennonite Church Canada 2007).

Sommerfelder, Mennonitische Gemeinschaft, Gemeinde Gottes, and MCC were all working among Old Colonists in the mid 1990s (2003, 75-76), he suggests that “of all the Mennonite groups and organizations that arrived in Mexico, the General Conference, the Kleine Gemeinde, and MCC caused the most disruption to Old Colonists and their plans to live in isolated communities. The first two groups initially arrived in Mexico for reasons other than evangelizing or helping the Old Colony” (2003, 76).

In 2008, MCC’s presence in Mexico continues to be felt, with offices and resource centres in Chihuahua and Durango.⁴⁸ EMC and EMMC participation in Chihuahua colonies is also evident, particularly through church partnerships, radio broadcasts, and the strong contingent of skilled educators from Manitoba who volunteer as instructors at SBS.

2.2.3 Mennonite Church and School in Northern Mexico

Despite outside notions of uniformity among Mexico’s Mennonite churches, it is along lines of church affiliation that they are most vividly distinguished from one another. Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and CMM congregations comprise the largest populations of Mennonites in Mexico. Each denomination operates its own schools, with Christian education – variously understood and manifested – a fundamental component.

While my fieldwork brought more formal association with Old Colony and CMM churches than with Kleine Gemeinde in Mexico, many of my interviewees held ties to the

⁴⁸ MCC’s work with “Low German Mennonites” is not confined to Mexico. According to their website, they work with Mennonites in Mexico, Bolivia, Texas, Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta (Mennonite Central Committee 2002b).

Kleine Gemeinde church.⁴⁹ What follows is a brief description of church and school in each of these three denominations, with some comparison and contrast between them. These descriptions are based on my own observations while attending various schools and worship services in northern Mexico. I recognize the variation that exists between individual congregations, and do not hold these descriptions as representative. I do, however, wish to provide some basic knowledge of how church and school function in the places where I worked and learned.

2.2.4 Old Colony

2.2.4.1 Old Colony Church



Figure 2.5. Old Colony Church, Nord Colony, Mexico.

⁴⁹ Other churches (e.g. Sommerfelder, Reinlander, Gottesgemeinde) populate the Mennonite colonies, but my contact with them was limited and I do not address them here.

The Old Colony worship service begins about one hour after sunrise on Sunday morning. Church members park their cars and trucks in a hitching-post-turned-parking lot between the church and the road before entering the unmarked building. Women enter through doors that face the road, leading into the left side of the sanctuary. Window shutters are open on Sunday mornings, allowing the sun (the building's only source of light) to enter; a stove in the centre aisle heats the space during winter months.

Married women sit at the front of the sanctuary on the left side, wearing dark dresses with puffed sleeves and pressed, pleated skirts. On each head is a black *Krüselmets* (Low German; "lace cap") covered by a black kerchief (embroidered or printed with a floral pattern), and each wears a dark apron tied around her waist. Unmarried women who are old enough to attend church also sit on the left of the sanctuary, directly behind the married women. They are dressed similarly, but on their heads, unmarried women wear a kerchief alone. Men enter the church through double doors at the rear of the sanctuary. Most often wearing hats and dressed in suits without a tie, they remove their hats upon entry, and hold them to their chest as they proceed from the rear of the sanctuary. Walking down a centre aisle, men make their way to benches on the right, hanging their hats on racks suspended from the ceiling above the benches before sitting down. Like married women, married men sit at the front of the church, and youth, behind them. Bibles are rarely seen in the hands of churchgoers; however, the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* (High German; "Spiritual Hymnal"), encased in a black cardboard sleeve, is carried by everyone. For all members of the congregation, this

procession occurs in relative silence, with nods of acknowledgement shared as churchgoers enter the sanctuary and find their places.

After the congregation assembles, and shortly before the service is to begin, the *Vorsänger* (High German; “front singers”) – usually four to eight of them – file into the sanctuary.⁵⁰ Also holding hats to their chests while walking, these male song leaders proceed to a pew facing the congregation on a platform at the front of the church, hang their hats on the ceiling pegs before them, and sit down. The preacher, dressed in a black coat, pants, and knee boots follows from the anteroom shortly thereafter, and the service begins.⁵¹

A *Vorsänger* calls out a number from the *Gesangbuch* (High German; “hymnal”), and leads the congregation in singing unaccompanied *lange Wies*. The hymnal’s High German texts are printed in Gothic script and musical notation is not printed inside the hymnal (Figure 2.6). Instead, the highly melismatic *lange Wiese* are memorized by song leaders who ornament cadences while guiding congregants through the hymns. Because texts are drawn out significantly in the singing of *lange Wies*, hymns are seldom sung in their entirety during worship; rather, the first three or four verses are sung.⁵² Despite

⁵⁰ According to John J. Friesen, “the office of song leader (*Vorsänger*) arose early in the 18th century when Mennonites were again given permission to engage in group singing... Song leaders did not conduct, but rather learned the tunes and sang vigorously in leading the congregation” (2001a, 5).

⁵¹ H. L. Sawatsky suggests that the leather knee boots worn by Old Colony preachers are understood by Old Colonists to be “ordained by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians,” (1971, 291). He refers specifically to Ephesians 6:15 which reads, “As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace” (NRSV).

⁵² The *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* does not have a standard number of verses per hymn. Hymn #332 (“Seht! das höchste Gut der”), for example, has six verses, while #14

these restrictions, the singing of the initial two hymns takes up to twenty minutes at the start of the service.



Von der Freude des Glaubens. 427

gang heilig, rein und gart, ein
Kind und Erb' des Herren! da-
ran muß uns nicht irren des
Teufels list'ge Art.

8. Darum, ob ich schon dulde
hier Widerwärtigkeit, wie ich's
auch wohl verschulde, kommt
doch die Gnade, so aller Freu-
den voll; dieselb' ohn' ein'ges
Ende, bißweil ich Christum ken-
ne, mir wolbefahren soll.

9. Was ist des Vaters Wille,
der uns erschaffen hat; sein
Sohn hat Gut's die Fülle er-
worben uns aus Gnad', auch
Gott der heil'ge Geist im Glau-
ben uns regieret, zum Reich des
Himmels führet; ihm sei Lob,
Ehre und Preis.

1. Cor. 6, 10. Als die Kreuzigen,
aber allezeit fröhlich; als die
Armen, aber die doch viele reich
machen; als die nichts inne ha-
ben, und doch alles haben.

100. Mel. Warum sollt' ich mich zi.

340. Warum sollt' ich mich
benn grümen?
Hab' ich doch Christum noch,
wer will mir den nehmen? Wer
will mir den Himmel rauben,
den mir schon Gottes Sohn bei-
gelegt im Glauben?

1. Naßend lag ich auf dem
Boden, da ich kam, da ich nahm
meinen ersten Odem; naßend
werd' ich auch hingelassen, wenn

ich werd' von der Erd' als ein
Schatten fliehen.

3. Gut und Blut, Reiz, Seel'
und Leben ist nicht mein; Gott
allein ist, der mir's gegeben;
will er's wieder zu sich kehren,
nehm' er's hin, ich will ihn den-
noch fröhlich ehren.

4. Schickt er mir ein Kreuz
zu tragen, bringt herein Angst
und Weh, sollt' ich drum ver-
zagen? Der es schickt, der wird's
auch wenden, er weiß wohl, wie
er soll all mein Unglück enden.

5. Gott hat mich bei guten
Lagen oft ergötzt, sollt' ich jetzt
auch nicht etwas tragen?
Fromm ist Gott und schärft mit
Waffen sein Gericht, kann mich
nicht ganz und gar verlassen.

6. Satan, Welt und ihre
Rotten können mir nichts mehr
hier thun, als meiner spotten;
laß sie spotten, laß sie lachen!
Gott, mein Heil, wird in Eil'
sie zu Schanden machen.

7. Undergagt und ohne
Grauen soll ein Christ, wo er
ist, stets sich lassen schauen;
wollt' ihn auch der Tod aufrei-
ßen, soll der Wuth dennoch gut
und sein stille bleiben.

8. Kann uns doch der Tod
nicht tödten, sondern reißt un-
fern Geist aus viel tausend Rös-

Figure 2.6. Above, *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, used in Old Colony worship; below, A page from the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, showing the first seven verses of hymn #340, “Warum sollt’ ich mich.”

(“Verzage nicht, o frommer”) includes twenty-two.

An intoned sermon, vocalized on a few pitches, follows the congregational singing. It is delivered by the preacher in High German, with clarification of specific points given in Low German; at such moments, a more conversational vocal quality is adopted. When the sermon comes to a close, congregation members turn around and kneel on the floor to pray, placing their heads on the backless church benches. Following this prayer and the return of congregation members to their pews, the preacher speaks a second time before the final hymn is sung and congregants exit in silence. The entire service lasts between one and two hours.

2.2.4.2 *Old Colony School*

Most Old Colony village schools, or *Darpschoole*, are multi-age one-room schools, run by a male teacher who sometimes lives in a teacherage attached to the school building. In most cases, teachers in Old Colony schools are educated through the Old Colony school system and do not receive special training before taking on a school post.

While Old Colony children do not attend worship services on Sunday mornings, their Christian education is extremely important to community members; one might argue that it occurs daily in the schools of Mexico's Old Colony Mennonites. Completion of the program usually takes six years for girls, and seven for boys.⁵³ Instruction is given in High German, with catechism recitation and singing from the *Gesangbuch* occurring

⁵³ Quiring suggests that various explanations are given for this difference, but that "the most common claims that boys need more education for farming and their other activities than girls do for being housewives and mothers" (2003, 47).

daily.⁵⁴ In the *Darpschool*, learning is not prized as an end in itself; rather, the training of Mennonite youth for participation in Old Colony religious life is the goal. In Quiring's words, "The school prepares Old Colonists for life in *their* world, and not for the larger world outside" (2003, 47 italics mine). Harry Leonard Sawatsky suggests that the related distrust of secular education and "higher learning" that has come to characterize conserving ideologies around education are scripturally based:

The basic educational philosophy hinges on Romans 12:2 and 16: "and be not conformed to this world ... Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." It is fixed by the admonition contained in I Corinthians 7:20: "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called." ... For the Mennonite, then, it requires that he accept unquestioningly the religious rationale of his forebears and that he follow the traditional agrarian way of life. (1971, 308)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The *Katechismus* (catechism) is a small book that contains questions and answers about church beliefs. The full title of the copy I purchased in Chihuahua in 2006 reads: *Katechismus, oder, kurze und einfache Unterweisung aus der heiligen Schrift In Fragen und Antworten. Zum Gebrauch in Kirchen und Schulen* (Catechism, or, short and simple instruction from the holy scriptures in questions and answers. For use in church and school). While not conceived of as a song form, the recitation of the catechism is intoned and requires practice. In preparation for baptism, the catechism is memorized, and *Singstunden* provide context for increased familiarity with the content, rhythm, and pitch of the recitation, which usually centres on the interval of a minor third.

⁵⁵ James Urry has also written about Mennonite attitudes around education, focusing specifically on the changing attitudes towards "knowledge" that occurred among many Mennonites in nineteenth-century Russia as the result of educational reforms that celebrated, rather than mistrusted, individual acquisition of knowledge (Urry 1983). Before exploring these "changes," however, Urry describes Mennonite understandings of faith and knowledge that were foundational in the early Mennonite Church. Of the New Testament emphasis on wisdom, Urry writes that "[a] true understanding of God could not be achieved through rational endeavour; God's wisdom defied the categories of wisdom of this world" (1983, 310). Urry goes on to cite I Corinthians 1:19-24, which reads,

19 For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.' 20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to

To this end, the Old Colony school curriculum is organized around the *Fibel* (High German; “primer”), Catechism, New Testament, and Old Testament, with students graduating from “being a *Fibla* to a *Tastamentla* to a *Bibla*” in the course of their education (Hedges, 154). During their first year (*Fibla*), children work through the *Fibel*. At this time, emphasis is placed on penmanship and learning the importance of obedience. Once the *Fibel* has been completed, study of the catechism and the New Testament begin. The final segment of the curriculum – *Bibla* – introduces reading of the entire Bible to students. According to H. L. Sawatsky, the movement from one reading level to another is one of the only aspects of the curriculum that changes as students progress through the Old Colony school system (1971, 307). Hedges extends this, suggesting that “the acquisition of High German occurs only through the reading, copying, and memorization of these few texts. There is no grammar and no vocabulary taught, and the texts are seldom translated to Mennonite Low German” (1996, 154).⁵⁶

Religious education through the reading and memorization of texts is a central part of the curriculum, but so are basic skills necessary to support agrarian lifeways. H. L. Sawatsky writes that in addition to reading materials, Old Colony students study “elementary arithmetic designed to teach the child what he needs to know to work simple

save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23 but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (NRSV)

⁵⁶ For a thorough examination of Old Colony school systems, see Hedges (1996, 153-169).

problems dealing with weights, measures, areas, and volumes which he is likely to encounter as a farmer later on" (1971, 306).

As in *Kleine Gemeinde* and CMM schools, Old Colony musical education occurs in the classroom. While *Musik* (i.e. playing instruments) is absent here, Old Colony students sing a diverse repertoire in unison and unaccompanied in both *lange* and *korte Wies* (Low German; "short melody" or "short way").⁵⁷ Song themes are frequently connected to a particular activity or time of day (morning, prayer after lunch, welcome guests etc.), and songs are chosen by the teacher. While openness to repertoires outside of *Gesangbuchlieder* (High German; "songs from the hymnal") depends on the schoolteacher and church leadership, some Old Colony schools have introduced linguistic variation into their classroom singing. In Abram Wolf's classroom in 2006, for example, school children sang in High German, Spanish, and Low German at various points in the school day.⁵⁸ Wolf also compiled a *Gesangbuchlein zum allgemeinen Gebrauch in den Schulen* ("Small hymnal for general use in the Schools") for his students. This collection of songs from the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* was easily transported to and from school, and enabled students to learn *Gesangbuch* repertoire that Wolf (who was also a church *Vorsänger*) deemed useful.

⁵⁷ My use of the High German *Musik* (music) and the implications of the term in the Mexican Mennonite context are explored more fully in Chapter 4.

⁵⁸ Schoolteacher Abram Wolf borrows texts from a Spanish "Christian Hymnal" (*Himnario Cristiano*) introduced to him by his niece, who attends a CMM church.

2.2.5 *Kleine Gemeinde*

2.2.5.1 *Kleine Gemeinde Church*



Figure 2.7. Kleine Gemeinde Church, Los Jagueyes Colony, Mexico.

Because I had less contact with Kleine Gemeinde churches in Mexico than with Old Colony and CMM, this description of Kleine Gemeinde worship is based on fieldnotes from a specific Sunday morning service in the Manitoba Colony, attended together with Jack, Mary, and Simon a few weeks after our arrival in Mexico.

This Kleine Gemeinde church was big enough to accommodate a congregation of over 500 people. The main portion of the sanctuary was unadorned, with no overhead lights above sanctuary pews. Pot lights, a clock, and microphones, however, were visible at the front of the church, and the pews were padded. To our right, Mary and I recognized the black kerchiefs and dark dresses of women in the congregation, and looked for an inconspicuous place to sit down. Jack and Simon joined the men on the left. While most

wore collared shirts, Jack and Simon were likely the only men in the sanctuary who were wearing ties.

After being seated, a time for hymn singing began. Like the rest of the service, this occurred in High German. While the nasal tone production of congregants, the male *Vorsänger* seated at the front of the church, and the unaccompanied singing hearkened to Old Colony worship services in the region, there were also significant variations. For example, hymns in the *Glaubens Lieder* (Belief Songs) hymnal were printed in High German but did not use the Gothic script of the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*. Also, four-part harmony was heard from the pews and notated with shape notes inside the hymnal itself (Figure 2.8). Singers frequently slid from one pitch to the next and added neighbour tones to melody lines.

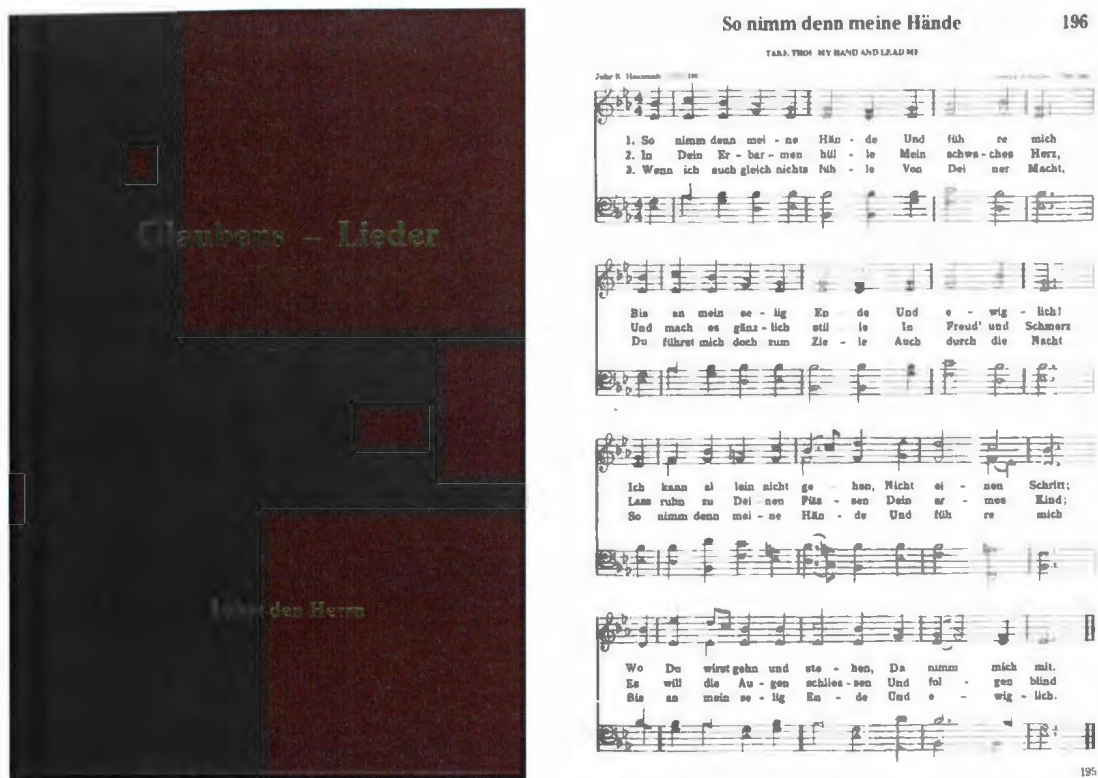


Figure 2.8. Left, *Glaubens Lieder*, hymnal used in Kleine Gemeinde worship; right, A page from the *Glaubens Lieder* hymnal, showing hymn #196, “So nimm denn meine Hände.”

The rich singing at the service involved not only adult church members, but children as well; Chihuahua’s Kleine Gemeinde churches hold Sunday school for children on Sunday mornings, and children are also present during worship services. Unlike their parents, children are not governed by gender divisions in congregational seating arrangements, and join a parent on either side of the sanctuary when Sunday school is finished.

At the close of the service, we returned to the parking lot, where church members congregated and conversed with one another.

2.2.5.2 *Kleine Gemeinde School*

Like their Old colony neighbours, *Kleine Gemeinde* teachers are not required to complete formal education beyond the church school system.⁵⁹ The *Kleine Gemeinde* model of education, however, differs from that of the Old Colonists. Whereas most Old Colony classrooms are multi-age or one-room schools, *Kleine Gemeinde* students are divided into classrooms according to age and grade level. They begin their education in High German, with Spanish integrated into the curriculum as children progress from one grade to the next.⁶⁰ As in Old Colony schools, the patience and disciplined obedience with which children sit, listen, and work is a central measure of their learning.

Kleine Gemeinde students also sing each day. Like Old Colony students, their song is unaccompanied and occurs at specific times of day. They do not, however, sing *lange Wies*, but *korte*. In the elementary classroom that I visited, enthusiasm for singing was acute, and memorized song texts – like classroom instruction – were in a mix of High German and Spanish.

⁵⁹ According to David Quiring, *Kleine Gemeinde* teachers may, in some cases, have attended secondary school (2003, 48).

⁶⁰ A fourth grade science class that I observed, for example, was conducted in High German while using a Spanish textbook (January 19, 2006).

2.2.6 Conferencia Menonita de México (CMM)

2.2.6.1 CMM Church



Figure 2.9. CMM Church, Nord Colony, Mexico.

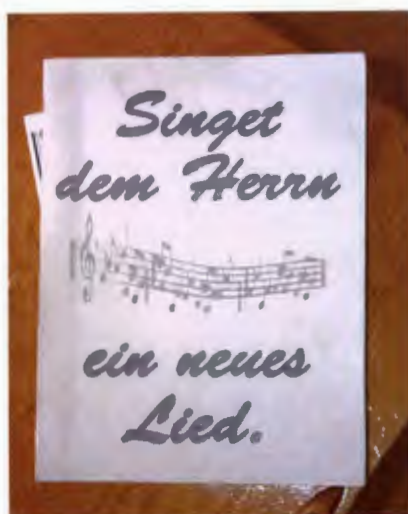
CMM churches in northern Mexico comprise their own conference, and in many ways bear more in common with their Canadian and American counterparts than with other Mennonite churches in the region. Thus, despite my relative unfamiliarity with Mexican Mennonite churches, CMM sanctuaries seemed familiar to me. Microphones, overhead lights, carpet, and padded pews are common (but not without exception) in their sanctuaries, and in the Swift Current Colony, a scripture passage painted by a community member adorns the back wall.

In each of Burwalde, Steinreich, and Blumenau churches, congregants (men, women, and children) share an entrance into the church foyer, and sit together in the pews. Clothing is not prescribed in CMM churches, however most congregants arrive in semi-formal attire: women wear skirts or dress pants with a blouse and various types of

jewellery; the men arrive in dress pants and collared shirts (sometimes with a jacket and a tie). Children are active participants in church activities, evidenced by Sunday school programs and the inclusion of a children's story during the Sunday morning worship service. During congregational prayers, church members remain seated in their pews. The sermon is delivered in Low German, and the scripture reading in High German.

Hymns, taken from a variety of hymnals and songbooks (e.g. *Evangeliums-Lieder, Zum Lob seiner Herrlichkeit [In Praise of God's Glory]*, or locally-compiled collections of praise songs),⁶¹ are sung in parts and accompanied by a piano or a collection of acoustic and electric instruments (e.g. accordion, violin, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, electric bass). In the *Evangeliums-Lieder* hymnal, hymn texts are printed in gothic script and are notated in conventional Western notation (Figure 2.10). Hymn numbers are listed in a church bulletin that outlines the morning's order of service, and are also announced by a worship leader. *Vorträge*, or "special music," from a choir or group of musicians (including both men and women) may also be included in the Sunday morning worship service. The details of weekly musical arrangements depend less on protocols encouraged by church leadership than on who has organized music on a particular Sunday.

⁶¹ At the Steinreich Mennonite Church, for example, a booklet of praise songs – *Singet dem Herr sein neues Lied* (Sing to the Lord a New Song) – has been compiled and is stored alongside other hymnals in the church pews.



No. 218. So nimm denn meine Hände.

APON F. SIEGEL

1. So nimm denn mei-ne Hän-de und füh-re mich
 Was an mein je-lig Ge-de, und e-wig lob!
 Ich mag es kein nicht ge-hen, nicht ei-nen Schritt:
 Wo du wirst geh'n und zu-ken, Da nimm mich mit.

2 In dein Scherzen führe
 Mein schwaches Herz,
 Und mach' es göttlich stille
 In Freud' und Schmerz;
 Geh ruh'n zu deinen Füßen
 Dein armer Knecht,
 Als soll die Kugel schlagen
 Und folgen blind.

3 Wenn ich auch gleich nichts fühle
 Von deiner Macht,
 Du führst mich doch zum Ziele,
 Auch durch die Nacht:
 So nimm denn meine Hände
 Und führe mich
 Was an mein jeig Ende
 Und ewiglich.

Figure 2.10. Above left, Songbook compiled for use at CMM church in the Nord Colony, Mexico; above right, *Evangeliums-Lieder* hymnal common in CMM churches in Mexico; below, A page from the *Evangeliums-Lieder* hymnal, showing hymn #218, “So nimm denn meine Hände.”

2.2.6.2 *CMM School*

Like the Kleine Gemeinde, CMM schools use both Spanish and High German languages in their instruction, and organize classes around the ages and grade levels of their students. Until recently, instruction was not offered past the tenth grade; however, a university entrance program has since been introduced in Blumenau. This program is open to interested students from each of the CMM churches. Thus while Christian education is part of school mandate, CMM schools also prioritize preparation for further study when making curriculum choices.

In the Steinreich elementary school classroom that I visited, singing was a daily activity, with students singing to the guitar accompaniment of their teacher each morning. In addition, the entire student body met in the Steinreich church sanctuary for a collective music hour once per week. Here too, students were led and accompanied by their music teacher who played the guitar. In Steinreich, songs with actions were also sung. An overhead projector was frequently used at these gatherings, allowing students to read song texts from the projection screen, and keeping their hands free while singing. Not only did these songs introduce physical activity to the class, they engaged older students by encouraging them to take leadership roles: standing beside the teacher at the front of the sanctuary, they led younger students in the actions. Blumenau, the largest school of the CMM churches, employs a music teacher and offers musical instruction as a class in its curriculum.

Mexico's Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and CMM churches represent only a portion of its Mennonite population. Still, the juxtaposition of their worship styles and

models of education demonstrate the diversity of Mennonite communities in the country. Many depictions of Mexican Mennonites, however, do not account for this diversity, nor do they recognize diversity within specific Mennonite denominations and churches. In the following section, I expand on the introduction presented in Chapter 1, and explore stereotypes of Mexican Mennonites and some of the impacts that these stereotypes have on understandings of northern communities and on my fieldwork in the region.

2.2.7 Mexican Mennonites: Facing Stereotypes from Home

Describing the Old Colony Mennonites in 1946, Fretz writes,

The name is appropriate in a sociological as well as an historical sense, because throughout the last century this group has made persistent efforts to retain all of the old customs, practices, and beliefs of their forefathers. They have tried to reproduce and preserve as accurately as possible the old social and economic systems that their forefathers established. Their settlement in villages, their pattern of building arrangements, their mode of dress, their attitude of non-conformity to the world, their church and community organizations, their system of landholdings, their attitude toward education, and their adherence to the German language are reflections of a conservative attitude. All these customs and values have been transferred from generation to generation and from colony to colony with as little change as possible. (2003, 68)

Having never before set foot on Mexican soil, my first impressions were shaped by personal experience as a Mennonite from Manitoba, by memories of the Mexican Mennonite children who seasonally came and went from the elementary school classrooms of my childhood, and from preparatory reading about the region. Unlike the conserving Mennonites in Pennsylvania or Old Order groups in southern Ontario, most academic and media treatments of Mexico's Mennonites do not paint a portrait of an

inspiring conserving body, perseverant in the face of worldly influences and struggle.⁶²

Instead, their portrait has been one of poverty, drug trafficking, land shortages, and hopelessness, a stark image compounded by narratives of abuse, alcoholism, and illiteracy. In contrast to Fretz' earlier description, a 2004 news story about the temptations "battled" by Mexican Mennonites begins,

As a child in his Mennonite settlement in northern Mexico, Jacobo attended a one-room school, where he did his lessons in chalk on a small black slate, and barely learned to read and write.

As a teenager, he was forbidden from listening to music, playing sports, dancing, even yelling, by Mennonite authorities intent on protecting their people from the world.

Instead, those good intentions left Jacobo vulnerable — unprotected — when the real world beckoned. As an adult, he became an alcoholic, then a crack cocaine addict. So did dozens of his Mennonite friends and acquaintances, he says — by the late 1990s, Jacobo could have his crack home-delivered. (Quinones 2004)

The author goes on to write that particular statistics about alcoholism and drug use among Old Colony Mennonites are not available, and that "the numbers probably are not greater than in the society at large, and may be less" (2004). Still, news stories about alcohol abuse and drug trafficking in and from the colonies near Cuauhtémoc continually focus on the paradox of religious conservatism and illegal activity, playing on stereotypes that equate "low education" with "low morality." Also, such media accounts emphasize Old Colony struggles with addictions and drug trafficking, and frequently overlook the

⁶² Larry Towell's *The Mennonites: A Biographical Sketch* (2000) is an exception. This photo narrative is interspersed with creative prose based on stories told to, and events experienced by, Towell during his time with Old Colonists in Mexico and Canada. In it, he does not shy away from realities of poverty faced by Old Colonists, but rather presents related struggles in a less essentializing light.

affiliations of Mennonites associated with more “progressive” Mennonite denominations.

Another example, from an award-winning article in *Saturday Night Magazine*, reads,

... [B]y the early 1980s the dream of a pastoral oasis was beginning to turn into a nightmare. In the midst of the worst economic crisis in decades — a devalued peso coupled with severe drought — many families went broke, no longer able to make a living from fields that had once produced steady crops of oats and corn. New trade restrictions also meant an end to the government subsidies that had previously guaranteed the Mennonites profits on their products.

With little formal education and few other non-agrarian skills, many itinerant Mennonites returned to Canada, to towns such as Leamington, looking for piecemeal work to support their large families. A small number sank into spiritual bankruptcy, turning to crime as a shortcut to fortune. Welfare fraud, gun-running, even money laundering became part of their financial lifeline. But it is in the dangerous netherworld of drugs that some Mennonites have truly prospered — a world in which dual Canadian-Mexican citizenship and a reputation for piety are priceless advantages. ...

... Meanwhile, the drug trade has transformed the once-placid Mennonite colonies in Cuauhtémoc into a modern Wild West. Tales of drug-related murders and crack houses abound. There is open drunkenness on the streets. On this day in late November, young Mennonite thugs flaunting gold rings and designer clothes and driving expensive, brand-new trucks spill into the parking lot of a Mennonite church. (Mitrovica and Bourette 2005)

Other colony members have suggested that the problem is exaggerated: “Because the young people don't have recreation halls, they drink in the street, so it's visible and people talk about it. Plus, you don't expect Mennonites to drink at all. You expect them to be perfect. But you have to accept we're human” (Abram Siemens quoted in Davison 1996).

Issues around drug smuggling and addictions must be taken seriously when considering Mexican Mennonite lifeways and belief. Sensational media that portray entire communities as engulfed in criminal activity, however, tell an incomplete story. They do not, for example, account for efforts within conserving churches to engage youth in activities that build community while providing life skills. Nor do they mention that

while Old Colonists comprise a majority, the “modern Wild West” around Cuauhtémoc is populated by Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and CMM Mennonites. Whether this negative portrayal has been the result of misrepresentation, or a truthful account of how land shortages and misguided accountability can affect community life, is beyond the scope of this project. Still, depictions of Mennonite Mexico as a contested and complicated space are apt.

Efforts to balance portrayals of conserving Mennonite groups can be found in the work of Delbert Plett, David Quiring, and Kelly Hedges, who present alternative perspectives on Mexico’s Mennonite communities.

Plett and Quiring do not emphasize the detrimental aspects of public media coverage in their writings about Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico; instead, they address negative portrayals circulated among Mennonites themselves. Further, while neither author denies the social challenges faced by conserving community members, they emphasize that these challenges are multi-faceted and cannot be reduced to assumptions of internal dysfunction.

Quiring writes,

In the past decades, various Mennonite groups have waged what resembles an undeclared war against the Old colony Mennonite Church in Mexico. Although the rhetoric often resembles that of a war, fortunately both sides ascribe to pacifism and have restricted their tactics to non-violent methods of attack and defense. (2004, 83)

Citing MCC efforts and the willingness of Kleine Gemeinde and CMM churches to welcome shunned Old Colonists into their churches, Quiring contends that the ability of the Old Colony to discipline and thereby restore right relationship with community

members has been undermined, effectually stripping them of their ability to be the Old Colony church. Here, Quiring emphasizes that connections imagined by many Canadian Mennonites in their outreach to “brothers and sisters” in Mexico have not always been reciprocal.⁶³ Making reference to MCC’s involvement in a 1954 assistance initiative during a severe drought, Quiring writes, “the Mexican Mennonites did not appreciate what they viewed as interference. ‘MCC is DDT,’ was repeated in the colonies” (2004, 88). Citing the General Conference, the Kleine Gemeinde, and MCC as primary culprits in undermining the Old Colony value system, Quiring suggests that offerings of ‘help’ should be directed at those who have chosen to leave the community, rather than enticing church members away from it (2004, 94).

In his editor’s note for an anthology celebrating 125th anniversary of the Old Colony (Reinländer) church in Canada, Delbert Plett describes the experiences of Mexican Mennonites who return to Canada with similar discomfort:

I have been ... downheartened by the bigotry with which some Canadians have treated their new neighbours. Sad to say, this attitude seems particularly noticeable among fellow Mennonites who have converted themselves over to so-called Evangelical religious culture. (2001, 2)

Tensions between evangelical and Old Colony Mennonite groups are not only evident across international borders, but within Mexico as well. While an estimated 90% of Mexico’s Mennonite population remains connected to the Old Colony church of the 1920s migration, the remaining 10% is comprised of Kleine Gemeinde (7%) and

⁶³ William Janzen, in a 2004 article entitled “Welcoming the Returning ‘Kanadier’ Mennonites from Mexico,” describes the complexities involved with welcoming Latin American Mennonites who return to Canada, and the importance of understanding diverse points of view around social, economic, and religious issues in this process (11-24).

Conferencia (CMM)⁶⁴ (3%) churches – congregations that preach assurance of salvation, support evangelical missions, and welcome ex-communicated Old Colony Mennonites into their congregations.⁶⁵ Evangelistic efforts – frequently involving programs of music and personal testimonies – are thus directed, not only to Mexican rancho-dwellers, but to conserving Old Colony Mennonites as well. Perceptions that Old Colony Mennonites have been misled by their leaders are common, with alcohol abuse and depression among church members cited as evidence (J. Friesen 2004, 136-37; Redekop 1969a; H. Sawatzky 1971).⁶⁶

Some Old Colony Mennonites have embraced outreach efforts as gestures of support. For others, external interference is experienced as a threat to the sustenance of community discipline and health; Old Colony Mennonites are put on the defensive, expending great effort to protect church boundaries at the expense of internal efforts towards community vitality.

The work of Kelly Hedges challenges stereotypes of Mexico's Old Colony Mennonites using a different approach. Like Plett and Quiring, she does not ignore the

⁶⁴ *Conferencia* is a Spanish term meaning "conference." It is used colloquially among Mexican Mennonites to refer to CMM churches in the region, with some also applying the moniker to other evangelical church denominations like EMC (Evangelical Mennonite Conference) and EMMC (Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference).

⁶⁵ These statistics are based on conversations with Abram Siemens, a Mennonite radio producer and news publisher in northern Mexico. The Mexican *Kleine Gemeinde* is more conservative in dress and theology than the CMM. For conserving Mennonites, then, it often serves as a "first step" when leaving the Old Colony church in Mexico, much like the Chortitzer, Saskatchewan Bergthaler and Sommerfelder churches in the Canadian Prairies, described by one minister as options "in-between" Old Colony and evangelical-Mennonite churches in Canada (Guenther 2004, 151).

⁶⁶ In his recent book, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites*, John J. Friesen describes similar tensions between Mennonite Brethren and Reinländer Mennonites in Manitoba, beginning in the 1880s (2007, 32-33).

social challenges faced by conserving Mennonites in Mexico. Hedges' focus, however, remains with conserving communities themselves. She challenges critiques of Old Colony life that do not account for context and worldview, and presents an alternate lens through which to view Old Colony life and practice.

In her doctoral dissertation (1996), Hedges explores concepts of literacy – and challenges assignments of illiteracy – among Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico. Problematic, she suggests, are examinations of literacy in conserving Mennonite contexts that use an autonomous model for 'reading' language and language use. While music is not explicitly discussed in her work, Hedges' contention "that several ideologies of literacy **can** co-exist, that literacy **can** have a multiplicity of meanings because it is context-dependent, and that there **can** exist ideologies of language and literacy independent of the notion of a 'standard'" (1996, abstract, emphasis hers) holds significant implications for studies of so-called Mennonite music as well.

By suggesting that literacy and language are in constant negotiation, and that language ideology can be conceived as an interactional resource, Hedges unlocks an "ideological" understanding of literacy that looks beyond a literate/illiterate dichotomy (1996, Ch. 4). The implications of this theoretical model for music are significant, and bear much in common with Gilroy's (1993) critiques of essentialism and his problematizing of tradition versus modernity dualities. If music literacy is not defined merely as the ability to read and comprehend musical notation (be it Western notation or

the *Ziffern* of the *Choralbuch*),⁶⁷ we can begin to get at the functions that various music literacies play in the formulating of community.

I began my fieldwork with a strong, albeit vague, awareness of tensions existing between conserving (most often Old Colony) and evangelical Mennonites in Mexico. It was with these tensions in mind that my initial encounters with northern Mexico were forged. However, in conversations with CMM, Old Colony, and Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in the colonies, the clarity of the duality between conserving and other churches in Mexico was obscured. While some CMM Mennonites lamented a perceived spiritual lack among conserving relatives, others celebrated their Old Colony past and the rich lessons that evangelical churches could learn from their Old Colony neighbours about material and family priorities. Similarly, while some Old Colonists spoke of parental disapproval of music lessons and education beyond *Darpschool*, most expressed curiosity about SBS and enjoyment of joint musicking with friends at home, or with guests. Just as conceptions of a polarized home-church; domestic-public; family-community are not useful in examinations of musical experience in northern Mexico, neither is the use of an Evangelical-Old Colony split as the primary point of departure for my work. Over time, I have come to find myself writing *against* this polarization, more

⁶⁷ *Ziffern* (High German; “numbers” or “ciphers”) are part of a system of musical notation that uses numbers, rather than note heads, to indicate pitch. This method was used by Heinrich Franz in the *Choralbuch* (High German; “Chorale Book”), and utilized by many Mennonites in Russia and later, Canada. For further reading, see Berg (1985), Burkhart (1953), or Letkemann (1985).

than *from* it. I do not suggest that these tensions are moot, but rather that they better serve to inform my work than to serve as its basis.

2.3 Context and Methodology

Fieldnotes February 12, 2006

The “rules” that one often imagines in the Old Colony church service were challenged this morning. I saw a woman wearing a bracelet, another whose bow was undone on her dress, and watched a man enter the sanctuary with a small boy. The cowboy hats on the ceiling racks still outnumbered the baseball caps, but barely (approx. 50:30). Of course their size and vibrant white(ish)ness made them stand out regardless. The sun was magic pouring through windows once more, and I watched the friendly woman from last Sunday sitting with her mother in the front and felt glad. Her youthful spirit radiated from her as she sat (elbows on her knees) through the long sermon. After church (the final moments of which were a bit unnerving as I was seated on the bench that exits first and had to head the venture), I waited for Simon outside.

As we made our way down the road, two men offered us rides, and we accepted the second. Our kind driver (born and raised in Mexico but with family in Canada – Winkler even!) lives in the house with the mini-windmill and barn out front, and we offered to walk the rest of the way back to SBS.

We soon spotted Jack and Mary’s truck along the road. They stopped to tell us that they were heading to Burwohl (Burwalde) for (CMM) church and that we were all invited to David and Elena Peters’ for lunch. Lovely people. In we hopped. An instrumental ensemble accompanied the congregational singing at church: electric bass, four violins, one clarinet, two flutes, one recorder and three singers behind the pulpit microphone. What a contrast. What a morning.

My fieldwork crossed the lines of church affiliation, sometimes on a single day as this extract shows. The associated expressive practices – whether carefully-tied bows or instrumental ensembles – were equally part of our daily routine.

2.3.1 Methodology

Simon and I arrived in Steinreich (Nord Colony in the state of Chihuahua) in January of 2006. Concerned that my own Mennonite background, previous associations

with Mexican Mennonites in Canada, and familiarity with particular Mennonite lifeways would hamper efforts at relative objectivity in Mexico, I (perhaps not uniquely) determined to keep my eyes wide open upon arriving in Chihuahua. This involved a policy of ‘not saying no,’ be it to sharing *Faspa*,⁶⁸ to attending church programs, to playing viola at the wedding of an acquaintance’s brother, or to accepting rides home in the box of a pick-up truck while out for a walk. The meshing of formal and informal fieldwork methodology was successful on some occasions, and frustrating on others. Still, by accepting each invitation, I was able to more broadly contextualize subsequent experiences and encounters in the region. At the same time, I was able to improve my Low German language skills, to get a sense of routines and relationships between churches, villages, and individuals, and of course, to meet people and to hear their stories.

2.3.2 *Steinreich*

While in Mexico, I volunteered as a violin teacher at the Steinreich Bibelschule (SBS) – a Mennonite Bible school under the jurisdiction of CMM and with strong ties to Canada through its faculty and student body (Figure 2.11). SBS runs for three months each year: Epiphany to Easter. Entrance requirements are based on age, and not academic standing, meaning that a standardized level of literacy is not required and any student over the age of sixteen is welcome. This admissions policy, in conjunction with subsidized tuition fees, encourages an international student body with varying educational backgrounds and diverse expectations. For some, SBS serves as a safe

⁶⁸ *Faspa* (Low German) is the name given to a light meal, usually involving homemade buns, cheese, and preserves, and served mid-afternoon.

environment for learning to read; for others it provides training in evangelical Christian ministry; for still others, the “higher education” offered signifies a challenge to their conserving Mennonite upbringing. For many, the opportunity to sing in a mass choir at SBS is their first.⁶⁹



Figure 2.11. *Above*, SBS campus from field behind the school; *below left*, New residence for students on SBS campus; *below right*, SBS cafeteria, Steinreich, Nord Colony, Mexico.

⁶⁹ More details about SBS and its student population in 2006 are provided in Appendix 1.

Jack and Mary Siemens headed up the music program, with Simon and I acting as assistants. During the week, I taught 11 violin students, marked theory assignments, and assisted during mass choir rehearsals. In addition, Simon and I participated in SBS music ensembles, and accompanied congregational singing in *Morgan Andacht* (High German; “morning worship”). Thursdays were set aside for interviews and for visiting other schools, while Sundays allowed for participation in worship at various churches in the region. During the first weeks, this meant visiting Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, Gottesgemeinde, and CMM churches. Thereafter, Sundays were occupied with school events, as SBS ensembles brought programs to evangelical churches in Chihuahua State and the surrounding area.

At SBS, my dual role on campus was no secret. The student body, faculty, and staff were made aware of my work and invited to participate in the project by one of the institution’s teaching faculty, Harvey Plett, during the first week of classes. This gesture of support greatly eased my research at the school, as subsequent interview requests did not catch people off guard and connections with those interested in the project were facilitated early in the year. Also, some SBS routines lent themselves well to round table discussions about questions that I had for students at the school. One initiative aimed at encouraging discussion among the student body, for example, involved giving students a list of questions to be discussed at mealtimes. Questions were compiled by a faculty member and relayed at the start of lunch and supper on weekdays. Students compiled their written responses during the meal and submitted them to the faculty member in charge of that week. My participation in this procedure allowed me to ask varied and

open-ended questions of a large contingent of the student body without having to arrange for extensive time commitments from specific participants.⁷⁰

Interviews at SBS involved participants from wide-ranging backgrounds. Students from North, South, and Central America were represented, and while most were connected through affiliation with evangelical Mennonite churches, their backgrounds reflected prior ties to conserving denominations.⁷¹ In March (2006), I distributed a questionnaire to students at SBS, asking questions about past musical experiences at home and in church. Also included were questions about past and present church affiliations. Of the 48 questionnaires returned (16 Mexico; 17 Canada; 5 Belize; 4 USA; 2 Bolivia), a significant majority cited affiliation with CMM, EMC, and EMMC churches through baptism and attendance. Of these same participants, 9 identified parental association with Old Colony churches, 1 with Reinlander, 5 Kleine Gemeinde, and 26 with CMM, EMC, or EMMC congregations. These demographics changed significantly when students looked to past church affiliation among their parents. Here, 26 students cited Old Colony, 6 Sommerfelder, 3 Reinlander, 2 Kleine Gemeinde, and only 3 EMC or EMMC. Going back one generation further, 24 noted grandparents' church affiliation as Old Colony, 4 Sommerfelder, 3 Reinlander, 2 Kleine Gemeinde, and only 1 CMM, EMC, or EMMC.⁷² In addition to demonstrating the diversity of church affiliation among SBS students, this breakdown highlights the relative absence of Old Colony students on the SBS campus. While many had at one time belonged to a conserving church community,

⁷⁰ To read the questions that I asked of students, see Appendix 2.

⁷¹ A number of families from Kleine Gemeinde churches in Alberta with family ties in Mexico also attended SBS in 2006.

⁷² A sample questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

and while many remained affiliated through extended family ties, conversations and questionnaire responses suggested that most students were critical of the beliefs and lifeways that they associated with conserving Mennonite life.

I attended community, church, and school events whenever possible, and benefited greatly from the generosity of friends. Jack and Mary Siemens, in particular, hastened my introduction to colony churches and communities in valuable ways. They have established a wide network of friends and acquaintances during their years of work in Mexico, and were quick to include Simon and me when invited to various *Faspas* and functions. Also, because Jack and Mary enjoyed the interface of Spanish and Mennonite cultures in Mexico (and willingly made room for us in the back seat of their truck), trips to Cuauhtémoc, Chihuahua, and settlements outside the Nord Colony were common on weekends.

Over time, and through involvement in school programs, extracurricular activities, and community events, I established connections of my own. These connections became networks and facilitated an increased breadth to my research. While a spontaneous radio interview alerted colony members to my work mid-way through my stay in the region, contacts with off-campus participants were most often made through informal introductions at community events, chance encounters, church services, and cultural institutions. Short introductions in public places like the *Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita, A.C.* (Mennonite Museum and Cultural Centre), or at auction sales, restaurants, stores, or church programs, laid the groundwork for interviews. In addition

to these activities, I made intentional efforts to visit Old Colony evening classes, to tour the local radio station, and to interview its manager.

While most schools were open to outside observers, not all were comfortable with specific inquiries about music and singing, nor were all teachers comfortable with the presence of audio and/or visual recording equipment in their classrooms. For this reason, I did not request to document events during my initial visit to a school, but rather inquired about returning at a later date. This allowed teachers and administration to consider my request and to respond at their discretion.

While in Mexico, I engaged usual fieldwork techniques such as participant observation, performance ethnography, written correspondence, media and performance analysis, feedback interviewing, formal interviews, and informal dialogue. When appropriate and where permissions were granted, digital photo, audio and/or video recordings were made. Based on the experience of Kelly Hedges in 1996 – who did not take notes or make audio recordings during her interviews in the same region – I was sensitive to concerns about invasion of privacy during my fieldwork. Nevertheless, the recording of interviews is less contentious now than in 1996, and was useful in my research.

2.3.3 *Consent*

The process of acquiring permissions for the recording and use of interview materials was instructive on a number of levels. Because of diverse protocols for respectful interaction, consent was acquired verbally in some cases and through written consent in others (see Appendix 4a and 4b for written consent forms in English and High

German). Very few participants expressed concern regarding my use of interview materials. While I expected that Old Colony participants would be most hesitant regarding the use of their names, it was interviewees from Kleine Gemeinde and CMM who more often expressed hesitation.

Pseudonyms were seldom requested by participants in my research. For this reason, I have engaged pseudonyms in some, but not all, cases. In most instances this decision was made at the discretion of the participant. When I felt that use of real names could implicate community members not participating in the study or affect participants in unhelpful ways, however, I altered names at my own discretion.

Of the participants who opted against pseudonyms, many had clear reasons. Some felt that the value of historical ethnography was diminished without the use of names: "What is history without names?" Others assured me that they "had no secrets."

This openness, however, did not amount to the unequivocal use of interview material. Stipulations on how recorded materials were framed, or in what context they were to be used, were more often points of concern. After one interview, for example, I was told that I could do whatever I pleased with the material, provided that it not be broadcast on television the world over: "Bloos ... wenn das nicht auch über TV, in der Welt darum geht. Kannst du tun was immer du willst" (*Just ... when it is not also on TV, around in the world. [Then] you can do whatever you want*). When I requested clarification as to whether presentation in schools, universities, or at international conferences would then be inappropriate, I was assured that these contexts were well within the realm of propriety. It was international television that seemed to be the point

of contention. In other cases, stipulations were attached to *how* particular voices were framed. Several Old Colony participants who spoke openly, and assured me that I could engage materials from our conversations in my work, were careful to add, “so long as the glory goes to God.” By emphasizing that their efforts and insights should not be celebrated in and of themselves, these participants demonstrated the integral nature of conserving Mennonite community, belief, and expression around humility.

My informants encompass a broad range of church backgrounds and experience; still, their narratives speak to each other in ways that are meaningful to this study. While northern Mexico’s population is diverse, there are many points of intersection between and among churches and families. In total, I conducted 29 formal interviews, involving 46 participants, and representing CMM, EMMC, Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and Bergthaler (Canada) churches. While all had close ties to and in Mexico, informants came from Canada, USA, Mexico, Belize, and Bolivia.⁷³

My initial guide for determining whom I would interview was very simple: anyone interested in talking with me. Later, as themes and issues around musicking in northern Mexico surfaced and connections between people emerged, I attempted to hear from voices that might respond to questions raised, or extend discourse around musical experience in the region.

During interviews, focused questions were usually less fruitful than conversation. Still, certain questions were telling. When I asked, for example, about “hobbies” or favourite past-times, I was most often greeted with a slightly confused expression.

⁷³ See Appendix 5 for a list of project interviews.

Subsequent re-translations and re-phrasings of my question did not clarify matters, and suggest that indeed the concept of “free-time” and the emphasis on the individual that this line of questioning implies is not part of the frame of reference for many conserving Mennonites. While some women responded, after some thought, with “*be’sorjen*” (Low German; “to do the chores”), this only serves to confirm the emphasis on family and community above individual self-realization in this context (again, this does not contradict agency, but reconfigures its parameters).

2.3.4 *On (Reciprocity and) Being Surprised*

As Canadian Mennonites visiting small and close-knit communities, Simon and my presence did not go unnoticed. While being conspicuous is not always desirable in a fieldwork setting, it sometimes worked to my advantage in Mexico. For example, during one outing with Jack and Mary, Mary’s difficulty ordering rice at a restaurant caught the attention of a Mennonite couple at a nearby table. Assisting her with the Spanish pronunciation, they subsequently extended us an invitation to their home later that afternoon. With the directions, “We live in the house directly across the highway from the vegetable market where you shop for mangos,” Jack, Mary, Simon, and I were not only recipients of spontaneous hospitality, but were made aware of our conspicuous presence in the region.

Implicit in this spontaneous invitation is a notion of “time” that differs from that which I had brought with me from home. A common joke among SBS staff members referred to “Mexican time” – an excuse given for delays, missing mail, and other relatively minor inconveniences. While the satirization of life systems different from

one's own is perhaps common in cross-cultural interface, conceptions of time figured frequently in my experiences of Mennonite Mexico. Determined to utilize each moment to the fullest, I spent a significant portion of time attempting to schedule interviews and meetings weeks in advance. Frequently, however, these attempts were thwarted because my requests did not match the temporal frames of reference of those with whom I spoke. Were I to ask for an interview, it seemed that "this afternoon" would be a more appropriate timing request than "next Wednesday." After all, who knew what could happen in one week's time!

Once I recognized such spontaneous immediacy, I felt free to allow for chance meetings and conversations with people who initially seemed inaccessible. By changing my temporal frames of reference to a more immediate level, I was able to address my inquiries in more appropriate and convenient ways.

One of the most explicit examples of this occurred while visiting Abram (Bram) Siemens at radio 530. I requested an interview with him, and he readily accepted, suggesting that I arrive at the station at 5:30 on February 17, 2006. I agreed, and Simon and I arrived at the appointed time to be shown the facility. Here is the incident as recorded in my fieldnotes:

Fieldnotes February 18, 2006

On to yesterday's radio adventures. Bram was extremely open about his work at the station, and answered questions with an organized confidence that implied that my inquiries were not unique. ...One of the most "refreshing at the expense of my pride" aspects of the visit occurred at 6:00, just as Bram was about to go on the air. He turned to me and said, "The reason I asked you to come at 5:30 was so that we could do a radio interview. It's 6:00 now, so I will read about ten minutes of news – (looks at watch) well actually, seven – and then we'll do the interview." Seeing my eyes bug out of my head, he asked which of Simon and I

spoke better "Dietsch." We signaled "me," but, as Bram leaned into his microphone, I whispered feverishly, "But which 'Dietsch' (i.e. High, or Low German)?" "We'll get by," he responded and I moved from the doorway to the hall to ponder my fate.

"It's about time you were on the radio," Simon remarked bemusedly. And I thought to myself, 'I am not in Canada anymore.'

2.3.5 Kilometer 14

A second place of learning for me was located at Kilometer 14 (Figure 2.12). It was at this corner that I bumped into many generous people, as well as some of the biases at work in my own worldview.



Figure 2.12. Intersection at Kilometer 14, showing Strassburg Platz, Manitoba, Colony.

I would not have guessed, when we first drove past Strassburg Platz and Libreria Aleman at Kilometer 14, that it would become a favoured intersection of mine. It was at the Kilometer 14 *Altenheim* (High German; "Old Folks Home") that the Saturday night ritual of *Nüt Pei* (Low German; "nut pie") and *spat'sear-ing* (Low German; "to visit") occurred, and at Strassburg Platz that I made some of my most rewarding contacts.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ The practice of serving Saturday night dinners at the Kilometer 14 *Altenheim* was a popular fundraiser at the care home. Prepared and served by volunteers (most often female youth), a small menu of Mennonite and Mexican dishes was offered and served in

Strassburg Platz was home to perspective altering conversations about literacy, belief, the politics of education, and cheese pasteurization.

George (Jorge) Reimer, with the help of Helen Krahn, runs this print shop, post office (the only one between Cuauhtémoc and Rubio), and book store – a business which serves a broad demographic of Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and Conferencia Mennonites in the region. Printing picture books in High and Low German, and supplying reading curriculum materials to colony schools, Reimer's store is a hub for people from each of the region's three main Mennonite denominations: CMM, Kleine Gemeinde, and Old Colony. Also selling cards, cassette tapes, religious books, hymnals and school supplies, Strassburg Platz is not merely a busy shop where stickers are purchased and pencil boxes chosen, but a heterotopia where community news is exchanged, messages delivered, educational principles discussed, and curricula decisions made.

On account of myriad interactions with a diverse clientele, Reimer is knowledgeable about colony happenings, and engages this knowledge on a practical level. The "*Kurze Nachrichten*" (a bulletin of short news announcements), for example, is written, printed, and distributed on a weekly basis from Strassburg Platz. This news bulletin is not only available at the shop in Mexico, but is also emailed to Mennonite settlements "from Argentina to northern Alberta, Germany, etc.," used by various radio programs, and circulated in Canada where excerpts are sometimes printed in Mennonite

the cafeteria at a reasonable cost, with a table of assorted homemade pies available for dessert.

news publications like *Die Mennonitische Post*⁷⁵ (George Reimer, March 17, 2008, e-mail message to author).

Reimer's engaging curiosity was beneficial to my fieldwork. Interested in my research, and aware of my desire to get at context, as well as learning about the musical happenings in colony schools, homes, and churches, he was generous both with his knowledge about, and opinions on, the educational models used in the colonies. Because these conversations occurred while standing in the store's front thoroughfare, they also held a second significance. Not only was I introduced to Reimer's perspective on particular issues, but other community members – often Old Colony educators – were frequently drawn into these conversations. Prefacing an introduction with, "this Canadian plays the violin," or, "this girl thinks she wants to learn about Mennonite songs and she can't even speak Low German (*see kaun nijch Dietsch*)," Reimer would go on to ask my new acquaintance what he (they were always men) thought of my interest. Because of unspoken rules of propriety around male-female interaction in Mennonite Mexico, and because of the sometimes skeptical reception of so-called Mennonites from Canada who are unable to speak Low German well enough, these introductions were not incidental. While there was seldom verbosity in the responses obtained, the benefits of Reimer's critical introductions were three-fold: 1) I was introduced to potential

⁷⁵ *Die Mennonitische Post* is a German language newspaper that is published out of Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada. According to Robyn Sneath, the paper was started by a subcommittee of the Mennonite Central Committee Canada (MCCC), the Kanadier Mennonite Colonization Committee, in 1977. Sneath suggests that the paper "was an attempt to educate, encourage, and reconnect conservative Low-German Mennonites who were spread across two continents [Latin America and North America]" (2004, 206-7).

informants in a public context; 2) I could respond – *opp Dietsch* (in Low German)⁷⁶ – that while my Low German skills were shaky, they were not as bad as Reimer purported; 3) Because these introductions occurred in jest, initial contacts were comfortable – we were laughing. Despite the current of Canadian incompetence that prefaced these introductions, I was not forced to embrace this aura, but to defy it; the potential imposition of my presence in Mexico, in Strassburg Platz, was minimized through Reimer’s engagement. It was through encounters like these that many meaningful contacts were made.

2.3.6 Day-to-Day Routine and Music at SBS

Much of my research in northern Mexico extended beyond the boundaries of the Steinreich Bibelschule. Still, SBS activities on- and off-campus were formative. My participation in student life, music education, and music ensembles shaped my relationships with interviewees from within the student body, and were part of the larger contextual framework within which I conceived my work.

2.3.6.1 Steinreich Bibelschule (SBS)

At SBS, music is not only a large part of the educational curriculum; it is central to the school’s mandate for outreach. Living on the SBS campus, I was part of a daily routine that was structured around worship and music. While the campus environment constituted only one portion of my fieldwork experience, it is a unique context in Chihuahua’s Mennonite colonies and merits description.

⁷⁶ The direct translation of the Low German *Dietsch* is “German”; however, it is used colloquially to reference “Low German” among many Mennonites on the colonies.

As SBS students enter the classroom-turned-chapel⁷⁷ for *Morgan Andacht*, they are greeted with ten minutes of gospel songs, played by a mix of music faculty (myself included) and students on a combination of piano, acoustic guitar, violin/viola, banjo, and mandolin. Worship begins thereafter with a congregational song accompanied by the same acoustic ensemble. Unison, part-singing, and canons are all included in this repertoire. This is followed by a ten-minute sermon given by one of the school's faculty members or a visiting preacher.

Abend Andacht (High German; "evening worship") is also a daily event (Figure 2.13). Unlike *Morgan Andacht*, however, it is led primarily by students and occurs in the school cafeteria. Like the sharing of personal testimonies by students and occasional guests to the school, the music at *Abend Andacht* reflects an emphasis on personal spirituality and salvation. Praise and worship songs in English, German and Spanish – many introduced to the student body by students from Canadian evangelical Mennonite churches – are sung enthusiastically by students, who are accompanied by a student-led worship band.⁷⁸ Instruments at this event include electric bass, electric guitar, and drums, with acoustic instruments like the banjo, violin, and mandolin present less frequently.

⁷⁷ SBS does not have a chapel, per se. Instead, the largest of the school's classrooms is outfitted with chairs, and a piano is wheeled in each morning. Here, the student body meets for a twenty-minute worship period before classes begin.

⁷⁸ Jonathon Dueck, whose dissertation explores the musical practices of three Mennonite churches in western Canada, defines *praise and worship music* as "a generic term for popular Christian music (also specifically this music from the 1980s and early 1990s)," and *praise band* as "the popular-music instrumental ensemble which leads and accompanies singing in choruses, praise and worship and contemporary worship music, usually composed of singers, guitars, drums and keyboards" (2003, 263).

The acoustics resulting from the cafeteria's large size, bare floor, and solid walls contribute to making this an emotionally charged time of worship.



Figure 2.13. SBS students gather for *Abend Andacht* in school cafeteria, Nord Colony, Mexico.

Christian rock, in the form of CDs or cover tunes performed by students at SBS in informal contexts, is also prominent on campus. Some students also perform popular songs for which they have re-written the lyrics to incorporate evangelical Christian content. The SBS talent show was a setting where students demonstrated many of these innovations.

Participation in the mass choir at SBS is mandatory for all students, with exceptions made for parents with young children (Figure 2.14).⁷⁹ Meeting two mornings per week, repertoire choices are made by choir directors Jack and Mary Siemens who bring scores for German gospel songs (in four-part harmony) from Canada. Mary

⁷⁹ In such instances, one parent may opt out of the course in order to care for his or her children.

accompanies and leads from the piano, while Jack conducts the ensemble. Additional instruments (e.g. violin, acoustic guitar) are sometimes used to supplement piano accompaniment. Unaccompanied singing also occurs, but with an entirely different aesthetic than the unaccompanied *Wies* described earlier. A former choir director in Manitoba, and an active participant in choral activities in the province, Mary Siemens brings an emphasis on clear vocal tone, crisp textual enunciation, and rhythmic accuracy to choir rehearsals, while Jack encourages singers to emphasize dynamic contrasts. With these values in mind, canons and four-part harmonies are common.

Despite an awareness of their German constituency in Mexico, efforts to maintain an emphasis on German songs and texts are challenging for Jack and Mary. While German gospel songs comprise a significant part of choir repertoire, decisions are also influenced by the popularity of English among students from Canada, Belize, and Mexico. Attempting to balance student enthusiasm with school mandate, both German and English songs are performed. Spanish is less frequently included, not because of disinterest on the part of choir directors, but rather a lesser familiarity with Spanish diction and lesser access to Spanish repertoire.



Figure 2.14. SBS mass choir rehearses for a program to be given at CMM church in Manitoba Colony, Mexico.

The *Männer-* and *Frauen- Gruppen* (High German; “men’s” and “women’s groups”) at SBS are smaller music ensembles.⁸⁰ These groups – also meeting two times per week – are led by Mary Siemens and engage four- to eight-part vocal repertoire. Jack and Mary arrange extra-curricular performances with these singers.

In addition to the ensemble performances heard around campus, are solo musicians practicing in preparation for individual music lessons. When Jack and Mary Siemens began working at SBS in 1999, school enrollment was below 50, making it possible for Mary to offer piano and vocal coaching to the school’s students, with recorder taught as part of the music theory course. Because of the drastic increase in attendance at SBS (2006 saw over 200 students), voice lessons have not been offered

⁸⁰ The exact number of singers in these ensembles depends on the availability of experienced singers, and therefore varies from year to year. The *Männergruppe* has usually consisted of eight singers, however, and the *Frauengruppe* anywhere between six and ten.

each year, despite overwhelming interest from the student body. In 2006, there were 32 piano, 11 violin, and 30 guitar students receiving instruction at SBS. These students received weekly instruction and shared three practice rooms. At the end of the three-month school term, a recital – involving all students taking music theory or private lessons at SBS – was held (Figure 2.15).



Figure 2.15. SBS *Musik Recital* (Music Recital), Nord Colony, Mexico. Mary Siemens (at piano) prepares to perform with recorder ensemble, comprised of students from SBS theory class.

2.3.7 *Social Musicking Beyond SBS*

Leaving the campus of SBS, different musical spaces and aesthetics emerge. Visiting schools, churches, homes, and evening classes for youth, the importance of *lange* and *korte Wies* in the lives of many Mexican Mennonites become audible. In this section, I offer a brief overview of some alternate songscapes.

While post-secondary education is not the norm for Chihuahua's Old Colony youth, evening *Singstunden* (High German; "singing hours") are held in a number of villages. Involving youth who have completed *Darpschool*, these gatherings function as

occasions for social and educational interaction. *Singstunden* are led by adults with an interest in engaging Old Colony young people and are held one evening per week, usually Tuesday. Other activities in an evening *Singstunde* include the recitation of portions of the catechism, Bible study, and the learning of Spanish vocabulary. While challenges from some Old Colony leaders have resulted in the intermittent offering of these classes in recent years, the three groups that I attended welcomed guests inside their doors.

Not surprisingly, home music was less accessible than public performance in my fieldwork. Whereas some acquaintances and informants became interested in my project such that they extended invitations to their homes for the express purpose of making music together, this was not always the case. One Old Colony singing group in particular – a circle that met on a weekly basis to sing hymns from the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* – was hesitant to allow an outsider into their midst for the sole purpose of listening. While this hesitancy is perhaps not surprising in an Old Colony village, it remains provocative: I never actually met any of this group's members, but was rather introduced to their singing through cassettes that I purchased at Strassburg Platz. My inquiries into their gatherings were always mediated through a third party and never amounted to a personal connection. Conclusions cannot be drawn on the basis of one incident. It would seem, however, that for these singers, the significance of their song was not only tied to musical outcomes, but was strongly connected to the social setting in which it occurred. The cassette recordings of their singing, available for purchase, were not contentious, but deemed a contribution to the community. They were a means of sharing and learning

repertoire. The space in which the group's singing occurred, however, remained distinct and was separate from public access. While some other home and family singing circles welcomed my presence, this group did not.

The *Centro de Rabilitacion, Luz en mi Camino* (Centre for Rehabilitation, Light on my Way) was another context of musical interaction in the colonies. Commonly referred to as the *Zentrum* (High German; "centre"), the 60-bed facility was established in the Manitoba Colony in 2004 to serve Low German-speaking men who struggle with alcohol and drug addictions (Terichow 2007b).⁸¹ Clients remain at the centre for a three-month period, during which time medical assessments, individual and family counselling, Bible studies, and group instruction are made available to them (Terichow 2007a). In addition to structured daily activities at the centre, outside groups (especially church and family) bring evening programs of music and testimony to the residents. A time of collective singing usually follows these guest performances, with songs chosen from the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, *Evangeliums-Liederbuch*, or a collection of German praise songs compiled in a folder for use at the *Zentrum*. While the site is secure and located some distance from the highway, members of the public are welcome to attend these programs, and often do.⁸²

⁸¹ While the use of Low German at the centre implies that most of its residents are Mexican Mennonites, Cornelius Schmitt (program director in 2007) notes that over fifteen percent of the centre's participants have come from Low German speaking communities outside of Mexico (i.e. Canada and the United States) (Terichow 2007a).

⁸² On the two occasions in which I participated in evening programs in 2006, there were at least 15 people from outside the *Zentrum* in attendance. Many of these were SBS students. This may demonstrate more about student interest in the program than about attendance trends in the broader community. Still, the openness demonstrated by *Zentrum* organizers (i.e. chairs set up for guests in advance) implied that such visits were

Other events, like music programs in barns or warehouses, occurred with less frequency, but nevertheless point to the social significance of musicking as a site of social interaction and negotiation in the colonies.

2.4 Insiderness and Outsiderness in Mexico

My own background as a Canadian Mennonite whose foreparents arrived in Canada in the 1870s did not place me with obvious church affiliations in Mexico; my experience of “Mennonite-ness” in Canada was not conserving in the way that Old Colony churches are, but neither was it evangelical. While my maternal grandparents were raised in Manitoba’s Old Colony Mennonite church and my paternal grandparents were Sommerfelder Mennonites, I grew up as part of southern Manitoba’s Bergthaler Mennonite church, a denomination whose movement towards “progressive” models of education led to division as early as the 1890s (Friesen and Dyck 1990). I later attended the Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) in Winnipeg, MB, where peace studies, social justice, and the importance of community were central elements of my education.

In my church experiences in Canada, families sat together during worship, part-singing and instrumental accompaniment were part of congregational song, and I frequently sang hymns or played my violin (and in later years, my viola) as part of the service. Connections between Mennonite belief and lifeways extended to my home experience; however, nonconformity was not emphasized. For example, “Mennonite foods” like *Rollküake en Ra’büs* (Low German; “fritters and watermelon”) existed

not unusual.

alongside pizza and chocolate chip cookies in our kitchen, my parents spoke Low German to each other when my siblings and I were not to understand, and I attended public school, where my parents were also teachers. The Bergthaler church of my small-town childhood emphasized community, but we were not visibly “different” from non-Mennonites around us.

Because my understanding of “Mennonite music” has been shaped by my work in Paraguayan Mennonite colonies, by fieldwork in Manitoba, and through personal experience as a Canadian Mennonite from the prairies, I was faced with my own assumptions of familiarity with Mennonite beliefs and lifeways, and likewise, my biases, upon arrival in Mexico. Family connections to Old Colony and other Mennonite churches in Manitoba have provided me a particular breadth of context: an awareness of diversity within and among Mennonite denominations, and familiarity with many customs and foodways that are significant aspects of hospitality and domestic Mennonite life. At the same time, however, this knowledge is not infallible. With Koskoff, I am encouraged to “reconsider the interactive, dialogic nature of fieldwork and to adequately position ourselves [myself] within the cultures we [I] study” (2001, xiv).

An anecdote from an early visit to the *Altenheim* at Kilometer 14 demonstrates the complication of being an “outsider within.”⁸³

⁸³ Diane Zimmerman Umble borrows this expression from Patricia Hill Collins to describe her own experiences as a Mennonite academic and fieldworker doing ethnography among Old Order Mennonite and Amish communities (2002).

2.4.1 *Familiarity and Musical Surprise at the Altenheim*

Whereas I grew up understanding the violin (I was 18 before switching to the viola) to be an instrument loved by my Mennonite grandparents and welcomed in the common rooms of old folks homes throughout southern Manitoba, this was, and remains, an extremely context-specific perspective. My grandfather – whose father was the Old Colony bishop in Manitoba⁸⁴ – spoke of instruments and radios being frowned upon in Old Colony belief, but it took an evening of *Nüdelsup* (Low German; “noodle soup”), *Nät Pei*, and *spat’sear-ing* at the Kilometer 14 *Altenheim* for me to recognize my narrow vantage point.

Walking through the hallways and greeting some of the home’s residents, I was taken back to selected afternoons of my early childhood in Altona, Manitoba, when I would sing and play hymns at the Personal Care Home, usually with another friend my age. We would greet residents of the home afterwards, and be rewarded by our mothers with a quarter, to be spent at our discretion at the Hi-Way Inn convenience store immediately following. Having these nostalgic memories awakened while walking through this *Altenheim* in Chihuahua, I imagined the pleasantness of returning with my viola the following week in order to enjoy some *Evangeliums-Lieder* together with the residents. I mentioned the idea to Mary and asked whether it would be appropriate. She suggested that I talk to the director in order to ascertain whether or not instruments were welcome.

⁸⁴ Manitoba’s Old Colony church lost its entire leadership as a result of the 1922-1925 migration to Mexico. It was only in 1936 that the church in Manitoba was re-organized, with my great-grandfather Jacob Froese the first to be ordained as minister (A. Rempel 2001, 246-47).

It was then that I was struck by the blatantly obvious. Not everybody *wanted* to hear a viola being played. The prohibition of instruments among Old Colony Mennonites was not merely an interesting historic detail, but a lived practice grounded in belief. While many members of the Old Colony church in Chihuahua have introduced instruments into their homes in recent years, and many of the *Altenheim*'s Old Colony residents would perhaps welcome an afternoon of "*Musik*," this was not an innovation I was justified to introduce. In fact, a thoughtless decision to bring *Musik* to the halls of the *Altenheim* would have signified much more, both about me, and for the residents. For me, it would have demonstrated an ignorance of Old Colony practice, or else a blatant disregard for it. For *Altenheim* residents, my imposition would likely have been welcomed by some, and problematic for others. Particular responses aside, the importance of tempering personal assumptions about Mennonite musical practice became clear in this exchange.

2.4.2 Questions and Complications

In the course of my fieldwork, it became evident that socio-political factors of age, gender, genealogy, and church affiliation are of no small significance when navigating one's role as fieldworker and community participant among Mennonites in northern Mexico. Balancing many, and sometimes conflicting roles, I discovered that it was in the relinquishing of control that engaged participation in fieldwork was enabled; though the complexities of *doing* ethnography may be anticipated, they are not predictable.

Questions emerged: What does participant-observation involve when ideas of what participation entails diverge? To what extent does prior personal experience assist – or hinder – understandings of repertoire use and reception? And how does a fieldworker explain that she values unison unaccompanied singing while carrying a violin and book of musical notes?

As previously described, work at SBS enabled a quick integration into a community of Mexican Mennonites, both at the school and among the CMM church communities that supported it. Be it through invitations to shared meals, interest in school programs at Steinreich, or a willingness to engage questions that I had about music in daily life, I was welcomed. In addition to these points of connection, I participated in church programs, had my picture in the *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*,⁸⁵ and did a live-to-air radio interview allowing me to “see and be seen” (or at least, “hear and be heard”) early in my stay.

These benefits were not without complication, however, as beliefs around music and education are contested among and within Mexican Mennonite churches. Affiliation with one group can affect reception in another. In reflecting on methodological conundrums of “shadows in the field” (Barz and Cooley 1997), (in this case the tensions between Mennonite groups that pre-dated my arrival), and the multiple and sometimes conflicting personae that I adopted while living in northern Mexico, Marcus’s notions of multi-sited ethnography and the “ethnographer as circumstantial activist” become useful

⁸⁵ The *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau* is a bi-monthly German language news bulletin, published by Casa Siemens in Campo 2A, and distributed throughout the Mennonite colonies in northern Mexico. The bulletin also has an internet presence at <http://www.rundschau.com.mx>.

(Marcus 1998, 98). Examining a single site through multiple lenses is not the only means of conducting research; multi-sited ethnography – recognizing shifting personal roles and changing ethnographic landscapes – accounts for a heightened self-awareness while in the field. As Michelle Kisliuk has written,

In any role or profession, in order to act upon the world we need to continually re-express our identities; we get to know other people by making *ourselves* known to *them*, and through them to know ourselves again, in a continuous cycle. In field research this task is broken down to its basics, and magnified, and the micro and macro politics of social life are revealed. (1997, 27 italics hers)

In my own fieldwork, these “continuous cycles” were implicitly connected to the places in which interactions occurred. Whereas Marcus describes multi-sited research as “designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations in which the ethnographer establishes some form of literal, physical presence, with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites” (1998, 90), the “multiple sites” of my ethnography were more literal, and involved the balancing of interactions between multiple, diverse, and yet connected Mennonite church denominations. The logic of these connections was not established by me, but was rather part of the context into which I stepped.

2.4.3 A Circumstantial Activist

Attempting to balance myriad personae – as fieldworker, violin teacher, descendent of Mennonites who chose to remain in Canada in 1922, and 29-year-old-Mennonite-wife-who-had-not-yet-birther-first-child – the process of deciphering my place(s) among these diasporic Mennonite groups was complex. On one hand, my role as an instructor at the Bibelschule afforded a meeting ground for engaging with, and being

engaged by, a generous and welcoming group of CMM Mennonites in northern Mexico. On the other hand, my association with an evangelical educational institution in a region where evangelism and “higher learning” are points of contention among Mennonite groups was an issue of personal concern. I became a *circumstantial activist*.

Describing this concept in relation to multi-sited ethnography and contradictory personal commitments, George Marcus writes,

This is not (necessarily) the traditional self-defined activist role claimed by the left-liberal scholar for his or her work. That is, it is not the activism claimed in relation to affiliation with a particular social movement outside academia or the domain of research, nor is it the academic claim to an imagined vanguard role for a particular style of writing or scholarship with reference to a posited ongoing politics in a society or culture at a specific historic moment. Rather, it is activism quite specific and circumstantial to the conditions of doing multi-sited research itself. ...

... In conducting multi-sited research, one finds oneself with all sorts of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments. ...

... In certain sites, one seems to be working with, and in others one seems to be working against, changing sets of subjects. This condition of shifting personal positions in relation to one's subjects and other active discourses in a field that overlap with one's own generates a definite sense of doing more than just ethnography, and it is this quality that provides a sense of being an activist for and against positioning in even the most self-perceived apolitical fieldworker. (1998, 98-99)

My work in the Nord Colony gifted me with several identities to perform. As a Mennonite from southern Manitoba I was potential *Frintschoft* (Low German; “family relation”). As a violin teacher and academic fieldworker, however, I was conspicuous. Teasing about my novice Low German skills and related interest in Mexican Mennonite music and song – despite my university training and ability to read notes – became a non-threatening entry-point for dialogue. While some found my interest un-nerving, I was more often met with curiosity than distrust.

My musical training and familiarity with hymn repertoire was a mixed blessing in this context. Availing me invitations to participate in numerous music programs among CMM churches and in various homes, my ability to “read the notes” created an imbalance of power in some instances. Despite my position as a guest among Old Colony singers who learn melodies by rote and sing unaccompanied, I was deemed a musical authority, capable of determining the extent to which singers had deviated from the “correct” performance of a song or hymn. As a cautious fieldworker with a sense of responsibility for power imbalances relating to musical literacy, I was uncomfortable. I was hesitant to impose or offend, conscious of my university education, and eager to champion unaccompanied singing – not as a survival from the past, but a valuable community practice.

Finally, I was an ethnographer-frequently-surprised. Responses to my work were shaped by welcome and curiosity from conserving and CMM Mennonites alike. Anxieties that my role as an instrumentalist would suggest pride and vanity were consistently thwarted (or at least masked) by invitations to participate in musical events in homes and churches. While I anticipated uncertainty towards my use of recording equipment during fieldwork, one family actually asked for make and model numbers in order to acquire a minidisc recorder and microphone during their next trip to El Paso.

Unfortunately, not all of the anecdotes depicting the complexity of fieldwork in Mexico were amusing life lessons. In some instances, where people regarded recording technology as invasive, my ethics were suspect. Further, my concerns with what happens

when an entry-point is predicated on friendly incompetence were dwarfed when language barriers led to significant misunderstanding.

2.4.3.1 *A Story:*

Because my research assistant (and husband), Simon Neufeld, does not speak German fluently, I frequently translated during programs we attended by making notes in a little black book. A few months into our time in Mexico, however, I was informed of a rumour: we had sat together during an Old Colony church service (where women and men enter through separate doors, and sit on separate sides of the sanctuary), and snickered as we wrote notes to one another about the service. Having never sat together, nor opened anything but a *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* at an Old Colony service of worship, I found this a difficult story to hear. It heightened my awareness that points of entry are not only affected by actions, but by observations and extrapolations made by people whom one may never meet. My research was not only shaped by multiple and shifting sites, but by misunderstandings and transitive associations as well.

Throughout our time in northern Mexico, it was evident that to engage in research was not only about observing community practice, but also about being observed. My desire to engage in a reciprocal fieldwork experience was possible, but required that I give up the notion that I would dictate the parameters of this reciprocity. While my role as a violin teacher and music program assistant at SBS engaged its share of challenge and surprise, it was my initiative that had placed me there. The relationships built in this context were invaluable, however, it was often unexpected requests like a performance or an impromptu radio interview that enabled an exchange that built mutual trust, mutual

awareness, and a wealthy store of anecdotal fodder for subsequent encounters with interviewees, story-tellers, and friends in the area. The contexts of these exchanges were not always familiar nor particularly comfortable, but they were invaluable lessons in reciprocity and exchange.

2.5 Conclusions

When I arrived in Mexico in January of 2006, I did not have a composite of questions and hypotheses about private and public musicking, nor had I determined a precise angle from which I sought to examine the relationships forged and strained in their engagement, enactment, and performance. In fact, I arrived in quite the opposite frame of mind. Cognizant of potential biases on my part due to previous experiences with Mennonite colonies and communities in Paraguay and Canada, I wished for the parameters of my study to be determined by conversation and experience in northern Mexico itself. While preparations involved research into historical and cultural studies of the 1920s Mennonite migration to Mexico and subsequent developments in the Mexican colonies, the framework for this dissertation grew out of encounters, performances, conversations, and observations in Mexico.

Upon my return to Manitoba, and during the subsequent months of indexing, transcribing, and otherwise engaging fieldwork material, I was sometimes overwhelmed, and questioned my implementation of methodological informality while in the field. Over time, however, concrete benefits emerged. Re-visiting fieldnotes and interviews, I began not only to identify recurrent themes and issues, but to see that these themes were

differently nuanced based on context and engagement. The ordering of the chapters of this dissertation and the layering of increasingly complex engagements with issues of musical defiance/practice and intra/inter-denominational tensions in northern Mexico's Mennonite colonies is meant to reflect this ongoing process of inquiry and epiphany. At the same time, this approach marks the story as unfinished. The processes of music making, church building, and gospel sharing are historically rooted, but they are not static.

Chapter 3

Lange Wies as a Window into Old Colony Belief

3.1 Introduction

Langen Melodien, *lange Weise(n)*, *alte Weise* and the Low German *lange Wies* or *oole Wies* are all terms used to describe the heterophonic, unaccompanied “long” or “old melodies” sung by Mexico’s Old Colony Mennonites in Sunday morning worship.⁸⁶ As described in Chapter 2, singing in Old Colony churches is led by anywhere between four and eight male *Vorsänger*, who enter the sanctuary from a small anteroom adjacent to the front of the church at the start of the service. From here, they file onto a raised platform next to the pulpit, and face the congregation. After hanging their hats on the pegged beam suspended from the ceiling, the men are seated.

Regardless of the number of *Vorsänger* present in a given service, hymns are led by one song leader at a time. After calling out the hymn number from the *Gesangbuch*, the *Vorsänger* begins to sing, and is joined a few syllables later by the congregation. At

⁸⁶ In his 1952 thesis, Charles Burkhart refers to the long melodies as “*alte Weise*” (“old melodies”). Writing about Old Colony church practice in Alberta, Wesley Berg refers to the Low German *oole Wies*, which he translates as the “old melodies,” or the “old way” (1996, 79). In his more recent consideration of the *oole Wies* in relation to the human body and its role in music making, Berg has gone on to suggest that “melodic repertoire and singing style do not capture the entire meaning of the *oole Wies*” (Wesley Berg, April 15, 2008, e-mail message to author). In keeping with the terminology I encountered most often in Mexico, I will refer to the *langen Melodien* as “*lange Wies*” (plural *lange Wiese*) in this dissertation. Like Berg’s use of *oole Wies*, I use *lange Wies* to reference both a singing style, or “way” of singing, and the particular “melodies” that comprise its repertoire, keeping in mind that the term is not bound by these attributes.

the end of each melodic phrase, the congregation pauses and the *Vorsänger* carries the melody alone, leading into the subsequent line of text. *Lange Wies* tunes are highly melismatic (a single syllable may utilize up to ten pitches), and tempi are determined more by breathing than metrical pulse.

In his exploration of hymnody and its relation to religious experience, Stephen A. Marini suggests that hymnody may be considered “a medium of religious culture – a complex of acts and psychological effects, texts and vocal techniques, group behavior and ritual gestures – that expresses for worshippers the universe of sacred meaning” (2006, 134). He goes on to assert the “protean ability of hymnody to express virtually everything about a religious tradition” (2006, 134). While I am hesitant to assign total and inclusive meaning to hymnodic practice among Old Colony Mennonites, Marini’s work provides an interesting starting point for examining the *lange Wies*, a starting point from which the significance of the form in expressing Old Colony understandings of community extends beyond its sonic character.

In order to set up the case studies that follow in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, this chapter describes various aspects of the melodies and associated singing style of *lange Wies*. It begins with a brief history of its development and use among Mennonites, and goes on to explore repertoire, performance style, vocal production, and related social interaction among singers.

3.2 Tracing Origins

A definitive history of the orally-transmitted *lange Wies* is not taught in schools, nor are the origins of the form debated at length among Old Colonists in Mexico. The singing of the melodies, however, remains a central element of childhood education and church worship. The history of the *lange Wies* – its roots and the continuity it represents – demonstrates the importance of the melodies in relation to church life and community adherence to the *oole Ordnunk*.

The Old Colony hymnal, *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, contains over 700 hymn texts; however, the 160+ long melodies (*lange Wiese*) to which these hymns are sung are orally transmitted. This complicates a search for specific points of origin. Still, scholars of Old Colony song and singers themselves have put forth various postulations regarding the melodic foundations of the *Wies*. Most scholars agree that they were adopted by Mennonite Anabaptists in Prussia and Northern Germany in the 18th century, and have been retained through a process of oral transmission (Berg 1996; Burkhart 1952b; Martens 1972).

Offering a slightly different perspective regarding “*Warum die Altkolonier Mennoniten die langen Melodien singen*” (“Why Old Colony Mennonites sing the Long Melodies”) is George Rempel, whose explanation has been transcribed here by Lisa Wolf:⁸⁷

⁸⁷ George Rempel is locally recognized as knowledgeable about the history of Old Colony Mennonites. He is known particularly for the Low German radio program that he produced on the history of Low German Mennonites, “*Onse Jeschicht*” (Low German; “Our Story”). As noted in Chapter 4, Lisa Wolf works as an interpreter at the *Museo y*

Früher als die Mennoniten in 16ten Jahrhundert aus der katholischen Kirche gingen, wurde sogar in ihren (katholischen) Kirchen die lange Weise gesungen. Die Mennoniten haben manche der Lieder (der katholischen Kirche) und auch die Melodien beibehalten die früher benutzt wurden. Als sie dann rausgingen (von den Katholiken) waren die Melodien hier und da schon etwas kürzer. ... Solange die Mennoniten in Preussen lebten, sangen alle die langen Melodien, und erst später in Russland begann man mit den Zahlenweisen. (2006 unpublished document)

Earlier, when the Mennonites left the Catholic Church in the 16th Century, the long melodies were even sung in their (Catholic) churches. The Mennonites retained many of the songs (from the Catholic Church) and also melodies that were used earlier. When they then left (the Catholic Church), in some places the melodies were already somewhat shorter. ... As long as the Mennonites lived in Prussia, they sang the long melodies. It was only later in Russia that they began to use the number (cipher) melodies.

In conversations with singers, I did not encounter a decisive oral history for the origins of the *lange Wies* in Mexico. However, connections to the early church and to later developments in Prussia and Russia were reinforced in some cases. Franz Dyck suggested connections to Catholic song repertoires and practice, while Abram Wolf had a vague notion of the melodies having come from Prussia and Russia:

Na die sind schon in Russland, oder vielleicht, vielleicht auch schon in Preussen gesungen worden. [Pause]. Wo werden sie dieses mal eingeübt hat, oder wie –. (A. Wolf 2006)

Well, they were already sung in Russia, or maybe, maybe also in Prussia. [Pause]. [But] Where they were learned, or how –.

For some, the melodies bear explicit connection to Anabaptist persecution in the 16th century. Peter Heide was taught that during the Protestant Reformation, Mennonites would form a circle and sing the *lange Wies*; as long as they were singing, their enemies could not hurt them (April 8, 2006, conversation with author). While not linked to

Centro Cultural Menonita, A.C. near Cuauhtémoc, Mexico.

particular church or worship practice, Peter's story affords power to the song form.

Another informant describes the slow tempi of the *lange Wies* as a means of encoding controversial song texts: "I heard somewhere that *lange Wies* was used during persecution so the persecutors could not understand what they were saying"

(Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire). What is striking about this reference is that it parallels and contradicts a criticism frequently leveled against *lange Wies* singing by Mennonites who are no longer part of the Old Colony church: the masking of textual meaning for those who sing it. A performative tool that some believe once functioned to dissuade Anabaptist persecutors from comprehending the texts of the *lange Wies* is now argued to disguise meaning from the singers themselves.

Music theorist Charles Burkhart, whose master's thesis dealt with the singing of *lange Wies* among Old Colonists near Cuauhtémoc, Mexico, made transcriptions of twelve long melodies that he compiled while in Chihuahua in 1950 and 1951. When comparing these transcriptions with Protestant chorale tunes, he found significant correlations.⁸⁸ Citing that melismatic embellishments make the "original" tunes almost unrecognizable, Burkhart observes that by extracting the *Urton*, or "predominating tone" (1952b, 32), of each texted syllable in the *lange Wies* (Figure 3.1), the chorales used by Protestant churches (and included in Franz's *Choralbuch* in the 19th century), emerge:

An original chorale tune ... can be extracted by a careful analysis of the written notes. The method of extracting the original tune, that is, of eliminating all the embellishments that the Old Colonists have added is simply to select the first of

⁸⁸ A full examination of Burkhart's findings can be found in his 1952 master's thesis, titled: "The Music of the Old Order Amish and the Old Colony Mennonites: A Contemporary Monodic Practice."

every group of notes that is sung to each syllable of the text. These first notes, place one after the other, will then be found to form a fairly accurate version of a now easily recognized chorale. This extracted melody is then compared with the corresponding version in the Old Colony *Gesangbuch*. In case the melody extracted from the Old Colony version and the notated version in the *Choralbuch* fail to agree in a few places, the missing note can usually be found among the more prominent (longer) notes within the corresponding group of notes in the Old Colony version. Lack of agreement here and there can be attributed to unconscious errors that are bound to creep in when the Old Colony version is repeatedly sung by memory for so many years after the original chorale melody has been forgotten. (2003, 127)

Helen Martens concurs with a hypothesis of connection, suggesting that the hymn tunes referenced in the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* were common 18th-century hymns in Northern Germany's protestant churches (1972, 362).

82

GS 239
CH 141
(1F)

5. Jesus, meine Freude

Je- sus, mein- e Freud- e!
Ach! wie lang, ach lang- e!

mein- es Herz- es Weid- e! Je- us,
ist dem Herz- en bang- e! and ver-

mein- e nach Zier! dir! Gott- es Lamm, mein

Bräut- 1- 2m, aus- ser dir soll mir

auf Erd- en nichts sonst Lieb- er's werd- en

The upper staff of this example gives a transcription made by the writer at a live performance of the hymn in an Old Colony Mennonite home in Chihuahua, Mexico. The singers were the family of Isaac Fehr of the village of Eichental. The notation is not metrical. The small notes in brackets are the mediantes sung by the *Vorsänger* alone. The lower staff gives the original chorale melody, that is, the melody as it was before the Old Colonists added all their ornaments. Careful comparison of the two will show an unmistakable kinship. The original version is No. 141 in the *Franz Choralbuch*. The text is No. 239 in the *Old Colony Gesangbuch*.

Figure 3.1. Burkhardt transcription of *lange Wies* hymn, “Jesu, meine Freude” (*Geistreiches Gesangbuch* #239) with corresponding Chorale melody (#141).⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Burkhardt’s transcription has been reprinted in articles by Helen Martens (1972) and Wesley Berg (1996). Berg compares Burkhardt’s transcription not only with the *Choralbuch*, but with other *Ziffern* notations from Alberta and Mexico (1996).

In my own transcriptions, the same correlations have not been found, although some *korte Wiese* are consistent with the chorale tunes notated by Franz.⁹⁰ Figure 3.2 below, for example, shows my transcription of *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* #525, as sung by a group of youth in Campo 11.⁹¹ In order to demonstrate stylistic differences between *lange* and *korte Wies*, the group sang the first verse with *lange Wies*, and the second and third with *korte*. The *Gesangbuch* lists #57 (“O dass ich tausend”) as the corresponding melody, but as my transcription demonstrates, neither version corresponds with the *Choralbuch* melody.⁹²

⁹⁰ Like *lange Wies*, *korte Wies* is a designation that can refer to both a song style and a specific body of melodies. While the *lange Wiese* are used in Old Colony worship services, texts from the hymnal are also affiliated with short melodies. In the schools I visited, *korte Wiese* were learned alongside *lange Wiese*. While some Mennonites use the term to reference any syllabic (i.e. non-melismatic) unaccompanied song, other uses imply a direct correlation to *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* repertoire.

⁹¹ This hymn was recorded at the *Singstunde* led by Franz and Tina Dyck on March 14, 2006.

⁹² For an image of Franz’s *Ziffern* notation for this hymn, see Figure 3.12.

Mel # 57 Chorabuch / Lange Wies Korte Wies

Oh Gott von dem wir Al les ha ben ne
 Die Welt ist ein sehr gro ß es Haus
 Du A ver Welt ist den e Gei ß en ne
 Neue sa gen fa ß er ein aus an
 Gei ß sa gen macht uns Al les gei ß er
 ach! e wer selb ster ist der ewi ge

Figure 3.2. Transcription of *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* #525 (Melody #57) as sung by Old Colony youth in Campo 11, March 14, 2006. *Lange* (LW) and *korte Wies* (KW) compared with corresponding Chorale melody (#57) transcribed from Franz *Choralbuch* (CB).⁹³

⁹³ In this transcription, the *Choralbuch* melody has been transposed from G major to C major, for ease comparison with the *lange Wies* version, sung in C major. Also, the text underlay is the first verse of *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* #525. While neither the

Exploring possible reasons for the melodic embellishments of the *lange Wies*, Burkhart credits Old Colony Mennonites: "I have no doubt that old, Protestant chorale tunes form the basis of this unusual music, but only the basis. To these chorale tunes the Old Colony Mennonites have added a great many embellishments of their own" (1952a, 21). Cornelius Krahn, however, disagrees. In an "Editor's Note" to Burkhart's 1952 article, he writes, "It is likely that the Mennonites of Russia and Prussia did not 'create' these elaborate variations and embellishments but simply adopted them from the surrounding Protestant churches in Prussia" (1952a, 47).

Wesley Berg posits that chorale tunes were modified through accretion and ornamentation (1996, 106). Difficulties in pitch matching when singing in a large group and without instrumental accompaniment, he suggests, may account for some melodic alteration. Berg deems it more likely, however, that "extra notes" in the *lange Wies* grew out of improvisation by the *Vorsänger*: "While there is no doubt that the pitch matching process accounts for many of the extra notes in Old Way melodies, the profusion of ornamentation ... suggests that there is an element of carefully constrained improvisatory freedom exercised by many singers that goes beyond the wayward fumbling about for notes implied by the pitch-matching theory" (1996, 101).⁹⁴

Choralbuch nor the *korte Wies* versions of melody #57 used this particular text (the *Choralbuch* uses the text associated with the melody name, "O Dass ich Tausend"; and the *korte Wies* was sung for the second and third verses of *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* #525), it is possible to compare the three melodies based on the shared meter of the hymn texts.

⁹⁴ The "pitch-matching theory" to which Berg refers is a hypothesis developed by Nicholas Temperley in a 1981 paper titled, "The Old Way of Singing: Its Origins and Development." Here, Temperley writes, "One way to explain these added notes is by the same process that accounts for the loss of tempo and rhythm. The leading singers of any

This suggestion of individually determined variation in a musical form purported to reflect and uphold values of collective worship experience is provocative. Is there a distinction to be made between “individual performance” and “song leadership by individual *Vorsänger*” in this context?

Conversations with *Vorsänger* Abram Wolf (Figure 3.3) imply that the individual emphasis required by this question is unhelpful. When asked about individual style and the singing of *lange Wies* in his experience, Wolf redirects the question. Instead of discussing individual style, he comments on the function of the *zwischen Gesang* (High German; “in-between singing”) of the *Vorsänger*. He notes that what is sung between phrases is determined by the intervallic relationship between the *finalis* of one phrase and the first note of the next:

Das muss auch eingeübt. Wir müssen, um, sie haben das gehört als wir das gesungen haben, in der Schule. Wir müssen da noch sehen der folgende Strof – wie fängt der an? Niedriger, höher, oder eben mehr so. Wenn das ‘eben mehr so’ ist dann fahren wir ein wenig zugleich, vielleicht haben wir ein kleines Kührchen ein. Soll das höher dann tun wir es ein wenig höher wiegen, soll das niedriger dann tun wir rauf wiegen. (2006)

That must also be practiced. We must, um, you have heard how we sang that in the school. We must look to the verse that follows – how does it begin? Lower, higher, or more of the same. When it is ‘more of the same,’ then we move together, maybe with a small “curve.” Should it go higher, then we sway a little higher, should it go lower, then we sway downwards.

group move to the next note of the tune; the stragglers, who are more timid, whose sense of pitch is unreliable, or (less probably) who do not know the tune, gradually follow them, sliding slowly up or down toward the next note, occasionally overshooting it, and then reaching it by a pitch-matching process: everyone assembles on the new note for a brief interval, drawing a new breath, before the long and arduous journey to the next tune note begins. When this proceeding has been heard, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, people will continue to imitate it, even if there is no longer any need for them to follow after the leading singer, for it will have become a ritual” (1981, 528).

Wolf's detracting from a focus on song leadership and individual style does not end here. When pressed regarding occasions or possibilities of variation from one performance of a hymn to another, he emphasizes not individual differences, but the collective process of determining melodic pathways among different *Vorsänger*. When asked what occurs when *Vorsänger* have differing ideas of how a particular song should be sung, Wolf responds,

Das kommt doch daran mit runter. Und dann, tun wir es probieren welches das beste schafft: "Oh, na du, du hast Rechts." ... Ja, wenn irgend jemand fährt wo andere reden, am Begräbnis oder Verlobung oder – wenn wir wieder zusammen kommen: "Da haben sie dies oder das Lied gesungen, sie haben das so und so gesungen. Wollen wir mal sehen ob wir das auch zu können, oder?" "Oh, ich habe das auch oftmals gehört, aber ich hab das wenig [...] gehört." Also, es ist etwas ein vermischen gekommen und dann, aber, um das genau zu sein dann muss man doch wieder abhören. Dies ist nur abhören. (2006)

That depends on the situation. And then, we try which works the best: "Oh, well you, you are right." ... Yes, when someone goes to hear others speak, to a funeral or an engagement party or – when we come together again [they might say]: "There, they sang this or that song, they sang it like this. Do we want to see if we also could sing it like that, or?" "Oh, I have also heard that often, but I have only a little [...]." Something of a mix comes together, and then, however, to be precise, one must hear it again. This is just listening.

Wolf also contends that melodic differences between colonies are likely related to the locations from which inhabitants migrated. Melodies sung in Chihuahua's Swift Current colony, for example, would have come along with the Mennonite settlers from Saskatchewan; those in the Manitoba colony, from Manitoba. Because these groups emigrated to Mexico from different parts of Canada, and in some cases to Canada from different colonies in Russia, variation is not surprising (A. Wolf 2006). As with many orally transmitted forms, the singing of *lange Wies* connects singers to past migrations

and song practices, while shaping and being shaped by current aesthetic ideals and experiences.



Figure 3.3. Teacher and *Vorsänger* Abram Wolf and his wife, Margaretha Wolf, at their home. Manitoba Colony, Mexico.

3.3 Repertoire

3.3.1 *The Geistreiches Gesangbuch*

Gesangbuch
— Eine —
Sammlung geistlicher Lieder
— zur —
Allgemeinen Erbauung
und zum Lobe Gottes.

Ich will dem Herrn singen mein Leben
lang, und meinen Gott loben, so lange
ich hier bin. Ps. 104, 88.

Figure 3.4. Title page of *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, 2003.

It was in the middle of the 18th century that West Prussian and Danzig Mennonites made a linguistic transition from Dutch to High German or Low German in their worship services (J. Friesen 2001a, 5). With it came the 1767 publication of a German Mennonite hymnal – the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch, worinn nebst denen Psalmen Davids eine Sammlung auserlesener alter und neuer Lieder zu finden ist, zur allgemeinen Erbauung herausgegeben* (“A Spiritually Rich Hymnbook, Containing in Addition to the Psalms of David, a Collection of Selected Old and New Hymns Prepared for General Worship”) (Wiebe 1962, 36). According to Burkhart, the hymns included in the

Geistreiches Gesangbuch were primarily of Dutch (translated into German) and Protestant origin, and also included some hymns not previously printed (1953, 44-45). The hymnal was first published in West Prussia, and while it has undergone numerous re-printings and editions in Russia, Canada, and Mexico, few changes have been made to its contents.⁹⁵ It remains the primary songbook for Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico today. Despite its florid title, hymnologist George Wiebe suggests that the hymnal is commonly referred to as “*daut oli Jisangbueck*,” (Low German: “the old hymnal”) (1962, 61). The *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* currently available for purchase in Mexico is entitled *Gesangbuch: Eine Sammlung geistlicher Lieder zur Allgemeinen Erbauung und zum Lobe Gottes* (“Hymnal: A Collection of Spiritual Songs for General Worship and to Praise God”), and was printed in Canada (2003).⁹⁶

For Mexican Old Colony Mennonites, the *Gesangbuch* is not only a primary text and accepted songbook; it is an integral part of the worship and educational experience.

⁹⁵ According to George Wiebe, there were 10 editions of the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* published between 1767 and 1864 (1962, 36). Subsequent to the Mennonites’ arrival in Canada, the 9th edition of the hymnal continued to be used by Mennonites in Canada, the United States, and later in Mexico (1962, 36). Wiebe contends that the hymnal’s content has undergone significant changes since its first (1767) printing in Prussia (1962, 63). In my experience, however, the relative continuity of the North American editions is noteworthy. When I discovered that the title page was missing from the second-hand *Gesangbuch* that I purchased and used in Mexico, my mother lent me the hymnal she used as an Old Colony youth in Reinfeld, Manitoba. Printed in Scottsdale, PA in 1954, its contents were identical. The title born by this newer edition is identical to that currently used in Mexico: *Gesangbuch: Eine Sammlung geistlicher Lieder zur Allgemeinen Erbauung und zum Lobe Gottes* (“Hymnal: A Collection of Spiritual Songs for General Worship and to Praise God”).

⁹⁶ The first North American reprinting of the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* occurred in Elkhart, Indiana, in 1880 (Wiebe 1962, 48).

While the Bible is found in the home, it is the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* that church members bring with them to Sunday morning worship.

The *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* includes hymn texts but no musical notation (Figure 3.5). Instead, appropriate tune names and numbers are printed at the start of each hymn text. All texts are printed in High German, and in ornate Gothic script. Because melodies are assigned but not notated, the hymnal functions in myriad contexts and amongst diverse performance styles; for example, it is used for the singing of both *lange* and *korte Wies*.

Anhang.		649
<p>Weinenszeit die Freudenernste bringen.</p>		
<p>11. Stärk' mich in meiner Pflicht, hilf, daß ich sei ein Licht, weil ich das Leben habe; mein Tröster! steh' mir bei in dieser Büstenei, bis man mich trägt zu Grabe.</p> <p>12. Dann führ' mit deiner Hand die Seel' in's Vaterland. zu dir, mein Gott! dort oben, daß sie in Ewigkeit, in deiner Herrlichkeit, dich preisen mag und loben.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Danklieder.</p> <p>Ps. 104, 28. Wenn du deine Hand aufhübst, so werden sie mit Gut gesättigt.</p> <p>57. Mel. O daß ich tausend zc.</p> <p>525. O Gott! von dem wir alles haben, die Welt ist ein sehr großes Haus, du aber theilest deine Gaben recht wie ein Vater d'rinnen aus; dein Segen macht uns alle reich, ach! lieber Gott, wer ist dir gleich?</p> <p>2. Wer kann die Menschen alle zählen, die heut' bei dir zu Tische gehn? doch muß die Nothdurft keinem fehlen; denn du weist allen vorzusteh'n, und</p>	<p>schaffenst, daß ein jedes Land sein Brod bekommt aus deiner Hand.</p> <p>3. Du machst, daß man auf Hoffnung säet und endlich auch die Frucht genießt; der Wind, der durch die Felber wehet, die Wolke so das Land begießt; des Himmels Thau, der Sonne Strahl sind deine Diener allzumal.</p> <p>4. Und also wächst des Menschen Speise, der Acker reichet ihm das Brod, es mehret sich vielfält'ger Weise, was anfangs schien, als wär' es todt, bis in der Ernte Jung und Alt erlangt seinen Unterhalt.</p> <p>5. Nun, Herr! was soll man mehr bedenken? der Wunder sind hier ja zu viel. So viel, wie du, kann niemand schenken, und dein Erbarmen hat kein Ziel; denn immer wird uns mehr besüßert, als wir zusammen alle werth.</p> <p>6. Wir wollen's auch kein Mal vergessen, was uns dein Segen trüget ein; ein jeder Wißsen, den wir essen, soll deines Namens Denkmal sein, und Herz und Mund soll lebenslang für uns're Nahrung sagen Dank.</p>	

Figure 3.5. *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* #525. See Figure 3.2 for melodic transcription.

The hymnal is divided into two parts, each with an *Anhang*, or appendix. The first part contains 452 hymn texts, and an additional 97 in its *Anhang* (453-550). The *Zweiter Theil des Gesangbuchs: in welchem noch eine Sammlung geistlicher Lieder enthalten ist* ("Second Part, holding another collection of Spiritual Songs") contains the remaining hymns (numbered 551-717) and a second Appendix (718-730). The hymnal's table of contents complements its overall thematic organization, offering access to hymns based on textual themes, use in relation to the church calendar year, and scriptural reference. Tune-text references are found at the back of the hymnal. The *Register* (846-866) lists hymns in alphabetical order, along with both text and tune numbers. Immediately following is the *Melodien-Register* (867-879), wherein the 730 hymn texts included in the hymnal are organized by tune name and number (see Figure 3.6). There are 163 melodies listed, meaning that the same melody may be used for more than one hymn text (see Figure 3.7 for the metrical indexes associated with each melody). At the hymnal's close is a ten-page collection of prayers (880-890), organized around theme and function. For example, morning and evening prayers, meal prayers, prayers for sermons, for the sick, for children and youth, and for communion, are listed in this section.

Melodien-Register.

Die Zahl am Ende eines jeden Liedes bezeichnet die Nummer desselben.

1. Melodie.		Wacht auf, es ist schon hohe Z. 174	
Danket dem Herrn, denn er ist 385		Welt, sieh' nun hab ich mich 248	
2. Melodie.		9. Melodie.	
Christus, der ist mein Leben 698		Nimm recht, wenn Gottes W. 211	
Ach bleib mit deiner Gnade 603		Wer sich dünken läßt, er stehe 198	
Dich soll mein Lied erheben 656		Gott, zu dir ist unsre Bitte 724	
3. Melodie.		10. Melodie.	
Wach' auf, mein Herz, und 688		Die Seele Christi heil'ge mich —	
Nun laßt uns gehn und treten 675		Ach Herr, wie schwer ist doch 272	
Nun laßt uns Gott dem Herrn 695		Bedenk', o Mensch, wie Gottes 64	
O Jesus, meine Wonne 630		Du unbegreiflich höchstes Gut 645	
4. Melodie.		Nun giebt mein Jesus gute R. 590	
Gott sei Dank in aller Welt —		Schmerzlich mein' Seel' voll 282	
Wie ein Hirsch in Mattigkeit 648		11. Melodie.	
5. Melodie.		Herr Gott, dich loben Alle —	
Unsere Ausfaat segne Gott 639		Geschlossen ist der Ehebund 721	
6. Melodie.		Kommt, ihr Mitbürger von Z. 144	
Lobt Gott, ihr Christen allzug. 88		12. Melodie.	
Auf, Seele, auf und säume n. 60		Herr Jesus Christ, dich 605	
Nun danket All' und bringet 864		Du heilige Dreifaltigkeit 682	
Nun gehe neuvermähltes Paar 637		Herr Jesus Christ, wahr'r 415	
7. Melodie.		Komm, Vater Sohn, heiliger 80	
Nun sich der Tag geendet hat —		Wo willst du hin, weil's Abend 698	
Laßt uns den Weg durchs L. 658		13. Melodie.	
Mein Gott, das Herz ich brin. 821		Herr Jesus Christ, mein's Le-	
So stehen unsere Tage hin 692		bens Licht —	
8. Melodie.		Erneu're mich, o ew'ges Licht 510	
Ich dank' dir schon durch dei-		Ich komme vor dein Angesicht 718	
nen Sohn —		Merkt auf, ihr Christen, all. 152	
Ach komm, du süßer Herzensg. 222		14. Melodie.	
Hr, die aus Wasser und aus 126		Vom Himmel hoch, da komm	
		ich her —	
		Das alte Jahr vergangen ist 40	

Figure 3.6. *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, Melodien-Register (867).

Because there exist over 100 orally learned melodies for the 730 songs in the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*, it is a repertoire that is sustained through use.⁹⁷ Abram Wolf attests not only to the difficulty of differentiating and retaining the *lange Wies* repertoire, but also the alternate literacy involved in listening to and learning the melodies. A *Vorsänger* who knows 82 melodies himself (see Figure 3.8), he recalls another song bearer who learned nearly 100:

⁹⁷ Some earlier editions of the *Gesangbuch* contain 726 hymns, instead of the 730 in the most recent hymnal.

Ich weiss einen, aber der is lange gestorben, der konnte neun und neunzig Melodien. Nur eine, weiss ich von, was hier in der Gemeinde gewohnt hat, ... Campo 4, in Reinland. ... Onkel Abram Penner, der konnte neun und neunzig Melodien. Die Hunderste hat er auch noch wollen lernen, aber, das war nicht vollbracht. Ja das – dieser Melodien alle lernen, das meint – pass auf! Und, weil wir haben nichts zum beschauen auf Zahlen oder wie – man muss nur wissen, horchen. Und der selbe der tut das üben, und andere der tut das folgen. (2006)

I know one, but he is long dead, he knew 99 melodies. Just one that I know of from this church, ... Campo 4, in Reinland. ... Uncle Abram Penner, he knew 99 melodies. The hundredth he also wanted to learn, but it was not to be. Yes that – these melodies, to learn them all, that means – look out! And, because, we do not have anything to look at like numbers, or how – one must just know how to listen. And one practices by themselves, and another follows.

Describing the process of learning the *lange Wies* as “etwas schwerer als Glaubens Lieder” (somewhat more difficult than belief songs), Wolf emphasizes that learning a new melody is a slow process:

Das ist nicht in einen Abend getan. [Laughter]. Das muss drei, vier mal. Und dann, es selber zu Hause allein, wo mich kein, niemand hören würde das probieren. ... Ja, ich habe zu Hause auch noch etliche gelernt. Na, erst sie von abhören, und dann – so bei dem arbeiten so denkt man, “Wie würde das gesungen?” Und dann geht man, nimmt sich das Buch, und dann mal selbst, “mal sehen,” [demonstrates with Gesangbuch] probieren ob man kann. (2006)

That is not in one evening done. [Laughter]. That must be done three, four times. And then, try it out by myself at home, where nobody can hear me practice. ... Yes, I have also learned quite a few at home. First from listening, and then – while working one thinks, “How was that sung?” And then one goes, takes the book [hymnal], and then by oneself, “let’s see,” [demonstrates with Gesangbuch], find out if it works.

Die grosse Zahl zeigt die Melodien an. Die folgende Zahlen zeigen die Silben und Strophen aus dem ganzen Gesangbuch und jede Strofe an.

Melodien-Silben.	Melodien-Silben.	Melodien-Silben.
1---11-12.	55---8-11-10-11-10-4.	109---8-7-8-7-4-4-8-8.
2---7-6-7-6.	56---9-8-8-7-8-8.	110---8-7-8-7-4-8-8-4.
3---7-7-7-7.	57---9-8-9-8-8-8.	111---8-7-8-7-6-6-8-8.
4---7-7-7-7.	58---9-8-9-8-8-8.	112---8-7-8-7-7-7-7-7.
5---7-8-7-8.	59---9-8-9-8-9-9.	113---8-7-8-7-7-7-8-8.
6---8-6-8-6.	60---9-9-8-9-9-8.	114---8-7-8-7-7-7-8-8.
7---8-6-8-6.	61---10-10-10-10-11-11.	115---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
8---8-7-8-7.	62---10-10-11-11-10-10.	116---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
9---8-7-8-7.	63---10-11-10-11-10-10.	117---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
10---8-8-8-8.	64---10-11-10-11-11-11.	118---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-7.
11---8-8-8-8.	65---10-11-11-10-11-11.	119---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-7.
12---8-8-8-8.	66---11-10-11-10-11-11.	120---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-7.
13---8-8-8-8.	67---11-11-6-6-11-11.	121---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-7.
14---8-8-8-8.	68---11-11-10-11-11-10.	122---8-7-8-7-12-12-11-11.
15---8-8-9-9.	69---11-11-11-11-11-11.	123---8-8-7-7-8-8-7-7.
16---8-9-8-7.	70---4-7-10-10-11-10-10.	124---8-8-7-8-8-7-8-8.
17---8-9-8-7.	71---6-6-7-7-6-7-6.	125---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
18---9-8-9-8.	72---7-6-7-6-7-7-6.	126---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
19---10-10-8-7.	73---7-6-7-6-7-8-7.	127---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
20---10-10-10-10.	74---7-6-7-6-8-7-6.	128---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
21---10-11-11-10.	75---7-7-7-7-7-7-7.	129---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
22---11-11-10-10.	76---8-7-8-7-3-3-7.	130---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
23---11-11-11-5.	77---8-7-8-7-8-8-7.	131---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
24---11-11-11-5.	78---8-7-8-7-8-8-7.	132---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
25---4-4-7-7-6.	79---8-7-8-7-8-8-7.	133---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
26---7-6-7-6-6.	80---8-7-8-7-8-8-7.	134---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
27---7-7-3-3-11.	81---8-7-8-7-8-8-7.	135---8-8-8-8-8-8-8-8.
28---8-8-6-8-8.	82---8-7-8-7-8-8-7.	136---10-11-10-11-11-10-11-11.
29---8-8-7-8-7.	83---9-8-9-8-9-9-6.	137---11-11-11-11-11-11-11.
30---8-8-8-8-4.	84---10-4-6-4-7-4-7.	138---11-10-11-10-11-10-11.
31---11-10-10-9-11.	85---11-10-11-10-5-5-10.	139---11-10-11-10-10-10-10.
32---14-14-4-7-8.	86---11-10-11-10-8-6-6.	140---12-11-12-11-6-6-12-12.
33---4-4-7-4-4-7.	87---12-12-11-11-12-12-13.	141---6-6-6-6-6-6-7-8-6.
34---4-4-11-4-4-11.	88---5-5-6-6-6-7-6-7.	142---7-7-7-7-7-7-7-7.
35---5-5-8-8-5-5.	89---5-6-6-6-6-7-6-7.	143---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
36---6-6-5-6-6-5.	90---6-6-6-6-8-8-7-7.	144---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
37---6-6-7-6-6-7.	91---6-7-6-6-6-7-6-6.	145---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
38---6-6-7-7-7-7.	92---6-7-6-7-6-6-6-6.	146---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7.
39---6-7-6-7-6-6.	93---6-7-6-7-6-6-6-6.	147---6-7-12-6-7-12-6-6-6-6.
40---6-7-6-7-7-7.	94---6-7-6-7-7-6-7-6.	148---8-7-8-7-8-7-7-7-16.
41---7-7-6-7-7-6.	95---7-6-7-6-3-3-6-6.	149---8-7-8-7-7-7-8-8-7-7.
42---7-7-6-7-7-8.	96---7-6-7-6-6-6-6-6.	150---8-7-8-7-8-7-8-7-7.
43---7-8-7-8-7-7.	97---7-6-7-6-6-7-7-6.	151---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-7-7-6.
44---7-8-7-8-7-7.	98---7-6-7-6-6-7-7-6.	152---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-8-8-7.
45---7-8-7-8-8-8.	99---8-8-7-6-7-6-7-6.	153---8-8-7-8-8-7-2-2-8-4-8.
46---8-4-7-8-4-7.	100---7-6-7-6-7-6-7-6.	154---8-9-8-7-8-8-9-9-8-8.
47---8-7-7-8-7-7.	101---7-6-7-6-7-6-7-6.	155---9-8-9-8-6-6-5-6-6-5.
48---8-7-8-7-7-7.	102---7-6-7-6-7-6-7-6.	156---9-8-9-8-9-9-8-9-8.
49---8-7-8-7-8-8.	103---7-6-7-6-7-6-7-6.	157---11-11-11-11-6-6-7-6-7.
50---8-7-8-7-8-8.	104---7-6-7-6-7-7-6-6.	158---7-8-7-8-7-6-7-6-7-6-8.
51---8-8-7-8-8-7.	105---7-7-7-7-8-7-4.	159---8-7-8-7-8-8-7-7-8-8-8.
52---8-8-7-8-8-7.	106---8-3-3-6-8-3-3-6.	160---8-8-7-8-8-7-8-8-7-8-8-7.
53---8-8-8-8-8-8.	107---8-7-7-8-7-8-8-7.	161---8-9-8-8-9-8-6-6-4-4-4-4.
54---8-8-9-8-8-9.	108---8-7-8-7-4-4-7-7.	162---8-8-7-7-8-3-7-7-8-8-8-8.
		163---8-8-7-8-8-7-8-8-8-8-8-8.

Figure 3.7. The title of this document reads, "The large number indicates the melody. The subsequent numbers indicate the metrical index for hymn verses in the entire *Gesangbuch*." From the collection of Abram Wolf.

Long Melodies	Hymns
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
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11	11
12	12
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264	264
265	265
266	266
267	267
268	268
269	269
270	270
271	271
272	272

Figure 3.8. Abram Wolf's tally of long melodies in his repertoire, with tally of corresponding hymns.⁹⁸

The commitment required to learn the long melodies is not incidental for Old Colony *Vorsänger*, and in order to facilitate this method of learning and transmission, song leaders in Old Colony churches meet regularly (usually weekly or bi-weekly) to rehearse.⁹⁹ While Abram Wolf does not discuss his role as *Vorsänger* in terms of

⁹⁸ This tally was compiled by Wolf in response to my questions about how many melodies he knew himself.

⁹⁹ Abram Wolf suggested that his group meets to practice every 14-15 days (February 9, 2006, conversation with author). Doreen Klassen has suggested alternate learning methods among Hutterite men, who engage a different repertoire than Old Colony *Vorsänger*, but also pass along sacred song repertoires orally. According to Klassen, a Hutterite *Vorsänger* whom she interviewed in the 1970s "learned the melodies privately from his wife so he could teach them publicly, and so the notion of oral transmission by men may be only part of the story" (March 25, 2008, email message to author). I did not

prestige, the intentional effort he describes in relation to learning and retaining the *lange Wies* repertoire demonstrates the commitment involved in the position.

Historically, the elected position of *Vorsänger* has been highly regarded. Describing the “institution of choristers” among Mennonites in Holland, Prussia, and Russia (1789-1820), John Rempel writes, “Since the choristers [*Vorsänger*] were chosen by secret ballot, just as were the ministers and the deacons, this position was held in high esteem. For this reason it was desired by many church members. In church, as well as at festivities in the homes, the choristers occupied a place of honor” (1950). Old Colony *Vorsänger* in Mexico are also elected by secret ballot. There is, however, no slate or prepared panel of candidates from which the congregational *Brüderschaft* (High German; “brotherhood”) chooses. Instead, each male church member is given one vote, which may go to any one of the *Brüderschaft*. Depending on how many *Vorsänger* are to be elected for the term in question, the man (or men) with the most ballots bearing their name is chosen to become a song leader. This process is taken seriously, with the outcome of the election interpreted as God’s will. Elected *Vorsänger* are expected to act as role models within the community. Thus, the position of *Vorsänger* is both an honour and a responsibility (Lisa Wolf, March 26, 2008, conversation with author).

Careful oral transmission and the lengthy path of Mennonite *lange Wies* – from Prussia and Northern Germany to North America and then Mexico – demonstrate an oft-cited emphasis on preservation in Old Colony lifeways and belief. Musical developments

encounter parallel narratives of transmission by women during my fieldwork among Old Colonists in Mexico, although some allusions to family involvement were made.

among Mennonites in 19th-century Russia, however, call the easy portrayal of uninterrupted preservation into question. It is to these developments that we now turn.

3.3.2 *The Choralbuch*



Figure 3.9. Title page of *Choralbuch*. Canadian Edition.

Despite its long history and dependence on oral transmission, the singing of *lange Wies* has not been an uninterrupted practice. In 19th-century Russia, the melodies were perceived as a corruption of chorale tunes by some, a problem in need of a corrective. In response, a system of musical notation using *Ziffern* was adapted from Rousseau by Prussian Heinrich Franz, and a *Choralbuch* was published with the express purpose of improving singing among Mennonites in Russia.¹⁰⁰ In the foreword (Figure 3.10) to a

¹⁰⁰ The *Ziffern* system of notation used by Franz was not based exclusively on the work of Rousseau. Wesley Berg writes that it “had its origin with Rousseau in France, with subsequent refinements by Galin, Paris, and Chev in France and by Bernhard Natorp in

Canadian edition of the *Choralbuch zum Gebrauch in den Mennonitischen Schulen und Kirchen in Kanada* (Chorale book for use in the Mennonite schools and churches in Canada)¹⁰¹ we read,

V o r w o r t .

Die heilige Schrift fordert uns an vielen Stellen des alten, wie des neuen Testaments auf, den Herrn, unsern Gott durch den Gesang geistlicher, lieblicher Lieder zu loben und zu preisen. Und wahrlich, Ursache zum Lobe Gottes haben wir genug, wenn wir erwägen, was unser Gott an dem in Sünde gefallenen Menschengeschlechte im Allgemeinen durch die Hingabe Seines Sohnes in die Welt gethan, und was Er noch fortwährend an jedem Einzelnen thut, um ihn für's Himmelreich zu erziehen! Daß der heilige Gesang aber, wenn er — wie dies seit langer Zeit nur geschah — blos nach dem Gehör fortgepflanzt wird, an seiner Schönheit, Reinheit und Wichtigkeit ungemein verliere, bedarf keines Beweises — die Erfahrung lehrt es.

Um nun nach Kräften in meinem schwachen Theile dazu beizutragen, daß der Gesang zunächst in meiner Schule und durch dieselbe endlich auch in den Gottesdienstlichen Versammlungen der Gemeinde, in welcher ich als Lehrer angestellt war, seine ursprüngliche Reinheit und Gleichförmigkeit wieder erhalte, ordnete ich bereits im Jahre 1837 sämmtliche Lieder unsers Kirchengesangbuches nach ihrem Versmaße und sammelte, in Gemeinschaft eines theuern Freundes und Kenners des geistlichen Gesangs die dazu erforderlichen Melodien, welche damals alle nur einstimmig aufgesetzt wurden.

Seit jener Zeit ist das in anspruchsloser Stille entstandene Choralbuch nicht blos vielfach abgeschrieben und in mehreren Schulen beim Einüben der Melodien benutzt worden, sondern zu meiner innigsten Freude hat dasselbe schon liebliche Früchte über die Schule hinaus getrieben, indem an mehren Orten in den kirchlichen Versammlung-

Figure 3.10. Excerpt from *Vorwort* (High German; “Foreword”) to Heinrich Franz *Choralbuch*. Canadian Edition.

Germany. Franz’s system used Natorp’s symbols for pitch notation; symbols for the notation of rhythm were combinations of French elements and features unique to the Mennonite teacher” (1996, 81). Peter Letkemann has written extensively on the subject of *Ziffern* notation and its use among Mennonites in Russia (1985; 2005).

¹⁰¹ This *Choralbuch* was printed at *D. W. Friesen u. Söhne* (D. W. Friesen and Sons) in Altona, MB. No date is given.

In the second paragraph of the *Vorwort* (Figure 3.10) is printed the same text that Peter Letkemann quotes from the 1860 publication (Figure 3.11):

Um nun nach Kraeften in meinem schwachen Theile dazu beizutragen, dass der Gesang zunaechst in meiner Schule und durch dieselbe endlich auch in den gottesdienstlichen Versammlungen der Gemeinde, in welchem ich als Lehrer angestellt war, seine urspruengliche Reinheit und Gleichfoermigkeit wieder erhalte, ordnete ich bereits in Jahre 1837 saemmtliche Lieder unseres Kirchengesangbuches nach ihrem Versmasse und sammelte, in Gemeinschaft eines theuern Freundes und Kenners des geistlichen Gesangs die dazu erforderlichen Melodien, welche damals alle nur einstimmig aufgesetzt wurden.

In order to do my small part in restoring the singing in my school - and through it the singing in the worship services of the congregation in which I had been hired as teacher - to its original purity and uniformity, I arranged all the hymns of our Gesangbuch according to their poetic metre in 1837. Together with a dear friend, who was knowledgable in the area of hymnody, I collected all the melodies required to fit these metres. At the time, I wrote down only the tunes (not 4-part harmony).

Figure 3.11. Excerpt from *Vorwort* to Heinrich Franz *Choralbuch*, 1860 edition. Reprinted from, and with translation by, Letkemann (1985, 241).¹⁰²

Franz' transcription method became known as *Zahlenweisen*, *Ziffern Weise* (High German), or *Tsoliwies* (Low German), which translate literally as “number” or “cipher melodies.”¹⁰³ In the *Choralbuch zunächst zum Gebrauch in den mennonitischen Schulen Südrusslands* (Choralbook for use in the Mennonite Schools of south Russia), “definitive versions” (Burkhart 1953, 45-46) of the 163 chorale melodies called for in the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* were notated using numbers rather than a musical staff to indicate pitch. Figure 3.12 demonstrates this:

¹⁰² According to Letkemann, the “dear friend” to whom Franz refers is likely Friedrich Wilhelm Lange (1985, 241).

¹⁰³ For some of my interviewees, like Lisa Wolf, *korte Wies* and *Ziffern Weise* were considered interchangeable terms. I distinguish between them here because whereas *Ziffern Weise* implies the use of cipher notation, *korte Wies* encompasses “short melodies” more generally. In some, but not all, of my transcriptions, *korte Wies* sung by Old Colonists in Mexico matched *Choralbuch* melodies.

3u. 9, 8 :: 8, 8 Silben.

57. O dass ich tausend Zungen hätte.

G dur, a=2.

5 | 3 5 6 5 | 4 3 2, | 1̇ 3 2 1 |
 Ich will von Dei - ner Güt - e fin - gen, So lan - ge
 Ich will Dir Freu - den - op - fer brin - gen, So lan - ge
 2 3 4 3 | 2, 0: || 2 | 2 2 3 5 | 5 #4 5 5 |
 sich die Zun - ge regt; Ja wenn der Mund wird kraftlos sein, So
 sich mein Herz be - wegt;
 3 1 6 4 | 3 2 1̇ ||
 stumm' ich doch mit Seufzen ein.

Figure 3.12. *Ziffern* notation for tune #57, “O dass ich tausend Lungen hätte.” Notated by Heinrich Franz, found in *Choralbuch*. For transcription of melody, see Figure 3.2.

While publications in 1860 and 1880 offered four-part harmonizations using *Ziffern* notation, the most popular edition among Mennonites was that published in 1865, offering a single melodic line. According to Burkhart, “this one-part edition and subsequent editions of the same book printed by the Mennonites themselves were long used in the Mennonite schools in Russia and tended to restore the *purity* of the melodies” (1953, 46 italics mine).

Given the prominence of this movement towards *Ziffern Weise* and “pure” melodies, how is it that Mennonites in Mexico – Mennonites who left Russia 30 years after the introduction of the *Choralbuch* and who spent 50 years in Manitoba (where the *lange Wies* are no longer sung) – sing the long melodies in their worship services? And why are these groups familiar with *Ziffern Weise* in name only? The answer, or at least

the roots thereof, lie in decisions made by Reinländer/Old Colony church leadership in the 1870s.¹⁰⁴

Upon arrival in Canada, leaders in the Old Colony church reconsidered their singing practices, and called for a return to the *lange Melodien* (*lange Wies*) in school and worship services. While many Mennonite immigrants were accustomed to the newer singing style that had been introduced in Russia, and disagreed with this stance and its implications (i.e. the abolition of hymnals with notes or ciphers), the return to the 'old ways' signified by the long melodies was deemed necessary by Elder Johann Wiebe. He believed the *Ziffern Weise* were "too worldly" (Berg 2001, 23; Burkhardt 1952a, 47, 1952b, 38).¹⁰⁵ According to Wesley Berg, the decision "to preserve their old songs in a new land" was "one of the most visible symbols of their commitment to a pure life untainted by conformity to the world" (Berg 2001, 23). It was this group who left Manitoba for Mexico in the 1920s and who went on to become Old Colony Mennonites.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ For a clarification of the relationship between the Reinländer and the Old Colony church, see Chapter 1, footnote 1.

¹⁰⁵ Not all Mennonite churches followed this lead, with the Bergthal group under Elder Gerhard Wiebe going on to introduce new hymnals into their congregations. It is from this group that the Bergthaler and Sommerfelder churches in Manitoba are derived (Burkhardt 1952a, 47).

¹⁰⁶ Interesting about this departure is the absence of *lange Wies* in Manitoba following the migration to Mexico. While not all of Manitoba's Old Colony Mennonites emigrated, the leadership of the church left in its entirety. Thus, in the years between the departure and the re-establishment of an Old Colony Church in Manitoba (1922-1936), Old Colonists were left without congregations in which to worship. According to Rev. Isaac P. F. Friesen, many (or "most" according to Abe E. Rempel, 2001, 246) attended Sommerfelder churches during this time, as "there was very little difference between these two churches. In both congregations the sermons were read, and they sang out of the same hymnal. The only difference was that the Sommerfelder sang the shorter choral

3.4 Performance Style

The *lange Wiese* are sung unaccompanied and in unison, with the register of men and women's voices usually an octave apart. Descriptions of the ornamented and melismatic melodies frequently refer to a particular "slowness" of movement. In a questionnaire circulated among students at SBS, tempo emerged as a primary difference between *lange* and *korte Wies*¹⁰⁷:

Using the same songs out of the Gesangbuch, one the words are drawn out a bit longer. Some songs in *lange Wies* could take a long time just to sing one line. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Lange Wies, you stretch out the words and the song runs together without really having a break anywhere, and without music. *Kurte Wies*, you sing the words, very much like you say them, except for it is to the tune, there is breaks in between, a lot of times, with music. I cannot sing both, just the *kurte Wies*. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Lange Wies; stretching the words and phrases. *Kurte Wies*; I'm not sure, but I cannot sing the *lange Wies*. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Ich weiss keinen Unterschied als das lange Wies ist viel langsamer, aber selber habe ich sie nie gesungen oder gelernt. Ich kann sie nicht singen. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

I know of no difference except that the long melodies are much slower, but I have never sung or learned to sing them. I cannot sing them.

melodies instead of the old style" (I. P. Friesen 2001b, 231). When the Old Colony church was re-established in Manitoba, it was determined that *Zahlenwiese* – the style of singing introduced in Russia and that used the same melodies as the Sommerfelder churches in Manitoba – would be adopted (Rempel 2001, 248). These historical accounts suggest that when the first Old Colony Mennonites left Manitoba for Mexico, they effectively took the *lange Wies* with them.

¹⁰⁷ Low German spellings are variable in many instances. In order to maintain consistency with my interview transcriptions, I use Herman Rempel's spelling for "short" (*kort/e*) in this dissertation. At the time that the student questionnaire was distributed, however, I used an alternate spelling of *kurt/e*. This accounts for the variation in student spellings found here.

Lange Wies is a manner of singing where a song is sung very slow and stretched. Kurte Wies is normal everyday songs I think. I sing just kurte Wies.
(Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

The lange Wies hardly has an ending. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Acknowledging difficulties associated with analyzing musics not organized around metrical pulse, Charles Burkhart suggests that the *lange Wiese* are perhaps not so much *slow* (i.e. containing “many very long tones”) as they are laden with “an effect of slowness” resulting from a single syllable being sung to a long melisma (1952b, 48). Still, this “effect of slowness” results in a slow revelation of text in the *lange Wies*. The prominence of sliding movement between pitches furthers this effect by minimizing formal reference points (i.e. standard meter) upon which listeners trained in Western music traditions often rely.

The perceived “slowness” of *lange Wies* singing does not go without critique. Descriptions of *lange Wies* tempi are often implicit or explicit value judgments as well. For some Mennonites, the attenuated melodies are an opportunity to reflect on the hymn text while participating in a community expression of song. To critics of the *lange Wies*, however, meaning is lost in the lack of forward-moving textual and melodic momentum. Again, comparisons made by students at SBS – some of whom grew up singing the *lange Wies* but have since left conserving churches – are telling:

One is very long and one is normal. One is understandable and one isn't. Yes, I can sing both. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Ein's ist sehr lang, kannst fast nicht verstehen. Ein's ist kurz, kannst gut verstehen. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)
“One is very long can barely understand. One is short and easy to understand.”

Lange Wies is where it takes a couple of seconds to sing one word, so you can't really understand it. Kurte Wies, you just sing out the word and it's easier to understand. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

The 'Lange' sucks, the 'kurte Wies' is cool. Nope, and I don't want to learn the 'lange wies.' (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Lange Wies I guess is the one no one can really understand. Slow and dragged. Kurte Wies is faster. I have sang both when I was still among Old Colony. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Lange Wies is singing for a long time doing whatever. Kurte Wies is normal singing. I dunno if I can sing it. I've never tried. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

Lange Wies, to me its just tradition, the forefathers did this and now we must too. I can't sing it. I tried last year after school, and I got lost after the first line. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

I don't know, I just know that you can't tap your foot to lange Wies. It sounds quite demonic. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)

These comments offer insight into perceptions of the *Wies* from young Mennonites outside the Old Colony church and demonstrate implicit understandings of what constitutes musical normalcy. For many of these young people, claiming a Christian identity involves distinguishing themselves from what they deem a conservative and rule-based past. Critique of conserving church principles is leveled via criticism of their worship practices and performance style.¹⁰⁸

Alternate readings of song forms similar to *lange Wies*, however, do not interpret slow tempi only in relation to textual reception, but emphasize rather the functions of singing collectively (Titon 2006); textual clarity is not the only factor involved in

¹⁰⁸ Because my questionnaire was distributed exclusively among SBS students, I was unable to hear from an equal number of Old Colony youth about their perceptions of *lange Wies* singing. Clearly this would be a meaningful space for further study.

analyses of performance style. *Lange Wies* singing, for example, might be compared with the intoned recitations of the Doukhobors.¹⁰⁹ Perry describes “the use of staggered breathing to create a continuous sound” in their melismatic *psalmi*, and observes that slow tempi “create a relaxed, meditative atmosphere” (27).

Similarly, *lange Wies* might be compared to the singing of Old Regular Baptists in the southern United States. Despite its being sung in unison, the absence of musical notation and the presence of *Vorsänger* who lead congregants in song contribute to make *lange Wies* a heterophonic song style where movement between pitches is not absolutely synchronous. Describing the simultaneity of individual and group experience in the “old way of singing,” Jeff Todd Titon writes,

By now it should be clear that because each person curves the tune a little differently, they do not sing in perfect unison. Their texture is better described as heterophonic. Singers have the chance to exercise their individuality and at the same time feel the bonding power of the group, a liberal ideal throughout American religious history here realized in the traditional musical practice of a conservative denomination. I find the integration all the more remarkable because they are not striving to do the same thing at the exact same time. (2006, 325)

This recognition of church members finding individual voice while engaging in community practice is significant. Rather than separating individual and collective experience, it is through one that the other is enabled. In the absence of a shared rhythmic pulse or a song leader, Titon speaks of Old Regular Baptist congregations learning to breathe together, a process that depends on a particular unity of individual and collective

¹⁰⁹ While Doukhobor singing is often characterized by its choral harmony, the recitation of *psalmi* (prayers) occurs in unison and with a melismatic form (Perry 1995, 25-27). Kenneth Peacock says of Doukhobor psalm recitation that “it takes ten or fifteen minutes to sing just a few words of an ancient psalm. The style of singing with one syllable extended over many melody notes indicates an origin in very old medieval music” (1966, 11).

spirit. The same might be said for Old Colony Mennonites and the *lange Wies*, as its performance is most successful when an entire congregation is engaged.¹¹⁰ Old Colony singers do not breathe in unison; however there is a sensitivity to the way the long phrase is articulated, or “breathed.”

An interesting difference between the groups, however, is that unlike Old Regular Baptists who do not engage a song leader, *Vorsänger* facilitate the collective experience in Old Colony churches, albeit without physical gestures or cues. The ability to “breathe” together is thus, to some extent, dependent on the willingness of the congregation to trust the *Vorsänger* – the bearer of the tune, and leader from one phrase and stanza to the next. That Old Colony gatherings occur in a sanctuary with bare walls and a resonant acoustic further contributes to a unified sound.

Old Colonists with whom I spoke did not use this language to describe the singing of *lange Wies* in their worship. Nor did they criticize the melodies for their slow tempi and articulation of text. Still, their weekly participation in collective worship signals the intentional commitment of Old Colony church members to the church community. By participating in the collective practice of singing the *lange Wies*, congregation members offer an individual voice that does not seek exact coordination with the voice of their

¹¹⁰ I use “performance” carefully here, aware of the negative connotations it holds for some when used in relation to worship. When referencing conserving song practice, I use the concept of performance as defined by Richard Bauman: “A mode of communicative behavior and a type of communicative event.” Grounded in the ethnography of performance, Bauman suggests that this approach may be used in both an “aesthetically neutral” sense, and to refer to an “aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication” (1992, 41).

neighbour. Somewhat paradoxically, it is precisely the variances among individuals that allow the congregation a richness and unity of voice.¹¹¹

3.5 Vocal Production

Closely related to performance style is vocal production. In fact, one might argue that the performance of *lange Wies* is as dependent on timbre as it is on melodic pattern. The sound quality of *lange Wies* singing has been described as “piercing and resonant” (Burkhart 1953, 47), “nasal and penetrating” (Wiebe 1962, 71), and requiring a “high laryngeal position” (Berg 2001, 84). The strength of the association between the melodies and nasal vocal timbre is particularly evident in imitations of *lange Wies* made by Mennonites outside of the Old Colony church. Such performances invoke melisma, but are equally defined by their nasal tone quality.¹¹²

¹¹¹ The integration of individual and community experience enabled by *lange Wies* singing holds some things in common with the *dulugu ganalan*, or “lift-up-over sounding” described by Steven Feld in reference to Kaluli soundmaking. Feld contends the heterophonic layering of sounds among Kaluli singers, wherein sounds “must constantly ‘lift-up-over’ one another” (1984, 392) enacts a balance between individual and group needs. While he writes that “Unison is the antithesis of ‘lift-up-over-sounding’” (1988, 82), his subsequent contention that in it, “the overall feeling is of togetherness, of consistently cohesive part coordination in sonic motion and participatory experience” (1988, 82) makes a comparison to *lange Wies* singing apt.

¹¹² Wesley Berg, for example, describes the imitation of Old Colony singing by his parents when he was growing up: “[M]y father would make us laugh by launching into a nasal braying when it was mentioned and my mother tells the story of going with a friend to a funeral in an Old Colony church and getting an embarrassing fit of giggles when the singing started. Since getting to know the remarkable skills of the Old Colony Vorsänger, however, and experiencing the reverent atmosphere and powerful, strangely beautiful sound of the singing in an Old Colony Mennonite congregation, I have been trying to argue that this is a kind of music making that has its roots deep in the human psyche, and that has wide geographical and historical associations and precedents” (2000, 45). Temperley describes similar responses to orally transmitted melismatic song forms in

The association between nasal vocal timbre and the *lange Wies* is not exclusive, however, as it is also present in other song forms (i.e. *korte Wies*). Still, its implicit significance stands; whereas other hymns may be sung with a variety of vocal production techniques, the same variety does not occur in the singing of *lange Wies*.

When discussing vocal challenges associated with singing the *lange Wies*, the amount of breath required is frequently emphasized by singers. Johan Heide, who learned to sing the *lange Wies* from his father when their family was part of the Old Colony church, describes the form as “very hard. And you have to have good breath for that. Like a *long* breath” (2006a). In some ways, this practical difficulty – combined with the previously discussed complexity of the repertoire – functions to distance Old Colony Mennonites from the world around them. In the absence of visual cues and familiarity with the song practice, it is difficult for “outsiders” to participate.¹¹³

3.6 Social Interaction and Social Effects

In the singing of *lange Wies*, we encounter a particular meeting of performance style, kinesthetic practice, and social effect. Engaging vocal production techniques that require “a long breath” in a melismatic song form that simultaneously prizes continuity of

British and American history. He writes, “Social changes have led to efforts to get rid of it; then it has been strongly denounced and ridiculed, and eventually replaced by “Regular Singing” (in which the leading singers are taught to read music notation or solfa symbols). Until recent times the Old Way of Singing, if mentioned at all, was treated as an unacceptable, primitive practice that preceded the introduction of anything recognizable as music” (1981, 511). In my own experience, imitations of *lange Wies* that poke fun at the nasal tone quality associated with the melismatic melodies have been most common among Mennonites who are not part of the Old Colony church.

¹¹³ This is exacerbated by the fact that *Gesangbücher* are not shared by individuals in worship services.

sound in its performance, *lange Wies* melodies are difficult to sing solo. This difficulty is not just an embodiment of humility, but a physical limitation identified by singers of the complex melodies. Because the *lange Wies* are a community repertoire, the fact that they are also *physically* difficult to sing independently is significant. Is this a practical characteristic of the melodies, an enactment of societal value via stylistic choice, or both?

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, some Old Colonists in Mexico grew up in contexts where *lange Wies* was the only acceptable singing style in and out of the home. If not sung with the melismatic form, *Gesangbuch* hymns were not condoned. Few remembered a family context in which these limits were strictly adhered to; however, the historical position of the *lange Wies* at the centre of good community practice is significant. As a repertoire and singing style that requires a group, *lange Wies* invites shared experiences of music that do not glorify individual singers.

Or does it? Because the melodies rely to some extent on opportunities for collective practice, accessibility to the *lange Wies* is not guaranteed for individual Old Colony Mennonites. Teacher and *Vorsänger* Abram Wolf, for example, relates that while children learn the melodies at school, few are able to sing them without help.¹¹⁴ Also, whereas *Vorsänger* gather regularly to learn the *Wies*, the same opportunity for collective practice cannot be assumed for community members, resulting in the ownership of melodic repertoire by a select few. Add to this the decidedly un-catchy

¹¹⁴ Wolf goes on to suggest that it is likely for this reason that *Wünschen* (literally, “wishes,” assumed to be in poetic form), memorized by children for recitation at family gatherings, held such a prominent place in the past. Because *korte Wiese* were not officially condoned, and *lange Wiese* were too difficult for children to sing, *Wünschen* and *Gedichte* (High German; “poems”) became their primary means of participation (2006).

melodies and some might argue that the *lange Wiese* effectively quiet the voices of ordinary church members.

This critique, however, requires tempering. Firstly, despite the rhetoric surrounding *lange Wies* as *the* condoned song practice, *korte Wies* has functioned, and continues to function, as a much used song form among Mennonite families. And as will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, musical proscriptions do not guarantee the absence of restricted song from Old Colony communities. Further, while many church members describe themselves as able to sing along with the *lange Wies*: “Met’sinje kaun ekj” (Low German; “Sing along, I can”), others attest to carrying a large repertoire of songs with them. Some singers, like Tina Dyck, are not intimidated by its difficulty:

Mit wenig Interessen ist es schwer. Ich sag zu ihm, “Wenn ich ein Mann wäre, ich würde es gerne tun!” (2006)

With little interest it is difficult [to learn sing lange Wies]. I say to him, “If I were a man, I would gladly do it [be a Vorsänger]!”

In addition, while collective opportunities for practice cannot be assumed for ordinary church members, home singing circles have emerged in northern Mexico, wherein groups of men and women gather to learn and sing the *lange Wies*. In fact, recordings of the melodies have been made in recent years, with dubbed cassettes available for purchase at Strassburg Platz near Cuauhtémoc.¹¹⁵ These circles are not only meaningful for the repertoire sharing that they enable. They demonstrate the social and community-building function of the *lange Wies* for many Old Colonists.

¹¹⁵ Strassburg Platz is described in Chapter 2.

3.7 Conclusions

Despite a complicated past and present, the self-conscious readoption and subsequent maintenance of the *lange Wies* by Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico reflects community values of equality and collective humility, and in some ways exemplifies the sonic encoding of non-conformist community values. Congregational singing occurs in unison, with a vocal timbre that enables full participation by individual singers, and that results in a full collective sound. The bare walls of the unadorned Old Colony sanctuary further facilitate a blended and resonant acoustic. Song leaders (*Vorsänger*) are set apart; they are seated at the front of the church and take turns singing 'solo' passages at phrase endings. Here too, however, collectivity is practiced in the biweekly rehearsals and the collective determining of melodies by *Vorsänger*. Despite individual leadership of specific hymns within the church service, it is always a group of *Vorsänger* seated at the front of the church who take turns in song leading. Further, as recent developments demonstrate, church members who first learn the *Wies* in church and school continue to engage in the process of oral transmission. Whether through cassette recordings or singing circles, participation is ongoing.

Perhaps what most distinguishes *lange Wies* from other congregational repertoires and singing styles is the intentionality required to sing it. While many, if not most, musical practices entail commitment, the depth of involvement required from singers of *lange Wies* and its implicit connection to participation in the Old Colony church community is noteworthy. The process of intentional teaching begins and is nurtured in Old Colony schools where repertoire, form, and timbre are taught through the daily

singing of *lange Wies*. The development of vocal competence “is not in one evening done,” nor are the tunes “catchy.” Old Colony singers must practice the melodies to learn and retain them, and engagement continues in Sunday worship long after *Darpschool* is completed. Participation in the singing of *lange Wies*, like participation in Old Colony community life, requires trust in song leaders and intentional commitment; it is not an “extra-curricular” activity, but is rather part of ongoing involvement in church life. Whether named as such, whether chosen or not, this intentionality shapes and is shaped by community participation and functioning, with a social effect (to return to Sugarman’s terminology) of sustaining community cohesion through song.

It is clear that the “musical style” of *lange Wies* is more than personal preference. Examined in this light, introductions of new repertoires among conserving Mennonite communities are not incidental, nor is theological content the only point of concern. The genres associated with new repertoires call into question the particularities of the *lange Wies*, and thus the primary means of worship in the Old Colony church, the “old way” of singing, and the “old way” of doing things. The chapters that follow explore music making in various contexts among Mennonites in Mexico. Here, both “private” and “public” deviations from officially condoned song practices demonstrate that accommodation and defiance are not mutually exclusive.

Chapter 4

Domesticating Family Music: Individual Defiance, Collective Authority, and a Vitaly Ambiguous In-Between

They couldn't have instruments because it was against their religion. (J. Heide 2006b)

* * *

JK: Did you have radio at home?

PH: At that time, we had – oh, underneath the couch, we had. (P. Heide 2006b)

* * *

Well of course there was a radio in the truck, but then we had music inside already. ... I was sixteen years old, and then we had music already, but before – never. That was a sin. (K. Peters 2006b)

* * *

4.1 Introduction

That music making in domestic contexts may function to unify family members is not a new observation (J. Klassen 2003; Kropf and Nafziger 2001). That music has been important in connecting communities across transnational boundaries has also been acknowledged (Shelemay 1998), as has its ability to forge connections between individual members of a collective religious group (Bohlman 2006b; Mazo 2006). Philip Bohlman has imagined individual and collective religious musical experiences as a sort of dialectic, “synthesized by music. Music and song make this dialectic dynamic,

allowing the individual her voice, while at the same time gathering the community in song” (2006b, 251).

Further, in reference to religious experience in America, Bohlman writes,

Central to the power of music to instantiate American religious experience is its ability not only to represent but in fact to unify *community*. The religious community assumes other metaphorical forms, notably that of the *family*. Sacred music, it follows, ensures the reproduction of that family, thereby providing through performance the agency through which the religious community’s genealogy unfolds. (2006a, 9 italics his)

Given their history, it would seem likely that conserving Mennonite families in Mexico might engage in music-making practices with outcomes similar to those outlined above. With church community and family constituting primary points of reference, their additional diasporic concern – of maintaining identity and nurturing unity in a new land – only compounds this emphasis on unifying community and reinforcing a distinct identity through song.

But what happens in religious communities where familial emphases are not metaphorical? Where distinctions between church and family, between private and public, and among individual members of a collective church are decidedly ambiguous, and where “music” is forbidden?

Old Colony Mennonites who left Canada for Mexico in the 1920s sought to return to a system of living in community under the *oole Ordnunk* (Low German; “Old Order”), a system led by church elders and one that forbade the playing of all musical instruments both inside and outside of the church.¹¹⁶ Proscriptions against music included the

¹¹⁶Kelly Hedges defines *oole Ordnunk* as “the ‘tradition’ which, among other things, specifies inter-Mennonite and Mennonite-outsider economic and social relations;

prohibition of audio-players, radios, and in some cases, the singing of anything but the unison unaccompanied *lange Wies* used in worship. During my fieldwork, many people spoke of domestic song in terms of strengthening family cohesion and sharing belief. The significance of home music in this context, however, was shown to be more complicated than narratives of family unity, didactic function, and diasporic theories of connection would imply. In fact, while many spoke of domestic song in terms of didacticism and building family cohesion, equally prominent were narratives of private, individual, or familial – and often secretive – defiance of community norms through song. Illicit musical activities – from clandestine listening to German hymns on a gramophone to the covert playing of polkas and rancheros on harmonicas, guitars, and accordions – have been important for members of Mexico’s conserving communities, despite their being *verboten* (High German; “forbidden”) by church leaders.

While most conserving churches in northern Mexico have broadened their definitions of what constitutes acceptable musical practice (or at least to ignore its prohibition) in recent decades, memories of its forbidden-ness and narratives of hidden instruments remain.¹¹⁷ It is these narratives, and their tendency to complicate

structures a colony political system divided into what the Mennonites consider secular and religious branches; provides rules regulating the adoption of technology; dictates dress and occupation norms; categorizes ethnic and other systems of identification; constructs and maintains certain institutions such as church, school, marriage patterns, a widows and orphans fund, and fire and disaster insurance schemes; and structures an ideology of language and literacy” (1996, 6-7). In short, it “provides the tools and mechanisms for cultural reproduction” (1996, 6).

¹¹⁷ While none of the narratives shared with me spoke of excommunication for playing forbidden instruments, Quiring refers to an incident wherein a Mexican Mennonite in Canada “resisted returning to Durango because he feared that he would be asked whether he had driven a car or played the mouth organ. Then, when he answered honestly, his

assumptions of religious ‘unity in diversity through music’ that form the basis of this chapter. I draw specifically from interviews with Mexican Mennonites who are, or were at one time, affiliated with the Old Colony church in Mexico. Using narratives of illicit music making in domestic contexts, I explore the usefulness of an individual-collective dialectic around musical experience among conserving Mexican Mennonites, and question assumptions of conserving Mennonite unity that are based on adherence to strict moral codes. “Music” in the family is not straightforward in Mennonite Mexico.

4.1.1 “Singing, but not Musik”¹¹⁸

During my initial inquiries into home music among Mexican Mennonites, the dialogue would often go something like this:

JK: Did you have music at family gatherings in the past?

I: No! Never. We never had *Musik*.

JK: What sorts of things did you do when the family came together?

I: We’d eat together, and spat’sea. And we’d always sing. We’d sing and sing and sing!

The dismantling of my question’s basic assumptions is telling when exploring domestic song in Mexico. At one level, the misunderstanding demonstrates differing linguistic conventions and the importance of vocabulary and “ethnoaesthetics” in some aspects of ethnographic study.¹¹⁹ For many conserving Mennonites, “music” – hereafter

church would excommunicate him” (2003, 116). This account was taken from an unpublished report written by J. G. Guenter in 1986.

¹¹⁸ When I asked my grandfather, Jacob Froese, about music in his Old Colony church in Manitoba, he responded, “No, no. There was singing, but not music”(2001).

¹¹⁹ In her ethnography of song among Prespa Albanians, Jane Sugarman outlines the parameters of *ethnoscience structuralism* and *ethnoaesthetics* – complementary approaches to ethnography that she suggests constituted an “interpretive paradigm” for music ethnography in the latter 20th century. Whereas ethnoscience structuralism

Musik – denotes the use of instruments with or without singing. By contrast, my experience with the term allows it a significantly broader scope, encompassing vocal, instrumental, and other less specific soundscapes. My understanding of music aligns closely with a definition offered by Lois Ibsen al Faruqi:

For most English-speakers the term music means the art and science of combining vocal and/or instrumental sounds or tones so as to form a wide variety of structurally, aesthetically, and emotionally satisfying expressions of a culture's underlying belief system. Under such a definition, music generally includes all types of aural aesthetic expression, regardless of their function or the context of their performance. (1985, 6)

Writing about "Music, Musicians and Muslim Law," al Faruqi goes on to describe a disconnect similar to the one I have just described in my work with German-speaking Mennonites. Of Arabic *mūsīqa*, she writes,

The term *mūsīqa* has had various connotations in Islamic history; but only when used in the loosest sense has it been regarded by members of Muslim society as synonymous with the term "music" as defined above. Instead, in most instances, it applies only to certain secular musical genres of the culture. (1985, 6)

Both *Musik* and *mūsīqa* demonstrate that the direct translation of "music" from English to another language and cultural context does not assure its equivalent usage. That I was not asked what I meant by "music" when speaking with Mennonites in Mexico implies a discrete separation between conceptions of instrumental performance

places the fieldworker in a position of interpreting musical performances as texts that evoke and confirm community values, beliefs, and patterns of community, ethnoaesthetics accounts for the lived experiences of individuals, based on their own verbalized accounts of links between music and non-musical domains. Ethnoscience structuralism and ethnoaesthetics get at *implicit* community meanings and *explicit* descriptions of personal lived experience; however, Sugarman contends that the interpretive paradigm they comprise is insufficient. Because ethnoaesthetics depends on vocabulary, it cannot get at implicit meanings; conversely, the "reading" of performances as implicit expressions of community values risks an interpretation of culture as static and unchanging (1997, 24-26).

and unaccompanied song. *Musik* was not general, but specific. It referred to a particular mode of performance, and was associated with particular proscriptions. At the same time, it called forward narratives that challenged those proscriptions and drew attention to the unique place occupied by *Musik* and song in the region. While the use of specific repertoires and instruments were called out in these narratives, an undercurrent of technology as a site of negotiation also emerged.

In this chapter, I use “musical instruments” to encompass the broad corpus of instruments that have been associated with prohibited musical practices in conserving Mennonite communities, be they traditionally conceived instruments (violins, harmonicas, guitars, etc.), or mediums for electronic sound production (radios, cassette players, gramophones etc.). Further, *Musik* is used in reference to prohibited musical practices among Mennonite groups, usually involving instruments, and is in this way distinguished from common English uses of “music.”

4.1.2 “Wuaromm?”¹²⁰ *Precedents and Hypotheses for Musical Prohibition*

As described in Chapter 1, Old Colony church leaders have not crystallized Old Colony theology in written form; neither have definitive bases for prohibitions against music in church, home, and community been written down. Various hypotheses, however, have been put forth for the latter, and historical precedents for Anabaptist proscriptions around music are many. Describing early Anabaptist rejection of iconography and ornate liturgies in worship, Calvin Redekop writes,

¹²⁰ Low German; “Why?”

Mennonite participation in the “life of the spirit” in the areas of music, literature, art, and intellect was generally weak and discouraged ... because the experience of oppression at the hands of the “pagan world” was simply not distinguishable from any of the possibly acceptable aesthetic aspects in the religious part of this culture. Indeed, the institution that was persecuting them was a church replete with religious symbolism reflected in incomparably rich and varied art forms. So it was only a short step to link these aesthetic expressions to the obviously ungodly acts of oppression and persecution. (1989, 116)

Concerning music specifically, this rejection was equally direct:

While sixteenth-century Anabaptists, as well as their descendents in various parts of Europe, differed in their interpretation of what constituted worldly practices and what were acceptable Christian practices, they were unanimous in their rejection of the musical and liturgical tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. All Anabaptists rejected choral and instrumental music in worship, and allowed only unaccompanied unison singing by the congregation. Some of their descendents, including the Amish, Hutterites and Old Colony Mennonites have maintained this position to the present day. (Letkemann 1985, 4)¹²¹

Given that Old Colony communities are understood to be modeled after the early Anabaptist church, it is conceivable that their rejection of *Musik* has its origin in these prohibitions. Other hypotheses focus less on early roots and address instead the particular functions of song in worship and conserving community life.

Helen Martens, for example, contends that the Amish, Old Order, and Old Colony Mennonites do not perform as vocal or instrumental soloists in worship, but rather “sing in unison, or in octaves, they say, so as to be better able to give thought to the words, and to avoid pride” (Martens 1972, 361). In this framework, the presence of *Musik* is understood to distract congregational members from collective experience in worship by drawing attention to specific performers and away from humility before God. Further, by

¹²¹ Not all Old Colony churches sing in the same way. Manitoba churches, for example, do not sing the *lange Wies* as they do in Mexico or Alberta. They continue, however, to use the same hymnal, the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* (Margaret Klassen, March 31, 2008, conversation with author).

exalting the individual, *Musik* can invoke pride and self-satisfaction in the performer herself. In what is to be a context of humble worship, distractions like these are significant.

Charles Burkhardt offers an alternate perspective, one that emphasizes historical continuity as the primary motive in decisions around worship style:

It is curious that the conservative Old Colonists should have considered the highly embellished *alte Wiese* more reverent than the simple melody of the *Ziffern*. Perhaps, when he had his people readopt the singing style that they had used so long in Russia, old Elder Wiebe was prompted by what seems to be the central idea in the Old Colonists' outlook on their own culture: that the *old* way is best. (1952a, 47 italics his)

Old Colony emphases on simple living and community discipleship may also be argued to support the prohibition of *Musik*. Able to act as tools for individual expression, musical instruments detract from the surrendered and faithful obedience of *Gelassenheit* (High German; "self-surrender"),¹²² distancing individuals from one another and their community; in Quiring's words, "working against the goals of the church" (2003, 37). Addressing possible links between musical instruments and worldly goods, technologies, and activities, Quiring writes,

Prohibitions also long have existed against the use of various other devices, including telephones, radios, bicycles, and musical instruments. ... Some technology provides an unwanted or unnecessary direct link to the world, some has the potential of working against the goals of the church, community, family solidarity, and some is condemned as sinful or as making it easier to sin. (2003, 37)

¹²² While most High German – English dictionaries define *Gelassenheit* as "calmness," it has other associations in this context. Robert Friedmann, describing various uses of the term in reference to early Anabaptist churches, begins, "*Gelassenheit*, self-surrender, resignation in God's will (*Gottergebenheit*), yieldedness to God's will, self-abandonment, the (passive) opening to God's willing, including the readiness to suffer for the sake of God, also peace and calmness of mind" (1955).

In the past, arguments against new technologies and musical innovations in the home were often tied to linkages like these. In the absence of “Mennonite” radio and appropriate song recordings, for example, the radio and gramophone became vehicles for passing along Spanish music, and with it, exposure to Spanish-Mexican culture.¹²³ The “machismo” of *corrido* and *ranchero* narratives, as well as stories celebrating Mexican nationalism and Revolution in early *corrido* ballads were not compatible with the lifeways and beliefs of conserving Mennonites.¹²⁴ Because radios, guitars, and accordions

¹²³ This has changed, with Abram Siemens’ introduction of Low German radio programming in 1988, and the increased availability of recordings by Mennonite musicians in recent years (Siemens 2006).

¹²⁴ The first extensive study of the *corrido*, *‘With a Pistol in his Hand’: A Border Ballad and its Hero*, was written by Americo Paredes (1958). Here, Paredes defines *corrido* as what “the Mexicans call their narrative folk songs, especially those of epic themes, ... the *corrido* tells a story simply and swiftly, without embellishments” (introduction). In a later article, Paredes describes the “exaggerated manliness or ‘machismo’” in the Mexican *corrido*, and asserts that in the early 20th century its attitudes were “most typical of the Mexican Revolution” and expressed a strong sense of Mexican nationalism (1963, 233). More recent writings about Mexican *corrido* extend the work of Paredes. Helena Simonett, for example, defines the *corrido* as a ballad form most frequently associated with peasant farmers in northern Mexico, suggesting that its roots lie in the *romance español* that was introduced by Spanish colonizers (Simonett 2001, 221). Simonett further describes the *corrido* as “a song with a rather declamatory melody in either 2/4 or 3/4 time. Its harmony is based on the tonic, dominant, and subdominant chords. Whereas in earlier times the *corridista* [balladeer] used to accompany himself simply on guitar, singers are nowadays accompanied by norteño groups or *bandas*. ... *Corridos* used to be long story ballads, but nowadays they have to fit the three-minute format of popular songs” (2001, 223). *Canción ranchera*, or Mexican country music, also holds connections to rural Mexico. With song themes about love, adventure, and romantic betrayal, *canciones rancheras* held great commercial appeal in Mexico from the 1930s onward (Sheehy 2000, 168-169). Describing the form, Daniel Sheehy writes, “*Canciones rancheras* are typically in a simple binary form, cast in a slow duple or triple or fast duple meter and sung by a soloist in a direct, extroverted, passionate style somewhat reminiscent of *bel canto*. The term is often extended to refer to any song sung in a *ranchero* style and particularly such songs accompanied by a *mariachi*” (2000, 169). Among the best-known *ranchera* singers is singer and film actor Pedro Infante, with José

were associated with these songs, they were not deemed conducive to community building.

Johan Peters, for example, whose father was Old Colony and mother, Sommerfelder, suggests that the prohibition of *Musik* in his childhood home was likely related to the lyrical content of songs: “I think the old *rancheros*, the *Musik* that they had before, almost everything was just about killing people. ... A lot of songs from Pancho Villa are there, and I think that’s why my parents say that’s not the right thing to do. I think that’s why they never had that *Musik*” (2006b).

Recognizing this tension, but arguing against a notion of guilt by association is Jacob Peters, a widowed electrician and mechanic who belonged to the Old Colony church before joining a CMM congregation:¹²⁵

Ekj säd e’mol ekj haud e’mol Probleem met [laughs] de Prädjasch. Enn nan säd ekj te ahm, ekj säd, “Daut Radio enn daut Grammafoon daut haft kjeene Sind. Daut deit mol bie mie Sinden wan ekj daut onnrajcht brucken doon.” Oba, fonn’doagsten Dach wan ekj soo enn enne Lengd kijken enn horchjen doo soo fäl Rock Mü’sikj enn, enn dise *Hard Rock* enn aul daut, dan saj ekj uck, dan, dan soll se leewe nijch horchjen. Daut es en, daut es en Dinj daut deit de Menschen denken wajch-nämen. Ooda, woo mott eena daut sajen? Ekj well nijch onnrajcht senn, oba, ekj sie gaunz hundat pe – ekj sie seeja fe Mü’sikj oba nijch fe soone Mü’sikj es daut. (2006)

I said once that I had at one time problems [laughs] with the preachers. And I said to him, I said, “The radio and the gramophone aren’t themselves sinful. My sin comes when I use them wrongly.” But in this day and age when I look around and listen, there is so much rock music, and this hard rock and all that, then I say also, they should rather not listen. That is the thing that takes away people’s

Alfredo Jiminéz its most prolific composer (Sheehy 2000, 169).

¹²⁵ Jacob and Katharina (1936-1997) Peters joined the CMM congregation at Burwalde when their children were in their youth. Jacob does not condemn the Old Colony church in his critique of it. Still, citing the presence of alcohol at youth gatherings at the time, he suggests that it was largely for the sake of their children that he and Katharina changed church affiliation.

*ability to think. Or how should one say that? I don't want to be unjust, I am very much for music, but not for such music as that.*¹²⁶

An argument related to that expressed by Peters suggests that the forbidding of *Musik* functioned in much the same way as the forbidding of rubber tires. It set conserving Mennonites apart from the world around them, ensuring that they remain “strangers in the land.” Here, questions about the inherent sinfulness of music become important. Historically, community living separated from ‘the world’ has been central to the enactment of *orthopraxis* for conserving Mennonites. By condoning *lange Wies* singing and by marking its performance as *the* acceptable song practice – a practice difficult to learn and difficult to sing solo – they marked their difference, presenting an audible symbol of collective nonconformity. In this sense the musical prohibition was perhaps not a statement of its inherent evil, but a means through which to separate church community from the secular world around it. Beverley Diamond has written of the importance of alliances and relationships in relation to (Saami) music traditions and identity: “I suggest that studying music’s capacity for defining relationships may well be as significant in the 21st century as studying music’s role in defining identities has been

¹²⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine. Victor Carl Friesen (1988), Herman Rempel (1995), and Jack Thiessen (2003) have all made significant contributions to the field of Mennonite Low German; still, its orthography is not fixed. In my interview transcriptions, orthography is based on that used in Rempel’s Low German-English dictionary, *Kjenn jie noch Plaut Dietsch*, and, to a lesser extent, Thiessen’s *Mennonite Low German Dictionary/Mennonitisch-Plattdeutsches Wörterbuch*. To distinguish between Low German and High German in offset interview excerpts, I use Arial font for Low German, and *Arial Italic* for High German. Insertions (laughter, pauses, gestures, etc.), are enclosed within square brackets and presented in the same font as the quote. Where English words appear within a predominantly Low or High German transcript, they are printed in italicized *Times New Roman* font. Within the main body of the chapter text, or when quoting published sources, I follow the standard Turabian practice of italicizing unfamiliar terms in roman type.

for the past few decades. Indeed, our alliances produce our identities” (2006, 2). For conserving Mennonites, alliances rejected are perhaps equally significant.

Regardless of reasons given for *Musik*’s proscription, its connection to church and community life is evident. Just as the pronunciation question (“ah” versus “au”) has not been resolved on the basis of what constitutes “correct” usage in High German parlance,¹²⁷ so debates about the forbidding of musical instruments will not be won or lost by proving, or disproving, their inherent sinfulness. By forbidding their use, church leaders contributed another level of self-imposed ‘otherness’ to community life, a means through which to maintain a distinct and non-conformist identity.

4.1.3 Interview Responses to Precedents

Not all of these hypotheses are echoed in individual responses to questions about *Musik* in Mexico’s Mennonite colonies. Instead, my inquiries about its proscription in Old Colony homes reveal an apparent uncertainty about the stance taken by church leadership. A conversation with Old Colony schoolteacher and *Vorsänger* Abram Wolf and his niece, Lisa Wolf (who attends a CMM church), demonstrates this:

JK: Warum war das verboten? Haben sie davon gesprochen, oder war das einfach so?

LW: War das weltlich? Würden sie das nicht, vielleicht, nicht so nennen?

AW: Der glaubte das war – in der Schrift verboten. Aber, ich kann das nicht finden. (A. Wolf and L. Wolf 2006)

¹²⁷ Debates over High German pronunciation continue in Mexico. Many see the use of “au” by some conserving groups (e.g. the letter “k” would be pronounced “kau” rather than “kah”) as absolutely erroneous: “There is no ‘au’!” (K. Peters 2006b). Others deem the so-called “correct” or “modern” pronunciation of High German as a sign of pride and self-aggrandizement. For a more detailed examination, see Kelly Hedges (1996, 303-314), or David Quiring (2003, 44).

JK: Why was it [Musik] forbidden? Did they [church leaders] talk about that, or was it a given?

LW: Was it worldly? Would they perhaps not consider it so?

AW: They believed that it was – forbidden in scripture. But, I cannot find it.

Franz Dyck, also an active member of an Old Colony church in northern Mexico, relays a similar uncertainty:

Ich weiss nicht. Sie haben das mal, ich weiss das nicht warum sie es nicht wollen wenn in die – in die Heilige Schrift können wir viel von Musik lesen – von Instrumenten. David hat sehr viel Instrumente gespielt und alles. Aber ich weiss nicht warum. Ich hab' gelest, ah, früher, als die Reformationen in 1525, dann hat, in die Geschichten was man da liest, sagen sie, das hat der katholische Papst hat das verboten. Orgel in die Kirche, auch der, auch die Glockenschlag. Ich weiss nicht, kommt das daher, oder was? Vielleicht kann das hier geblieben sein von dorthier. Aber ich weiss das nicht ganz, weil wir – wenn man von, von Kindheit aufwachsen wird das, es wird nicht gebraucht in die Kirche oder nicht. (F. Dyck 2006)

I don't know. I don't know why they do not allow it – we can read much about music in the Bible, about instruments. David played many instruments. But I don't know why. I have read about the Reformation in 1525, and in the histories one can read, they say that the Catholic Pope had forbidden it. Organ in the church, and the bells too. I don't know, does it come from there? Maybe it has carried over from that time. But I don't know for certain, because we – when one from childhood grows up, it is simply not used in the church, or not.

Because the authority of church leaders is understood to be unequivocal in Old Colony communities, apparent contradictions in biblical teachings are contentious. Critique of the power afforded many church leaders is implicit in the responses of Old Colony church members who question the absence of a biblical foundation for musical proscriptions. That a prohibition on music is not only absent from the Bible, but that David played the lyre and found favour with God,¹²⁸ therefore, remains a point of

¹²⁸ 1 Samuel 16:14-23 reads,

14 Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. 15 And Saul's servants said to him, "See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. 16 Let our lord now command the servants who

contention for Old Colonists and also for other Mennonites in the colonies. Elena Peters (Figure 4.1), for example, is a CMM church member and classically trained pianist for whom *Musik* – in family, in church worship, and individually – has been formative in her life. For Elena, worship without *Musik* is a contradiction in terms, and life without *Musik* is difficult to fathom:

Ich glaube, wenn wir nicht könnten Musik haben im Haus, dann wurd' ich schon nicht leben. [Laughter]. So schlimm, ich mein' – man könnte ja vielleicht, aber, für mich ist das sehr wichtig. Ich sag' immer, die Gemeinden, die nicht Musik erlauben – die meisten sollen ja schon, aber nicht in der Kirche, sind da etliche die das nicht erlauben – und dann sag' ich aber, "Was machten sie mit den Psalmen? Singet und spielet dem Herrn!" Und das, Musik ist – ein, ein Ding das mir am meisten aufgehoben hat wenn ich mutlos war, oder nicht weiter wollte oder wasimmer. Und dann immer wieder wenn ich zum Klavier ging, oder gute Musik gemacht hab, dann hat es mir aufgehoben, und dann bin ich doch wieder vorwärts gegangen. (2006a)

I believe that if we could not have music in the house, then I would no longer live. [Laughter]. So serious, I mean – one could perhaps [live], but for me it [music] is very important. I always say, the churches that do not allow music – most of them do already, but not in the church, there are some who do not allow it – and then I say, "What do they do with the Psalms? Sing and play to the Lord!" And that, music is – a, a thing that has most helped me when I have been discouraged, or didn't want to go on or whatever, and then time and again when I would go to the piano or made good music, then it uplifted me, and I again moved forwards.

attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better." 17 So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me." 18 One of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him." 19 So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David who is with the sheep." 20 Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. 21 And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. 22 Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." 23 And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him. (NRSV)



Figure 4.1. Elena and David Peters at their home in the Swift Current Colony, Mexico.

Church leaders are not oblivious to these tensions. During a conversation with one Old Colony preacher, I inquired as to whether musical instruments were still forbidden in Old Colony church communities. He relayed that indeed they were, but that church members no longer listened to the leadership on this matter. Notably, theological justifications for *Musik*'s prohibition among conserving Mennonites were no less ambiguous in this conversation, nor did the apparent disobedience of congregants seem to concern him. Like others, he mentioned that there were in fact instances of *Musik* in the Bible, implying that the origins of its prohibition were not biblical in a literal sense.

It is possible that this preacher did not fancy explaining *Musik*'s sinfulness to a Canadian musician simply because she asked; however, I suspect that his response suggests something more. Just as sermons are written down and passed along from one generation of Old Colony preachers to another, so the principles governing behaviour among Old Colony communities are treated with respect and trust. In much the same

way that church members trust the guidance of the *Elltesta* and the *Prädjäsch*,¹²⁹ those same leaders place faith in the *oole Ordnunk*. It bears noting, however, that the respect for tradition implied by the continuance of its ordinances does not hinder community negotiations around it, as evidenced in the ambiguous response of the preacher; that *Musik* remains *verboten* does not negate the possibility of its being unofficially sanctioned by church leaders.

4.1.4 Theoretical Perspectives

The prohibition of instruments in Mennonite Mexico is significant. It suggests that Old Colony and other conserving church leaders are actively engaged in directing community life, and that this engagement is connected explicitly to maintaining nonconformity with the larger society and implicitly to identity maintenance. As descendents of Mennonites who valued the freedom to educate their children in church-run schools above the familiarity of home and family in Canada in the 1920s, the primacy of community and church life in Mennonite Mexico should not surprise. Because children do not attend Sunday morning worship and Mexican Old Colony churches do not hold “Sunday School,” it is in the *Darpschool* that education, preparing students for competence within the church and village, occurs.¹³⁰ If we understand Old Colony faith

¹²⁹ The Old Colony *Elltesta* and *Prädjäsch* comprise the leadership of the church. The *Elltesta* is the church elder or bishop, and the *Prädjäsch* are the preachers.

¹³⁰ For some Mexican Mennonite families who have lived in Canada, the question of Sunday School has proven significant. Johan and Tina Peters, for example, attended an Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) church in Ontario, Canada for three years, as there was not a *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation in the area. When they returned to Mexico, their daughter wanted to continue attending Sunday School, and because the family’s home congregation (*Kleine Gemeinde*) did not have Sunday School

in God as enacted through a life of community discipleship – as *orthopraxis* – the task of church leaders, as well as the importance of church-run schools and community accountability, is magnified. Identity, here, is inherently connected to the living out of a shared belief. Community guidelines directed towards identity maintenance exist in service of a greater goal – that of faithful living after Jesus' example.

This understanding of Mennonite *orthopraxis* and the monitoring of community behaviour among conserving groups becomes complicated, however, when considered in relation to theologian Chris K. Huebner's call for a "non-sovereign diasporic" understanding of Mennonite identity (2006, 28). Arguing against an identitarianism that assumes identity to be "somehow self-identifiable" (2006, 28), Huebner contends that "identity in Christ implies a conception of identity that does not coincide with itself. Just as the precarious peace of Christ disturbs our desire to construe knowledge as a form of ownership, so it works to unsettle our temptation to think of identity as something solid and impenetrable" (2006, 28). In Huebner's framework, identity, like peace itself, is a gift continually given and received, and not an entity that can be named, owned, and protected.

If identity is to be understood as gift, as "non-sovereign," and as "dislocated," then Mexico's conserving Mennonites seem to pose a theological conundrum. To what extent do non-conformist actions among conserving communities (i.e. musical prohibitions and the monitoring of community activity) serve to dislocate identity, and to

classes, they began attending a CMM church. It is my understanding that since this time, most Kleine Gemeinde churches in Mexico, and some Old Colony churches in Canada, have begun holding Sunday School classes as part of Sunday worship activities (2006).

what extent do they engage a “sovereign territorial” (2006, 28) approach to identity maintenance, one that marks territory and protects boundaries? In other words: Can a community remain open to the receiving of “gift” while working to regulate the same?

Ethnographic inquiry is a valuable approach in conceptualizing the tensions these questions raise, and conversations with Mexican Mennonites yielded varied responses. Among informants who had left conserving churches in recent years, I heard frequent references to Old Colony, Reinländer, and Sommerfelder churches having “too many rules.” These “rules,” some argued, functioned to keep church members ignorant of the gospel message of grace and salvation, and subservient to church leaders who were said to be more concerned with maintaining control through the *oole Ordnunk* than with the salvation of congregants. So understood, this “boundary-maintenance” might be described as “sovereign territorial.”

Conserving Mennonites, however, are not unique in their adherence to guidelines for community participation. One might argue that communities of accountability – regardless of particular church affiliation – are by virtue of their very existence governed by “moral codes” or “rules” of ethical conduct, be they explicit or implicit; without accountability, community is no longer community.

Also, by taking narratives from Old Colony church members into account, the rules associated with conserving Mennonite lifeways become less “solid and impenetrable” than sometimes portrayed. I recall in particular an instance of sitting in a circle of women, all but one of whom attended CMM congregations. When the playful banter took a turn towards criticism of Old Colony school, church, clothing, and singing,

an apology was directed to the young woman who was at that time preparing for baptism into the Old Colony church. She replied confidently in Low German, "I don't mind. I know things have changed." With this anecdote I do not wish to imply that what was once a territorial and controlling church body has now "changed" so as to warrant second consideration. Rather, the young woman's response highlights a diversity of experience within a particular structuring of community. Readings of 'precarious' communities must allow for divergent experiences and negotiations within them.

Daphne Winland, in her work among Mennonites in southern Ontario, also emphasizes the dynamic nature of group identity. Drawing on Bourdieu's work in Algeria (1962), she suggests that it demonstrates "how practices of living are harmonized into a meaningful framework for action, although the meanings attached to these practices are not always objectively known or articulated. ... The resulting ambiguity, however, is not indicative of incoherence or rigidity, but rather, of the dynamism of human existence" (1993, 113).

It would be erroneous to suggest that participants in conserving communities do so because of imposed ignorance, and that this imposition is exemplified in adherence to specific rules. Conserving church members not only choose to participate in non-conformist community life, but they also participate in making the community what it is. It is this type of ambiguity upon which Huebner's 'precarious peace' is balanced. Describing what he calls "three key movements of the church" (2006, 23-24), namely disestablishment, disowning, and dislocation, Huebner writes,

Each of these names a negative moment. They perform an activity of distancing whereby the church expresses its otherness, its difference from the world. And

yet they simultaneously name a distance and differentiation that is internal to the very life of church itself. ... [T]hey explore the character of the church as a kind of dislocated identity. ... [T]hey provide an account of the church as it is charged with the task of giving voice to the peace of Christ in a way that does not compromise its precarious nature as gift. They tell a story of a strange and unsettled people who face the difficult and ongoing task of giving expression to a body that does not admit of establishment, a truth that does not admit of ownership, and an identity that does not admit of location. (2006, 23-24)

The ongoing engagement described here by Huebner is perhaps compatible with Jane Sugarman's ethnographic framework for approaching music practices. Reconciling tensions between shared understandings and what she calls the "idiosyncratic interpretations of individuals," Sugarman observes (as have others) that music does not just *evoke*, but also participates in the constitution of "worlds of meaning" (1997, 27). Building on Bourdieu's use of the concept of "habitus"¹³¹ and the "discourses" of Foucault,¹³² Sugarman gets at both discursive knowledge and practice in her explorations of Prespa performance, without losing sight of the dialectical tensions between them. In this way, her work with immigrant Presparé communities in North America moves beyond "lived experience" to include what she terms "social effects" of musical practices; namely,

... the ways that music-making participates in the very construction of agency and experience; and the ways that the actions of individuals implicate them in continual renegotiations, not only of their musical practices, but also of the relations of power that organize their society. ... It suggests that performance

¹³¹ According to Bourdieu, the habitus is "the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations" (1977, 78). Winland has suggested that Bourdieu's concept of habitus represents his attempt "to avoid the reification of practices induced by the deterministic notion of activity as rule-governed. Action is thus more than pure reflex" (1993, 114).

¹³² Sugarman draws her definition of "discourses" from Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Here he defines them as "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (1972, 49 in Sugarman 1997:28).

forms be seen both as structured by a range of shared meanings, and as structuring, in their capacity to shape ongoing social formations. (1997, 27)

The monitoring of *Musik* by past and present Old Colony church leaders demonstrates recognition of its powerful social function; and further, that this function is understood to be inherent in the practice of musicking itself. In the past, Old Colony musicians were defiant in the playing of *any* instrument, in the act of listening itself, and in any repertoire choice that deviated from that condoned by church leadership. Defiance was measured not only by textual content, generic difference, or performance contexts, but in the very existence of difference. It was not how they differed, but that they differed at all that constituted their sinfulness. Despite these prohibitions, however, conserving church members *did* engage in forbidden musical practices, and thereby performed defiance of church norms.

By so imagining musical practice among Mennonites, the prohibition of *Musik* and its defiant presence may be conceived as a dialectic, balanced in a tension whose bi-product is vitality, open to the gifting of "Mennonite identity." In proscriptions against *Musik*, and in narratives about musical expressions that deviated from those proscriptions, we read not only the maintenance of boundaries, but implicit connections among individual, family, and church/community activities.

It is to these narratives that we now turn.

4.2 Narratives

LW: And then I remember he, he had *Musik*, but it was under the bed. [Laughs]. A gramophone. ...

JK: Did you ever get to hear it playing? Or how did you know it was under the bed?

LW: Because, we lived in Campo 82, and at that time there was no highway from Santa Rita to, to Rubio. So then uh, mostly we would come one day before Christmas, stay with our grandparents, and then in the evening my dad and my grandfather, they would, they had music over there! [Laughs]. ... Then the other day when the family came together, it was, I saw where my grandfather put it – under the bed. (L. Wolf 2006)

* * *

4.2.1 *Under the Covers, In the Dark, and Behind the Barn: Keeping Secrets at Home*

Stories of illicit musical activity abound in the narratives of Mexico's conserving Mennonite families. While idiosyncratic protagonists wound up in plots of alleged secrecy are frequently described, their respective idiosyncrasies bear noteworthy resemblances. Only one generation ago, *Musik* was hidden under the covers, under the bed, or behind the barn; church elders voiced the prohibition, while church members monitored it; and those found in breach would receive a visit from church leaders, at which time offending instruments were removed, or more likely, destroyed. Notably, the concealment of instruments was not merely the practice of rebellious individuals; in nearly every account, the narrator's home was a quietly defiant exception to the rule.

Home is often conceived as a space separate from the church. Referencing his fieldwork in German American Lutheran communities in the 1970s and 1980s, Bohlman observes that "the home was the locus of piety, distinct from the church" (2006b, 249).

Recognizing that religious experience extends beyond liturgies and organized religious institutions (2006b, 233), Bohlman posits personal and individual experience to be “*the experience* that conjoins music and religion. Music is ... inseparable from the experiencing of religion and from experiencing through religion” (2006b, 234 italics his). And further,

In contradistinction to the communal performance of music in the public sphere, many musical practices exist only in the private sphere, in pietism and prayer, in the performance of the individual. Often unrecorded, or not even named “music.” (2006b, 239)

In many ways, the suggested relationship between private and public spheres articulated here resonates with rural Mexico and ideas around Mennonite *orthopraxis*. In Mexican Mennonite communities, however, it is not uncommon for one’s church community to overlap with one’s extended family, making distinctions between family, church, and home – between private and public – difficult to render. Whereas “home” is often conceived as a private space, social relations between and among family members make domestic contexts less easily bounded and complicate a private/public dichotomy. While attempts were made to confine secret musicking to the walls of the family home in northern Mexico, narratives, like the one that introduced this section, reveal their invariable complications.

4.2.2 “*That Had to be Underneath the Coats Someplace, You Know?*”¹³³

In instances where *Musik* was permitted in the home, its presence was often protected by unspoken codes of silence; individuals sharing a three-room house with 10

¹³³ (P. Heide 2006b).

siblings could not easily conceal instruments from one another, but they were not mentioned in public. Discussing the presence of guitar and accordion music in her Old Colony home while growing up, Maria Schmitt recalls,

Oba eena räd daut kjeenmol üt. Ekj jleew nijch daut de Elleren mol han je'sajchtet, daut eena nijch sull daut aundre wäjchs fe'talen; Oba, eena säd daut kjeenmol nijch wua. (2006)

But one didn't discuss it. I don't believe that my parents ever said that one shouldn't talk about this [Musik] elsewhere. But one didn't ever talk about it anywhere.

Franz Dyck recounts a similar experience:

Mein Vater hat immer Instrumenten, ein wenig. Er hat nicht gut gelernt, aber ein wenig. Er sagte nicht dass ich nicht sollte, aber er gab mir nicht Geld zum einer kaufen! [Laughter]. (2006)

My father always had instruments, a little. He was not well-learned, but a little. He never said that I shouldn't [have an instrument], but neither did he give me money to buy one! [Laughter].

And for Abram Wolf:

Von ein Teil von den Ältesten waren sie verboten. Aber, mein Vater fragte nicht ob alles, ob das verboten war oder nicht. (2006)

By one group of the elders they were forbidden. But my father did not ask if everything, if it was forbidden or not.

Just as my own Old Colony grandparents “didn’t ask” for permission to play instruments at home in Manitoba, so some parents in Mexico “didn’t prohibit” the mention of their use outside the home.¹³⁴ Unspoken prohibitions, and exceptions to those prohibitions, were sufficient.

¹³⁴ When asked about whether music was allowed in his Old Colony home in Manitoba, my grandfather Jacob Froese responds, “We never asked” (2001).

Because family relationships and living arrangements change over time, however, unspoken rules around home *Musik* could not be taken for granted. Lisa Wolf (Figure 4.2) is an interpreter at the *Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita, A.C.* and a descendent of Johann Wiebe, the Reinländer bishop who was instrumental in establishing the Old Colony church in Canada. While her grandparents migrated to Mexico as Old Colonists in the 1920s and her father was an Old Colony educator for some years, Lisa's parents later left the Old Colony church to join the *Kleine Gemeinde* over disagreements around education and High German pronunciation. Lisa, who remained a member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church until approximately 2005, remembers easily the humorous and at times complicated place occupied by *Musik* in her family's past. The narrative about her grandfather's gramophone, previously cited, is only one of many formative stories tied to music in family life:

LW: And how I learned to play on my guitar, that's, oh, when I was fourteen, I stayed, my brother was a teacher in the *Kleine Gemeinde* school, and then I stayed after I was 14, 15 years because I wanted to study more. So then I stayed with him, and I helped him ... at the school. And then for the first year when I helped him, he gave me a guitar for Christmas. ... And [I am] actually left handed, but I didn't change the string ... [laughs] it was very hard! ...

JK: You taught yourself to do that –

LW: Uh hm, with the – yeah, with some copies [music books]. (2006)

As Lisa's narrative continues, multi-generational living arrangements challenge conceptions of the family as an independent and self-contained unit. Despite the existence of care facilities for the elderly in Mexico's Mennonite colonies, it remains common for parents to live with their children following the death of a spouse, or when no longer able to care for themselves. For Lisa, this practice transformed her experience of musical practice in the domestic domain:

LW: Then very soon my grandma lived with my family, because my grandfather passed away, died, and then, eh, my mom never wanted that my grandmother would know that I had a guitar. So – [laughs] about in the evening, from when it was dark outside, I had to, I walked out, um, behind the stable. That's where I was practicing guitar. [Laughs].

JK: And did your grandmother ever find out?

LW: No. [Laughs].

JK: So you had, did you have any instruments in your house, or was that *verboten*?

LW: In my family it wasn't *verboten*. Aah, no I had an older sister, she plays accordion, and I have one brother, he plays guitar. Yeah, we did it before my grandmother moved to our home.

JK: OK. And then after she did, then you just wouldn't play any of those instruments around her?

LW: Actually we would play on Sunday when she went to [visit] – to my uncle. [Laughs]. (2006)



Figure 4.2. *Left*, Lisa Wolf with author during interview. Manitoba Colony, Mexico; *right*, Simon Neufeld, Lisa Wolf, mother Maria Wolf, and sister Tina Wolf at Maria and Tina's home in Santa Rita Colony, Mexico.

In many ways, so-called individual acts of defiance against a collective church body would have been impossible without the negotiations that occurred in the in-between spaces of home and family. In Lisa's case, "home" was an exception to *Musik*'s prohibition, so long as her grandmother remained absent. However, the unspoken disapproval of Lisa's grandmother is enough to curtail *Musik*'s presence in the home for as long as she lives there. This negotiation alludes to the significance of generational differences in determining appropriate musical practice in the domestic sphere. Lisa's mother is comfortable with defying church protocol (i.e. allowing Lisa to play the guitar at home), so long as her own mother remains unaware; the restriction of Lisa's guitar playing is implemented by her mother, but instigated by her grandmother. In this sense, Lisa's mother acts as a mediator between Lisa's *Musik*, and the "old ways" represented by her grandmother.

Despite the generational differences implied in this narrative, however, musical defiance was not only practiced among conserving young people. Both the involvement of Lisa's mother in enabling her guitar playing, and Lisa's earlier narrative about the gramophone beneath her grandfather's bed, suggest otherwise. The socializing patterns in many conserving villages contributed to musically defiant song practices among youth, but, as will be addressed later, these patterns were in many cases enabled by spoken or unspoken parental consent.

In narratives about *Musik* in conserving communities, proscription guidelines applied to all members of the Old Colony church. The severity of their application, however, was often magnified, depending on one's role in the community. Again, the

family home does not represent a clear boundary between private and public spaces, especially in contexts where workplace and home overlap:

AW: Das wurde früher ganz verboten. ... Mein Vater, so lange er in der Schule gewohnt hat, hatten wir keinen Instrumenten dürfen im Haus. Aber als er erst in sein eigenen Haus hinein zog, dann, dann ja.

LW: Also weil er ein Lehrer war, wohnt er lange im Schulhaus. Da wollte er das respektieren, weil das nicht erlaubt war. Aber als er, er sein eigenen Haus hatte, dann konnte man ihn nicht rausjagen wenn er Instrumenten hatten wurde.

[Laughter]. Nicht so? (A. Wolf and L. Wolf 2006)

AW: That was earlier completely forbidden. ... My father, as long as we lived in the schoolhouse, we didn't have any instruments in the house. But when he moved into his own house, then yes.

LW: So, while he was a teacher, he lived a long time in the schoolhouse. There he wanted to respect that it was not allowed [to have instruments]. But when he had his own house, then nobody could chase him out if he would have instruments! [Laughter]. Isn't that so?

Because home and school are the primary contexts for raising children into Old Colony lifeways, it is not surprising that Abram's narrative presents them as contested spaces. The common practice of having the teacher reside in a teacherage attached to the school building makes the distinction between work and home, between church member and church representative, unclear. What is very clear in this scenario, however, is a recognition of the "social effects" (Sugarman 1997, 27) connected with a teacher's musicking. In the classroom, the Old Colony teacher's impact on his students is explicit.¹³⁵ Hence, elders maintained strict watch on his activities at home.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ To date, Old Colony teachers in northern Mexico are always male.

¹³⁶ The overlapping of a teacher's home and workspace, however, is not always a burden. Nor is surveillance unique to community leaders. While visiting an Old Colony school in 2006, Jack, Mary, Simon, and I were entertained comfortably in the teacher's *groote Stow* (Low German; "large room" or "parlour") during the student lunch break. When the time came for students to settle back into their desks, the teacher did not excuse himself, but was able to peer into the classroom through two tiny holes that had been

In cases where one's work was less open to public scrutiny, caution was nevertheless important where music was concerned. Fluid social and family boundaries complicated this process, and made the evasion of leakages difficult to avoid. Whereas some individuals describe the closing of doors and windows in order to keep the sounds of radio or other instruments indoors, others describe sharing or accessing forbidden music events by opening the same. One informant described, for example, how attendance at a Bible school program would be unacceptable for an Old Colony preacher. He could, however, open the door to his house and listen from the yard.¹³⁷ Regardless of efforts to contain or access particular sound waves, secrets – like the sounds themselves – are difficult to keep. Peter Heide (Figure 4.3), who grew up in Durango, Mexico, and remained in the Old Colony church until the mid-1990s, recalls the efforts made by his own family in this regard:

PH: Did you ever see an old, old record player? With a crank?

bored into a door connecting the schoolroom to his family living quarters. When time came for classes to begin, he simply stepped from the living room/bedroom, and into his workplace. The teacher's view from his living room and the power embedded in his "unseen eye" connects in some ways with Foucault's conceptions of observation and the panopticon. In "The Means of Correct Training" in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes, "The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible" (1977, 170-71). He goes on to discuss architecture in particular, one that "would operate to transform individuals; to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them" (1977, 172). The motives of this Old Colony educator seemed more practical and less sinister than those outlined above. Still, the significance of village schools as sites of training for participation in a particular way of life makes a provocative comparison.

¹³⁷ Music-related infractions in northern Mexico are no longer monitored as they once were. Still, not all musical practices are readily accepted, particularly those affiliated with external influences, be they Spanish Mexican or evangelical Christian.

JK: Yes.

PH: What's the name of it?

JK: Well, I guess a gramophone would be one of the names.

PH: Gramophone, OK. ...

... That was a secret from the neighbours.

JH: You couldn't tell anyone.

PH: No, you couldn't tell nobody. OK, now I tell you about the story about that. We were listening to it. My older sister, she had a boyfriend, and he couldn't be quiet and he told somewhere. So that [the gramophone] had to be put away so that nobody would see it anymore. Then, we went from Durango to Zacatecas, my parents moved, and they brought it [the gramophone] over. My dad had a brother over here, ... and when I was 13 years old, then my parents brought that to his brother over here because it was a problem. See? Then, when he [Dad's brother] came out from his room, he had it in a Sack. He had it in a bag. And I said, "Hoooh, what do you have there?" And he said [sternly], "Peter? Be quiet please." [Laughter]. And I had to be quiet. And then after they went away, then I remembered, "That's the old gramophone!" We have never seen it since then. (P. Heide and J. Heide 2006b)

In instances where musical instruments were allowed in the home, their parameters of use were often complex.¹³⁸ During an interview together with his son, Johan, Peter goes on to describe his first harmonica, and the stipulations around its acquisition that were laid out by his own father:

PH: I laid it down on the table in front of him – that was at dinner time – and he looked at it that way, and he turned it around, and he said, "Take it away, I don't want it over here." After and I was smiling so much, and [acting] all my best, and then he said, "Yeah, you can have 14 pesos, but DON'T play in the house. Please, don't bother nobody with that." Oh, I was so happy. [Laughter].

So, OK, then we had a Stroodäl—

JH: Pile of bales –

PH: That weren't bales, that was the old time where they had –

JH: Just straw, uh, the story of Joseph in the Bible where they –

JK: Oh yeah, yeah. Were they – sheaves?

JH: That's right. Sheaves. They would just pile up the sheaves.

¹³⁸ Abram Wolf recalls learning to play by himself: "Daut deid ekj in diestern, weetst? Woo mie kjeen Mensch saj!" (Low German; "That I did in the dark, you know? Where no-one would see me!") (2006).

PH: Then I went, and made myself a hole in there, and I was – whoa whoa whoa whoa – I was sixteen years old. (P. Heide and J. Heide 2006b)

The image of Peter Heide playing harmonica in the sheaves is not only an amusing example of “private” music making taken to the extreme; his narrative draws attention to the negotiations around instrument use in conserving Mennonite families. Peter’s music making was a personal, but paternally sanctioned activity, an individual defiance enabled by familial consent. Whether Peter conceived of his harmonica playing as a form of rebellion or not is unclear in his narrative. His willingness to conceal his *Musik*, however, suggests that he well understood its prohibition.



Figure 4.3. Peter Heide pictured with his wife, Anna, and two of their children at their home in Durango, Mexico. From left: Anna Heide, Anna Heide, Trudy Heide, and Peter Heide.

Attempts to maintain musical secrets among extended family members, however, were not always successful. Johan and Katarina Peters both grew up in conserving households, joining a CMM congregation only after they were married. Johan recalls:

JP: I was a small boy, and we lived down, close to Steinreich. And one day my parents went to Cuauhtémoc and they left us with the grandparents. They lived here in Camp 22, and they had a two-storey house.

KP: Upstairs?

JP: Upstairs. And then there was a little hole there in that, *enn dann* [and then] me, and I think my brother was around, or maybe mostly me –

KP: Jake?

JP: I think it was mostly me, *na dann* [well then], we start singin' up there.

KP: Upstairs.

JP: What we know. We start singin' and auu, they were listening and they like it soo much. And-a, and they was listening and how we singin' and, "How you can sing that well?" And I was a small boy I say, "Well we got that Grammafoonschiew hat [record that has] all the songs in it."

"Grammafoonschiew? Haa." And they didn't know what to say. And after that when we went home I told my parents that. "Hey, you shouldn't told that. Now we going to be in problem."

KP: Parents don't want them to have the music at home –

JP: Like the gramophone. They didn't know, I didn't knew they couldn't have that! That they don't allow that.

KP: That was private, right? [Laughs].

JP: Because I was still a small little boy. [Laughs].

(Johan and K. Peters 2006b)

Whereas Bohlman posits a metaphorical relationship between American church and family, the link is tangible among Mexico's Mennonites; church members *are* family members. Familial exemptions to church rules around music thus become complicated, as there is no decisive point at which 'familial exemption' ends and 'community accountability' begins. As Johan Peters' narrative continues, a further twist in this reading of illicit musicking is introduced. The offending songs performed by Johan and his brother are identified as German gospel hymns:

JP: "Can you sing the songs again?" I know I remember that one was "*Gott ist die Liebe*," ["God is love"] and the other was "*Singe mir es noch einmal vor*" ["Sing it again to me"]. Those are the songs what was on there. And I still was singing those again, and I was still a small boy. [Laughs].

JK: So grandparents didn't think it was good to have a gramophone at home?

JP: No, I think that was bad, but they really loved those songs, I don't know. [Laughs]. Yah, my parents had a hard time then they'd say, "Now we are going to be in a problem." [Laughs]. (2006b)

Johan did not bring musical instruments into his grandparents house, nor was he singing Spanish *rancheros*. Here, the singing of "Gott ist die Liebe" by young Mennonite boys to their grandparents is transformed from a metonym for conserving religious life and multi-generational unity, to the betrayal of a family secret. This narrative forces the recognition that not all "defiant musical acts" were intentional challenges to community norms. That is to say, Johan and his brother were not engaging in a subversive plot to undermine church leadership; they were singing gospel songs to their grandparents. Still in this instance, hymns are transformed from vessels of spiritual nourishment to symbols of disobedience, with the potential to incite controversy at both familial and church levels.

4.2.3 "Wo? Auf der Strasse?"¹³⁹ *Keeping Instruments at Home*

Just as melodies were transportable, so were many instruments. Accordions, guitars and harmonicas (and to a lesser extent autoharps and fiddles), were preferred instruments in northern Mexico's Mennonite colonies. Their mobility made it difficult for parents to monitor the musical escapades of their children and often resulted in the strict, and sometimes amusing, regulation of musical access and activities. Abram Wolf describes his interaction with his father over his first instrument:

AW: Ja. Dann kaufte er sich ein Radio. Und das war ein altes Dinget, und die Jugend Knaben hatten eine –
LW: Zieharmonica.

¹³⁹ High German; "Where? On the street?" (A. Wolf 2006).

AW: Ja. Und die verstand eben wenig zu brauchen. So, und die Knaben, die jugend Knaben die wollten auch gerne ein Radio, und sagten sie mir ich soll Vater fragen, ob wir tauschen wollen. Ich fragte ihm danach, und, "Was willst du das Ding!"

"Na, zum spielen."

"Wo, auf der Strasse?"

"Nein, ich werde es zu Hause lassen."

"Na, dann, werdest vielleicht schaffen."

Und dann tauschten sie. Und dann hatte ich das Ding. Aber ich hatte keine freiheit das mit auf der Strasse zu nehmen oder zum spatzeiren gehen. (2006)

AW: Ja. Then he bought himself a radio. And it was an old thing, and the youth boys had an –

LW: Accordion.

AW: Yes. And they understood little about how to play it. And the boys, the youth, they also eagerly wanted a radio, and said that I should ask my father if we wanted to trade. I asked him about it, and,

"For what do you want that thing?"

"Well, to play."

"Where, on the streets?"

"No, I would leave it at home."

"Na, then maybe it will work."

And then they traded. And then I had the thing [accordion]. But I was not allowed to take it along on the streets, or along visiting.

Ben Schmitt, who grew up in an Old Colony family, also recalls complications around instrument use at home during his childhood:

BS: Radio, daut haud wie plietsch. Wie haud uck mol en' Accordion – ekj haud eena. Daut wea so trublich.

JK: Wuaromm?

BS: Dee Prädjasch, dee kjeemen bei onns opp'en Hof je'foaren, ütspaunen, weits? Met Pied. Enn dan wea de Foda seeja Angst wan wie wudden spälen ooda dei daut wudden enwoaren. Oba hee wea, endlich wea hee nijch doa'jäajen, oba dann haud hee Angst.

En ekj haud eenmol en Fiddle ... Ekj enn noch een Jung toop, enn wie wisten je nuscht von Wiesen spälen, oba wie spälten dan oppe Gauss, enn dan kjäm Foda mol enn loamd onns seeja üt. [Laughter]. (2006)

BS: Radio, that we had in secret. We also had once an accordion – I had one. That was so troublesome.

JK: Why?

BS: The preachers, they came by our place and drove onto our yard, unhitching, you know? With horses. And then had father much worry if we would play, or

that they would notice. But he was, in the end he had nothing against it, but he was afraid.

And I had once a fiddle ... I and another boy together, and we didn't know anything about playing melodies, but we played on the street, and then came father and really scolded us. [Laughter].

The mediating role of the family – in these narratives, parental consent – is again significant here. Both Abram and Ben refer to the presence of radio in their homes, and to their individual ownership of accordions. Given the cost of these devices and the proscription on *Musik* in their communities, it is not peculiar for Abram and Ben to mention paternal involvement in relation to their acquisition. Parental involvement does not end with the instrument's purchase, however. The monitoring of instrument use, and the concern expressed around it, highlight familial involvement with regard to *Musik*. Even in instances of individual performance, consequences are exacted, and exceptions made, at home first.

4.2.4 Intentionally Un-covert

The previous narratives paint a portrait of careful musical defiance, balancing unspoken domestic resistance with community accommodation. Not all church members, however, were equally cautious. David Peters – a pastor at the CMM church in Burwalde – recalls his father's unconventional profession as an Old Colony electrician and mechanic and explains some of the unorthodox benefits of his father's work:

DP: Mein Vater hatte das gelernt. Er repariert sie, solche Dinge, zu seiner Zeit. Als ich klein war da waren immer nicht, nicht zwei-drei in der Schmiede, da waren viele!

JK: Gramophones?

DP: Ja. Gramophones und Radios die die Menschen aus dem Ranchos, die Mexikaner brachten die weil mein Vater war der einzige in der Umgebung der solche reparierte. Und dann, noch, wir – Wann wir selber nicht hätten gehabt,

dann taten wir doch immer hörchen! Da waren immer solche in unser, in unser Heim. (2006a)

DP: My father had learned that. He fixed them [gramophones], such things, in his time. When I was small there were not just two or three in the workshop, there were many!

JK: Gramophones?

DP: Yes. Gramophones and radios from the ranchos, brought in by the Mexicans, as my father was the only one in the area who fixed such things. And so, even if we didn't have our own, we could listen anyways! There were always such things in our, in our home.

For David's father, Jacob Peters (Figure 4.4), challenging the status quo began at an early age, and was in keeping with his own family history:

Ekj ha äwent – woo soll ekj sajen – en Grammafoon, to jane tiet, aus ekj so 'en nata Jung wea, also dan wea doa noch nijch dise elektronische, da wea – [laughs], da wea dee met de Fada, opp' too trajkje, jo? Enn hea, nü aus et Oolt Kolonier wearen dee wearen soo seeja fe'boten de Mü'sikj, oba ekj wea emma soo seeja doabenn enn ekj kunn, enn de Foda, hee wea uck nijch soo seeja Oolt Kolonie. [Laughs]. Oba, dan moak ekj mie eent. (2006)

I have even – how should I say – a gramophone, at that time, when I was a young lad, but there was not yet this “electronics,” it was – [laughs], it was [made] with a spring, to wind it up, yes? And here, among the Old Colony music was so very forbidden, but I was always so involved [with music], and father, he was also not so very Old Colony. [Laughs]. But, then I made one [a gramophone] for myself.

In later years, the apparent inconsistency between Jacob's work and his participation in the Old Colony church did not trouble him, as his primary concern remained the care of his family. In his own words,

Ekj haud en grootet Mechanic Shop. Wie deeden Motors re – rebuilden, Krakjt endoont woat doa kjäm, auf daut en Tractor wea opp de picke, ooda auf daut oppe Rad wea, ooda aufs daut en Koa wea, ooda auf daut en Truck wea, en dan jeft daut Probleem bie de Oolt Koloniesche Je'meende, dan kjiejch ekj Probleeme met dee. Dan säd ekj de Oolt Koloniesche Je'meende auf, weits? “Büte jie welle mie feeden dan et's goot, oba wenn ekj mie soll selwst miene Familje feeden, dan, dan lot mie schaufen soo aus ekj kaun.” [Laughs]. (2006)

I had a big mechanic shop. We rebuilt motors, for whatever came – whether that was a tractor with picks or rubber tires, or if it was a car, or if it was a truck, and that caused a problem with the Old Colony church, I ran into problems with them. Then I told the Old Colony church off, you know? “If you want to feed my family then that’s fine, but if I should feed my family myself, then let me work the way I can.” [Laughs].

In some ways, the paradox lived by Jacob Peters is anything but paradoxical. It is clear that expected patterns of Old Colony behavior were defied: Jacob’s very livelihood depended on forbidden instruments and machines. That he learned his trade by correspondence with the aid of audio language-learning programs, and that much of his clientele came from outside the Mennonite colonies, only exacerbates this seeming incongruity. However, as his encounter with church leaders demonstrates, Jacob’s understanding of “church” assumed the primacy of community; community censure divorced from community support held little weight with him.



Figure 4.4. Jacob Peters shows me his workshop, Swift Current Colony, Mexico.

4.2.5 *Shifting Alliances? Mennonite Youth Dancing in Mexico*

Wie han seeja je'daunst! / *We really danced! [in the past].*
(M. Schmitt 2006)

* * *

Despite abundant narratives describing familial secrecy around musicking in conserving Mennonite homes, this was not the only place in which musical alliances were forged. The sections that follow demonstrate an apparent shift in loyalty from family to peer group. In each case, however, familial connections prove difficult to leave behind.

4.2.5.1 *Shifting Alliances #1: From Family to Peers to Spanish-Mexico? Cross-Cultural Relations in Mennonite Mexico*

Maria Schmitt's (Figure 4.5) narrative refers to youth dances that were secretly held in Mennonite kitchens on Sunday afternoons. Her comical account implies that the secret plots of Old Colony youth were less "under the covers" than youth often believed:

Miene Elleren hauden 'ne seeja groote Kjaekj Tüss, fe dän Dauns. Enn dee hauden twischen twee Däären haude see twee Mäldoosen stonen. Enn dan, oooh, doa wort soo seeja je'daunst (dee Elleren wearen nijch Tüss – dee wearn no'em Darp je'foren rüt bie mien elsta Brooda spat'searen), enn dan, bie-aun dän Dauns met eenst dan wea dee Mäldoos ommjestelpt, enn daut Rollholt haud se' uck emma benn, enn daut Brat t'um Kjielkje schnieden, enn de Schoop, Mälschoop met eenst dan ligjt daut, wea 'ne Doos omm je'stelpt, enn daut Mäl ütjeschett, enn daut Rollholt enn dee Schoop, aules ligjt doa opp de Flua enn daun wea daut opp eenmol derch daut daunsen!

My parents had a very big kitchen at home, for the dancing. And they had, between two doors they had two flour boxes standing. And then, oooh, there was such a lot of dancing (the parents weren't home – they had driven to the village to visit my oldest brother), and then, the others danced and all at once the flour box tipped over, and the rolling pin had she [mother] also always inside it, and the board for cutting noodles, and the scoop, the flour scoop, at once it lay there, a box had fallen over and the flour had spilled out, the rolling pin and the scoop all lay there on the floor and then all at once was the dancing finished!

Na jo, Waut nü? Nü wist 'we nijch waut – wea en schoof Mäl ütjeschett – waut wie nü doamet wullen, oba wie fäjen daut toop. Enn wie hauden Soagespoon ennjeschtreit – kjann jie Soagespoon woat von Holt daut fiene jeft? – daut wort eascht emma seeja fäl ennjeschtreit daut dee Fluaren reina bleewen.

So, what now? Now we didn't know what – a lot of flour had spilled out – what to do with that, but we swept it together. And we had sawdust strewn – do you know sawdust, what from wood the 'fine stuff' gives? – that was strewn about very often in the past so that the floors would stay cleaner.

Enn nan, na jo, enn daut, docht ekj soo daut büten opp' enn Mest Hüpen droagen, emma fomm Staul wort han je'feat. Wudden daut doa han motten schedden, oba doa docht ekj wudden see daut seenen. Doa weea soo fäl wittet Mäl, daut wud nijch schaufen mank enn Soagespoon. [Laughs]. Enn dan met eenmol dan wie jingen wie rearden daut mank dän Schwiensfooda. [Laughs]. Dann kjrieejen dee Schwein noch bloos soo fäl mea Fooda! Mäl enn Soagespoon! [Laughter].

And then, I thought to carry it outside to the manure pile – always from the barn things were carried there. We could pour it there, but there I thought they would see it. There was so much white flour that it wouldn't work with sawdust in it. [Laughs]. And then at once we went and stirred it in with the pig feed. [Laughs]. Then the pigs just got that much more food! Flour and sawdust! [Laughter].

Oh, fe'schiedenstet haft eena be'läwt! [Laughter].
Daut haft scheen je'gonen. Wie han ne' seeja goode Jugentiet je'haud. ...

*Oh, different things has one experienced! [Laughter].
That was fun. We had a very good youth time. ...*

... Enn dan, aus miene Ellren no Hüss kjeemen, von spat'searen, daut wea meist Ovents, daut passearden, dann spood wie onns aul daut wud fe'recht kjrieejen. Doa wort fresch Soagespoon ennjeschtreit. Enn dan, na jo, aus wie daut aule fe'recht enn uck aule schmock oppjeriimt be'sorjcht hauden, 'jing de Jugend dan wajch, fe'leet dee enn nan, kjeemen dee Ellren uck meist fuats no Hüss, enn säd Mama, "Jie han secha seeja onnjeläwt."
Na, "Woaromm?"
Säd se, "Jie han fresch Soagespoon ennjeschtreit." [Laughter].

... And then, when my parents came home, from visiting, it was almost evening when this happened, then we hurried so that we'd have everything in order. There was fresh sawdust spread out. And then, well, when we had everything in order and nicely cleaned up, then the youth left, and then the parents came home almost immediately thereafter, and Mama said "You have really lived it up," Well, "Why?"

She said, "You've spread fresh sawdust!" [Laughter].

Daut ku' wie nijch plietsch hoolen. Nijch bie miene Ellren bruck wie daut nijch plietsch hoolen. Dee wearen nijch doa'jääjen. (2006)

That we couldn't keep a secret. And we didn't have to with my parents. They weren't against it.



Figure 4.5. Maria and Ben Schmitt at their home in the Swift Current Colony, Mexico.

The extent to which Maria's narrative resonates with the classic "party at home while the parents are *spat 'sear-ing*" plots of situation comedy is striking. Loud music, raucous dancing, a disaster that requires immediate attention – each of these elements is cause for great alarm. Still, the cover-up is thwarted, not because of what was *wrong* with the house upon her parents' return home, but because of what was *right*; the house was too clean after the accident. Further, the story does not end with the peer group, but with Maria's parents' return home. Maria's final assertion, that her parents were not opposed to Sunday afternoon musicking in the kitchen, implies that the elaborate cover-up was less about keeping secrets from them than it was about recognizing community protocol and the expected roles played by young people in relation to their parents.

At the same time, symbols of Mennonite lifeways figure prominently in Maria's story. The dance party takes place in the kitchen while the parents are out visiting, and it is a box of flour, and not a keg of beer, that spills onto the floor; the flour scoop and the knife and board used for cutting *Kjielkje* noodles – symbols of Mennonite domestic life – figure also. In the absence of a discreet garbage disposal system, the timely concealment of the evidence is impossible and its ingestion by farm animals becomes the only means of escape. Were an “essential” portrait of rural Mennonite life sought, this narrative might capture it precisely.

We do not, however, seek such a portrait, nor has Maria's narrative been fully explored. Many aspects of the youth dance were unique to the Mexican Mennonites who organized and participated in them, but dance narratives also reveal surprising connections to Spanish Mexico. The postcard in Figure 4.6 depicts “a typical Sunday afternoon for young singles in the forties,” and brings to the fore an entirely new set of reference points for Mennonite youth gatherings – points that call essentialist metonyms into question.



Figure 4.6. Postcard of Old Colony Mennonite youth in northern Mexico, circa 1940s. Postcard distributed by *Chihuahua Gobierno del Estado, Secretaria de Desarrollo Comercial y Turismo* (Chihuahua Government of the State, Secretary of Commercial Development and Tourism). Purchased by the author in 2006.

This postcard was purchased at the *Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita, A.C.* near Cuauhtémoc, Mexico and is part of a series of cards distributed by *Chihuahua Gobierno del Estado, Secretaria de Desarrollo Comercial y Turismo* (Chihuahua Government of the State, Secretary of Commercial Development and Tourism). Upon first glance, the uniformity of dress among the youth is noticeable. Hats, scarves, and *Schlaubbekjse* (Low German; “overalls”) are predominant, and are similar to the styles worn by Old Colony youth today.¹⁴⁰ Besides iconic dress, deviations from expected norms are implied with the presence of a harmonica (bottom group, second from left) and a bottle that resembles a flask of alcohol (top group, second from left). When I showed this postcard to Annie Rempel, a Mexican Mennonite woman who would have been an Old Colony

¹⁴⁰ While these fashions would not be out of place in northern Mexico, young men’s attire has changed. Overalls are still worn by some, but jeans, western-style button shirts, baseball caps, and cowboy hats have become popular in recent years.

youth at the time the photo was taken, however, it was neither uniformity nor deviant behaviours that caught her eye. Instead, she pointed to the man in the bottom left corner of the picture and said, “Daut es en Mexa!” (Low German; “That is a Mexican!”).

Referring to related stories told her by her mother, Annie’s daughter Suzanna recalls,¹⁴¹

SR: My parents they [laughs], my mom [laughs]; she sometimes tells us that at that time, Old Colony Mennonites, when my parents were young people, they had some kinds of dance. And there was one Mexican rancher, he would come from a, from a rancho to, not in my mom’s house, I know, I think in my dad’s house at that time, then they would have, they had a big room and they all of them they had the wooden slippers, for the dance, and they had a kind of dance. And so the Mexican, he would play the accordion for the youth.

JK: Wow, and that was Old Colony, then –

SR: That was Old Colony Mennonite.

JK: Do you know what kind of songs he would play for that?

SR: No, that was Spanish *rancheros*! (2006)

Concurring reports from other informants suggest that this Mexican accordion player was well-known among Mennonites in the region. The significance of music as a site for crossing social and cultural boundaries – even while knocking over a box of flour in a conserving Mennonite farmhouse – is relevant to this study. The musical repertoires performed at youth dances, and the instruments used to perform them, are telling in that they connect Mennonites both to pre-migration song practices and to the new environment in which they now found themselves. Not only did the latter imply association with the ‘worldly’ influences of Spanish culture and ‘inappropriate’ song themes (Spanish *corridos* and *rancheros*), these songs were learned from radios, records, and, apparently, from at least one Spanish Mexican accordion player in the colonies:

MS: Dan, wea doa een oola Einheima – fe onns wea daut en Oola –

BS: Oh ja, daut wea dan uck aul en erno a Oola.

¹⁴¹ Annie and Suzanna Rempel are pseudonyms, used at Annie’s request.

MS: Enn dee, dee haud en *Accordion*, enn doa späld dee met, enn wie daunsten enn deeden. ...

... Enn die Jügent haude je'daut dän dan foaken von Maddoch bott jaaen Owent, enn dan jeewe see dän 20 Cent daut Leed, jleew' ekj, enn nan deed hee spälen, enn nan – . Wada de Junges doa, dee Deitsche Junges woat doa dann wearn, dee deeden met de Mulschiara spälen, enn callen. (Schmitt and Schmitt 2006)¹⁴²

MS: Then there was always a "native" Mexican – for us he was an old man –

BS: Oh yes, he was already quite an old man.

MS: And he, he had an accordion, and he played along, and we danced. ...

*... And the youth often were together from lunch until early evening, and we would give him 20 cents per song, I think, and then he played. And the boys, the German [Mennonite] boys that were there, they played harmonica and "called."*¹⁴³

According to Ben and Maria Schmitt, not only did the Mexican accordion player accompany at covert youth dances, he was well known in the Mennonite colonies:

MS: Enn daut wea en feena Mensch, dee Menschen jleijchten dän. Dee 'jing 'romm, enn spält met *Accordion*, enn nan, wää daut jleijcht dee jeft een poa Centen, enn nan –

BS: Doa bei deed dän Maun sien läwen met moaken. Daut wea ne oame Familje, enn hee däd emma, daut wea sien Oabeit – hee 'jing emma 'romm, en Woakjeldach, emma, emma 'jing hee 'romm enn späld, enn kräjch hee doa een bät Jeld, enn nan. Dän siene Fingasch dee wearen gaunz drahl je'want, en Dümen. Daut wea noch soona met dise dee twee Läpels! Dee haud bloos twee Läpels doa weetst? Dee haud nijch hea soo dise 'räj.' (2006)

MS: He was a good man, people liked him. He went around, and played his accordion, and then, those who liked it gave him a few cents, and then –

¹⁴² The practice of paying performers "per song" is not uncommon in Mexico. In *talón* (Spanish "shoe heel") playing, for example, Mariachi bands visit bars and restaurants by foot, looking for clients interested in purchasing a song. Once a price is established, the band performs, and splits their earnings between them (Sheehy 2006, 66).

¹⁴³ Ben and Maria Schmitt were married into the Old Colony church, but left in 1971 and are now part of a CMM congregation near their home in Burwalde, Mexico. Music was an important part of their family life when their children still lived at home, and continues to play an important role when the family gathers. In hearing them sing together, and in conversation with Ben and Maria's children, the continued importance of music in connecting family members to one another is apparent.

BS: That is how the man made his living. That was a poor family, and he always did, that was his living – he went around on workdays always, always he went around and played, and received a bit of money for it. His fingers were completely gnarled, and his thumb. That [gestures as though playing an accordion] was such as had only two spoons!¹⁴⁴ It had just two spoons there, you know? It did not have a row.

As with many narratives describing incongruities between Old Colony “rules” and the use of musical instruments in private and public contexts, stories about this Mexican *Einheima* were recounted by Mennonites in more than one village. The presence of a Spanish Mexican accordion player in the colonies, and the acceptance of his contact with youth and with others in the region are significant. They indicate that despite emphases on separatist communities and nonconformity among Mennonites in northern Mexico, the “territories” they occupied were less rigidly patrolled than often portrayed.

4.2.5.2 Shifting Alliances #2: Who Gets the Last Word? Navigating Family, Peer, and Church Affiliations in a Multidimensional Narrative

After recounting his father’s role in acquiring a harmonica, Peter Heide describes how his own ability to play the instrument allowed him to cross social boundaries usually determined by age and its affiliated social status:

That’s the funniest thing about that. And I learned to play, I guess very well – well right now I would say very well. And then you know the bunches [groups] are bigger and smaller? And the big bunch and there are small bunch, and there are olders and there were, we called they were the big bunch. There were, oh I would say 18, 19 years old, and I were 16, so I didn’t belong to that bunch. I couldn’t go there! I had my bunch and we would [...] ¹⁴⁵ somewhere else. So the big bunch came and were getting me to play, they want to dance, you know?

¹⁴⁴ Ben’s description here suggests that he is referring to a button accordion. The “spoon keys” he describes have been associated with both Cajun accordions and with the Hohner “German Style” accordion.

¹⁴⁵ In my transcriptions, I use three ellipsis points enclosed within square brackets [...] to indicate unintelligible portions of the audio recording.

Then I went with them. Ooh, you wouldn't believe how proud I was. I would belong to the "bigs." OK, then we went to one room, one house, where there were a bunch of boys and girls, and [laughs] then, I started to play. They had a harmonica, I didn't have one. They had a harmonica. Then I started to play, I don't know if you know the song, uh, "Yankee Doodle"? (2006b)

Peter's challenging of social boundaries, however, was allowable only to a point, and this point was directly proportional to his perceived usefulness by the older "bunch":

PH: OK, and then we were playing that ["Zig Zag"¹⁴⁶]. And they, and the bunch started to dance, they were dancing – oh, quite full – there was one girl left. And I was the player, so I thought by myself I could play and dance also too. So I ask her and she said, "That's OK, let's dance," and play. Once they were tired, jumping and bumping around,

JH: Then they kicked Dad out!

PH: Then they kicked me out! [Laughter]. I had pants like this [gestures to his overalls]; and they grab them by the back part, and they gave me a foot on the bottom, so "Git! You're done!" So I was, I just was proud I could play and I could dance with a girl...

... That was in a house. The parents weren't home. ... After – that was Sunday – on Tuesday, then my dad got visitors. "Your Peter was playing and dancing at the other house." "Well, OK." Ahh, my dad said, so far as he was concerned I didn't have a harmonica. Well he could ask me about that. And now I won't have a harmonica and whose harmonica was it. I was always honest with my dad, and said, "Oh, ... he knew what he would do with that. I didn't know. So anyhow, I shouldn't done that. I think – no, my dad didn't never, I – not even said he would spank me. But I think they were told to do it.

JK: Really –

PH: Because they done it. But he never did. He never did. But I think he were told to do it.

JK: By the visitors?

PH: No, by the, the visitors were the – preachers,

JH: They were just the messengers –

¹⁴⁶ While they are not identical, the version of "Zig Zag" played by Maria Schmitt on the harmonica has a melody similar to "Sikj, Sakj, Hakj en Tee" (Low German; "Zick, Zack, Heel and Toe"), a song collected by Doreen Klassen in southern Manitoba and included in *Singing Mennonite* (1989, 191). Klassen writes that the song was known by Mennonites with an Old Colony background in Manitoba, and that its lyrics were typical of the social activities of some Old Colony young people "before the middle of the century" (1989, 192).

PH: – Preachers. ... So that was the biggest story about what makes me laughing. A person get a job and that was the pay for it. [Laughter]. And that's what I liked too. (P. Heide and J. Heide 2006b)

Peter's ability to play the harmonica enabled him to traverse boundaries of social status among the youth in his community, despite his being only 16. Unspoken stipulations were attached to this traversal, however. He was welcome to play his harmonica at the dance with the older, "big bunch," but when they tired of "jumping and bumping around," Peter was kicked out. Peter's forced removal by the youth did not mark the end of this episode, however. Again, family relationships are shown to be an integral part of musical activities, or at least to the consequences associated with illicit musicking. The story not only reached Peter's parents within two days, but implicated them as well. Peter's description demonstrates the weaving together of church, family, individual, and peer group in his Old Colony youth, a description that resonates with Mazo's description of Molokan American experience:

[T]he collective experience and the experiences of the individuals are completely interdependent, if not altogether inseparable. Anyone willing to approach a living culture as a dynamic, complex, and dialectic phenomenon is confronted with this multidimensional dilemma. (2006, 84)

In Peter's narrative, we find collective and individual experiences that are interdependent. At his father's request, Peter learns to play the harmonica by himself while hiding in the sheaves. His ability to play, however, is not confined to this secret place, nor to his family home, but is known by the youth in his village, who invite him to play at their dance. After this breach of church protocol, Peter's parents are held accountable to church proscriptions as the "visit" demonstrates. But the family is not unequivocally governed by the message delivered by the visitors. Peter's father

determines what form of discipline, if any, Peter receives, and in the end, Peter is still able to laugh about the sequence of events.

The interdependence of so-called individual and collective spheres is clear in this account. This sequence of overlaps, however, also shows that despite a narrative's multidimensional nature, its "dimensions" are not always equally significant for the narrator. For example, while Peter describes the involvement of his parents in relation to the preachers' visit, he does not end his story there. Instead, he returns to the youth: "So that was the biggest story about what makes me laughing. A person get a job and that was the pay for it!" (P. Heide 2006b). A harsh punishment from Peter's parents may have lessened the humorous component for Peter in the narrating of this event. Still, the absence of a strict reprimand from his parents does not shift his attention to familial involvement at the story's close. Peter emphasizes not the mercy of his father's actions, but the humour of being jilted by the "big bunch." The mediating role of the family is important to this narrative, but does not seem extraordinary; Peter does not dwell on it.

4.2.6 Defiance is Not Always Amusing

4.2.6.1 Mischief and the Difficulties of Laughing Alone

Allusions to foiled attempts at secrecy and the comical aftermath surface repeatedly when speaking with Mennonites of conserving roots. Recollections of illicit *Musik*, however, are not always the food of nostalgic reminiscence. As alluded to earlier, Peter Heide remembers his father being encouraged to discipline him forcefully for having played a harmonica at a youth dance. Peter's son Johan Heide suggests,

If the Old Colony found out about it [a musical instrument], then they, the preachers would come over and you would have to break it, or throw it away. Or they would take it and destroy it. By force. It was – I don't know – very, very strict. (2006b)

Frank Neufeld too remembers a strict upbringing as the son of an Old Colony deacon, and the absolute prohibition of music in his childhood home.¹⁴⁷ This censure extended beyond musical instruments and radios to include the singing of anything but *lange Wies*. While other song forms were not explicitly forbidden, Frank recounts that “if father doesn't sing, the children won't sing either” (2006).

Frank Neufeld also remembers playing the harmonica as a youth, while Tina (Frank's wife) notes the ease of concealment enabled by its small size.¹⁴⁸ When he was fifteen years old, Frank secretly purchased his first harmonica, and practiced alone while plowing the fields. This secrecy – practicing far from listening ears – is not unlike other narratives about illicit musicking and its place “*unter die Decke*” (High German; “under the covers”). For Frank, however, the purchase was not sanctioned by his parents; his harmonica remained a secret. By playing in the fields, he was not only being discreet to avoid awkward neighbourhood gossip and church reprimand, Frank was disobeying family protocol. The resultant anxiety that he describes holds little resemblance to the laughter of previous narratives; Frank burned his harmonica under the weight of his guilt.

What is it that makes this story tragic, and those told by Lisa Wolf, Abram Wolf, Peter Heide, and Johan Peters amusing?

¹⁴⁷ Frank (pseudonym) left the Old Colony church at age 18 and joined a CMM congregation.

¹⁴⁸ Names “Frank and Tina Neufeld” are pseudonyms, used at the couple's request.

Here, a comparison of Peter Heide and Frank Neufeld's experience is perhaps telling: both were once part of Mexico's Old Colony church, both continue to play the harmonica, and both count *Musik* an integral part of their life. Peter laughs about his secret playing, about being tossed out of a youth dance, and later being "found out" by church leadership; Frank, however, does not. While Frank does not mention being discovered by his parents or by church leaders, his view of *Musik*'s proscription does not allow him to find humour in the defiance he enacted.¹⁴⁹ I suggest that this is largely due to the absence of family support around *Musik* in his home.

The strength of the ambiguously delineated "family" is perhaps significant here. Old Colony youth become responsible to Old Colony leadership only after baptism. Before this time, it is parents who are responsible for their actions and discipline. Whereas many parents allowed some form of defiance towards the prohibition of *Musik*, this was not universally so. Revisiting the relationship between individual church members and the church community, Frank Neufeld's narrative demonstrates the importance of "allies" in determining how *Musik* is experienced by defiant performers. Given the important position of the family in Mexican Mennonite homes, "individual" responses or actions in defiance of church proscriptions hold implications not only for relations to the collective religious body, but within families as well. Further, because these interactions are primarily mediated by family members, they shape perspectives on the severity of community prohibitions.

¹⁴⁹ The question of what compelled Frank Neufeld to purchase and play the harmonica, despite the guilt he felt, is worthy of further consideration but beyond the scope of this project.

4.3 Conclusions

Studies of musical engagement in religious and diasporic communities frequently address the ability of music to build unity among diverse members. Differentiation of experience in these contexts is accounted for by recognizing the unique personal experiences of individuals that comprise these bodies. In narratives of secret musicking from northern Mexico, however, these assumptions are challenged by the inter-relatedness of individuals as family and religious groups. While the singing of *lange Wies* provides an example of church-sanctioned collective song, other forms of musical expression (“sacred” or otherwise) were forbidden in living memory, and their performance occurred in defiance of church protocol. Further, despite the frequency with which narratives of forbidden *Musik* involve an individual protagonist covertly practicing her art, these narratives describe more than personal experience within a collective church body.

A recognition of tensions between individual and collective spheres is important in studies of religion and music, but in the context of Mennonite Mexico, a binary perspective causes us to overlook the complex web of relationships that constitute an ambiguous, yet significant, in-between space of negotiation: the home itself. By providing a domestic “exception to the rule,” defiant musicking families confounded stereotypes of compliant conserving church members, and dialectics of individual and collective in church worship experience.

While I do not suggest the inherent futility of an individual-collective dialectic, in this instance the negotiations and renegotiations of power, meaning, and the very

construction of agency and experience – to use Sugarman’s terms (1997, 27) – are not confined to it. In this configuration, or rather, among these diverse configurations, church is not a locatable collective comprised of individual members, but a body of believers variously knit as families, friends, peers, and community members, together forming the “precarious church.”¹⁵⁰

By recognizing this, the significance of ‘home’ becomes obvious. Tensions around negotiations of music performance and meaning, around individual and group identity within Mennonite church community, and around the vocabularies used to describe it involve decidedly more conversations than a binary framework allows. Here, the family mediates between individual and collective spheres, affecting both individual expression and community participation.

Returning to Sugarman’s notion of music’s “social effects,” these narratives become more than reflections of lived experience for individual Mexican Mennonites. Defiant musical practice alone does not equate with agency; however, the continuous spoken and unspoken negotiations and renegotiations of individuals within families, families within communities, and villages within churches, speak to music’s social effects among Mennonites in northern Mexico. For many of these Mennonites, the secret making of music in their homes was directly linked to the “construction of agency and experience,” and implicated them “in continual renegotiations, not only of their musical practices, but also of the relations of power that organize their society” (Sugarman 1997, 27). In turn, bonds between family members were in many cases reinforced. Individual

¹⁵⁰ I use “precarious” after Chris Huebner in *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (2006).

narratives are not merely idiosyncratic recollections, but recall musical participation that challenged expected behaviours in the past, and that confound attempts to essentialize Mennonite community life and religious experience in the present. In this way, narratives of illicit musicking among Mennonites in northern Mexico challenge territorial interpretations of music's proscription. While most, but not all, narratives point to a resulting unity, it is not stationary, nor predictable. Despite the apparent quietude of the dissention enacted within musicking Mennonite families, it nevertheless functions towards a peculiar vitality. Paradoxically, these examples of familial agency within the church structure – subversive acts of covert musicking – become vital to the very church they defy.

Chapter 5

Singing Outside the Box: Convergence(s) of Acceptable Old Colony Song and Public Practice

Lange Wies, to me it's just tradition, the forefathers did this and now we must too. I can't sing it. I tried last year after school, and I got lost after the first line. (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire)¹⁵¹

Ich würde das gerne tun. ... [I]ch würde es lieben. Aber das – viele von die Eltern würden sagen dann, "Das ist, das ist schon zu viel." (F. Dyck 2006)

I would happily do it [use instruments at the Singstunde]. ... I would like it. But that – many parents would say then, "That is, that is already too much."

Nijch werkljijch schljachte Leeda, oba, frooa Leeda! (T. Dyck 2006)

[The songs we sang were] not really bad songs, but, [they were] happy songs!

The absence of instruments at public singing events does not ensure the acceptability of those events in Old Colony circles. Just as *Musik* was once unequivocally forbidden among Chihuahua's Mennonites, so certain ways of singing have been discouraged by conserving church leadership. The regulation of these proscriptions is no longer as vehement as it once was. Still, the negotiation of acceptable song practice in so-called public contexts is complex.

¹⁵¹ Some questionnaire responses from SBS students had minor spelling mistakes. I have corrected those included in this dissertation.

This chapter takes the notion of musical defiance introduced in Chapter 4 out of the home and into the community by examining the Old Colony youth *Singstunde* (High German; “singing hour”). In addition to published references, my observations are based on fieldwork among conserving and evangelical Mennonites in Mexico, with special emphasis placed on interviews with Old Colony *Vorsänger* and *Singstunde* leader Abram Wolf, and *Singstunde* leaders Franz and Tina Dyck. I also draw from questionnaire responses given by students at SBS – some of whom belonged to the Old Colony church in the past, and others who did not. By juxtaposing the related, but not always parallel, music practices associated with *Singstunden* and the singing of *lange Wies*, and by considering perspectives on these song practices from Mennonites both in- and outside the Old Colony church, this chapter demonstrates the significance of song in performing and sustaining church community. Through analytics of performance style, repertoire choices, social interaction and related issues/social effects, it explores how song practices may draw people together at one level, while enacting defiance on another.

5.1 Introduction

In at least four Mennonite *campos* near Cuauhtémoc, Mexico, weekly *Singstunden*¹⁵² have been organized in recent years to provide a setting for Old Colony Mennonite youth to sing together, to study the Bible, to learn church catechism, and to gain familiarity with basic Spanish vocabulary. In some cases, the initiation of *Singstunden* has occurred at the request of Old Colony leadership, eager to engage youth

¹⁵² *Singstunden* is the plural form of the High German *Singstunde*, or “singing hour.”

in the church community. In other instances, it has been parents or youth who have requested the classes, often with similar motives.¹⁵³ *Singstunden* organizers come from within the Old Colony church. In some cases they are parents with a concern for the youth in their community, in others, they are schoolteachers who have been approached by interested youth. While the provision of a parent-sanctioned context for education and social interaction among youth seems congruous with conserving Mennonite emphases on autonomous religious education, *Singstunden* are not without controversy. Just as the use of musical instruments was once forbidden among Chihuahua's Mennonites, so Spanish language education, biblical exegesis, and song repertoires expanded beyond the *lange Wies* have been contested by some church leaders. Resistance to new modes of music performance is no longer as vehement as it once was; still, determining what constitutes acceptable song practice in public contexts is a task recognized by *Singstunde* leaders.¹⁵⁴

Many sports and music-making activities are frowned upon by Old Colony leadership, leaving few church-sanctioned social settings for youth to gather and interact.¹⁵⁵ Whereas the forbidden dances described in Chapter 4 were once a primary

¹⁵³ Parental consent is necessary for youth participation in the *Singstunden*. This requirement highlights both the connections between individual, family, and church, and the continued responsibility of parents for the actions of youth prior to baptism, which occurs before marriage (usually in a youth's late teens or early 20s).

¹⁵⁴ *Singstunden* are also reported to have occurred in Russia, although I have not encountered mention of language or Bible education in connection with them. Instead, they were controversial for the "untraditional nonsense" that choirs introduced into village life (Berg 1985, 18-19).

¹⁵⁵ According to Quiring, "Old Colonists look on most competitive sports and games as originating with the world and the devil. Even owning a ball has brought criticism from the *Lehrdienst*" (2003, 50). Quiring goes on to mention changes that have occurred in

social reference point for unmarried young people, the congregating of youth *oppe Gauss* (Low German; “on the street”) now bears connotations of dangerous driving, Spanish rock music, and careless alcohol consumption. Angst among Old Colony youth is fuelled by the growing scarcity of land in the colonies, and related uncertainty about the future. This has led to an increasing tide of seasonal Mennonite workers traveling between Canada and Mexico, a trend that contributes to community instability.¹⁵⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2, struggles among Old Colonists are not insignificant, nor inconsequential. But neither are their responses. *Singstunden* respond to difficulties faced by Old Colony young people, but they also speak to critiques leveled against their communities: not only are they positive contexts for youth interaction, *Singstunden* model alternative ways of living in Old Colony community.

Essentialist depictions of Mexican Mennonites, emphasizing conservative religious values and resistance to change, frequently cloud recognition of efforts to the contrary. In this section I argue that in some cases it is through defiant musical practices that conserving communities are shaped and made stronger. By examining analytics of repertoire choices, performance style, and related issues and social effects at the Old Colony *Singstunde*, I explore the paradox of defiant song that strengthens precisely the church whose guidelines it defies.

some colonies in recent years. The Manitoba Colony, for example, had at least seven baseball teams in 1996 (2003, 50).

¹⁵⁶ The Mennonite Central Committee website attributes economic hardship and subsequent migration between Canada and Mexico to the drought of the 1990s, and to the increased production costs and lower prices on agricultural commodities that followed the implementation of NAFTA, and more general globalization (2002a).

5.1.1 Background

While in Mexico I attended *Singstunden* in three villages, all of which were located in the Manitoba Colony, near Cuauhtémoc. The remainder of this section draws on experiences at these events and conversations with their organizers. My focus will lie primarily on the *Singstunde* facilitated by Franz and Tina Dyck (Figure 5.1), as it was with this group that I had most extensive contact.



Figure 5.1. *Above*, Old Colony school where Franz and Tina Dyck hold *Singstunden*; *below*, Tina and Franz Dyck together with author inside the school. Manitoba Colony, Mexico.

Most *Singstunde* meetings occur on Tuesday evenings, and involve Old Colony teenagers who live at home but have finished the six or seven years of *Darpschool*. In many ways, *Singstunden* reflect the model of education practiced in village schools. Meetings are highly structured, with teacher-student directives prized over group work. Further, norms of male-female separation (also practiced in church) are maintained in the seating plan and in the reading of catechism in the classroom (Figure 5.2). When reciting the catechism, it is common for women to read the questions and men, the answers, or vice versa.



Figure 5.2. Class photo at *Singstunde* in Manitoba Colony, led by Franz and Tina Dyck.

While the specific format of *Singstunden* varies from village to village, basic components are consistent: The evening begins with a time of singing. This is followed by The Lord's Prayer, and various activities including recitation from the church catechism, group memorization of Bible texts, Bible study worksheets, reflections by

Singstunde leaders, and, in some cases, rehearsal of Spanish vocabulary. The evening ends as it began: in collective song.

5.2 Repertoire

Repertoire choices at the *Singstunde* parallel the tension between continuity and change articulated about the classes themselves. The primary song texts come from two sources: the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* – the hymnal used in Old Colony worship and school, and a compilation binder usually compiled by group leaders. All of the singing and learning of melodies in the *Singstunde* occurs by rote. Songs from the *Gesangbuch* use *lange* and *korte Wiese* that have been orally transmitted and that are taught in Old Colony schools. Other songs and song texts are photocopied from various hymnals (esp. *Glaubens-Lieder*, *Hymnario Cristiano*, *Evangeliums-Lieder*) or transcribed from cassettes and CDs. Newer song texts in the compilation binders used at Franz and Tina's *Singstunde* are usually transcribed by their daughter, Anna Dyck. She also memorizes corresponding melodies through repeated listening and then teaches them to the group.

Franz and Tina's class of 60 youth sings the *lange Wiese* each week, an exercise practiced at the request of the church *Ältester*, and willingly accommodated by the youth:

Der Ältester ... sagt wir sollen auch die lange Wiesen singen, so die Jugend tun das willig. Sind ganz willig sie zu singen, aber wir singen viel mehr andere Lieder. (T. Dyck 2006)

The bishop ... said we should also sing the long melodies, so the youth do that willingly. They are absolutely willing to sing them, but we sing many more other songs.

Still, the time required to sing the *lange Wiese* is a deterrent for some group members:

Sie tun das auch lieber, weil das braucht nicht so viel Zeit. Ein Vers lange das, das dauert wie ein anderes Lied, ein Evangeliumslied. (F. Dyck 2006)

They also prefer that [singing repertoire with shorter melodies], because it doesn't take so much time. One verse of 'long' takes as long as an entire other song, a gospel song.

Merging these ideals, the group frequently sings hymns from the *Geistreiches*

Gesangbuch with the first verse “*lange*” and the second and third using *korte Wies*.

While all of the song texts hold Christian content, repertoire in Franz and Tina's compilation binder is varied. Comprised of 55 songs, new additions are appended and added to the table of contents as needed. Of these song texts, 45 are written in High German, 7 in Spanish, one in Low German, and one in English. Thirty-five of the songs include musical notation (shaped-note or conventional Western notation), while others provide texts only.¹⁵⁷ According to Tina, the presence or absence of notation is immaterial at their *Singstunden* as none of the participants, herself included, have been trained in reading “notes.”

Significant about these texts is the intercultural borrowing evident in the presence of High German, Low German, English, and Spanish among them. In fact, despite it being the language of daily communication, Franz and Tina rarely sing Low German songs at *Singstunde* gatherings. Because the orthography of Low German is not fixed,

¹⁵⁷ According to its title page, the *Glaubens-Lieder* hymnal is “Printed in Shaped Notes only.” The hymnal is printed in Manitoba and Kansas for the “Church of God in Christ, Mennonite,” but is also available for purchase in Mexico (*Glaubens-Lieder*. Gospel Publishers, St. Anne, MB: 2001).

and because the language has seldom been used in written form among Old Colony

Mennonites in Mexico, its use in song texts at the *Singstunden* has not been welcomed:¹⁵⁸

Wie jleijchen nijch Plaut Dietsch, wiels daut es schwanda, enn dee Sproak es
nijch soo foadijch. Hüach Dietsch daut es wirklijch eene Sproak waut, waut wie
aules kjennen, enn dee Plaut Dietsche dee woat soo fe'schieden. Wie jleijchen
dee Plaut Dietsch, oba nijch je'schräwen. (F. Dyck\, 2006 #698}

*We do not like Low German [for singing], because it is harder, and the language
is not as complete. High German, that is really a language that everybody knows,
and the Low German has so much variation. We like Low German, but not in
written form.*

While High German is by far the dominant language choice, the inclusion of Spanish (and to a lesser extent, English), remains noteworthy. Singing in Spanish represents not only a departure from the *lange Wies*, but an overt connection to “the world” of Spanish-Mexico. The controversial nature of this engagement is compounded by the teaching of Spanish vocabulary at the *Singstunde*. Whereas some Old Colonists feel that Spanish language competence is imperative for survival in a Spanish-speaking nation, others argue it akin to conformity with the world, a conformity they left Canada to avoid.

According to Lisa Wolf, differences in perspective around Old Colony education are not only evident within membership, but also among church leaders. The Manitoba Colony, for example, has upwards of three bishops, one of whom has supported significant educational reform in the past ten years. Support for his initiatives, however, has not been unanimous. This has brought to light differing views among Old Colonists

¹⁵⁸ Low German as a sung language is not unheard of in northern Mexico, however. Chapter 6 considers more closely decisions around the use of Low German song in daily life, evangelism, and worship.

in the colonies, even within the same congregation. For example, efforts towards Old Colony curriculum development among church leaders who favour educational reform in the *Darpschoole* may be welcomed by some church members and rejected by others (Lisa Wolf, March 26, 2008, conversation with author). The connection between *Singstunden* and efforts to improve reading comprehension and writing skills among Old Colony youth are obvious in the way classes are organized. But even the consent of some of the *Lehrdienst* does not guarantee unequivocal community support.

Not unlike the “binding” and “loosing” described by Jonathan Dueck in relation to Mennonite music and identity in urban Canada, *Singstunde* repertoires both connect Old Colony youth to, and distinguish them from, the larger church body of which they are a part. Whereas Dueck’s work considers a meeting of diverse Mennonite churches within a single service of worship, his contention that “the service itself ... forms a whole, a body which is both at war within itself and representative of a general peace” (Dueck 2005 unpaginated) is apt.

Despite complications, conversations with organizers suggest that varied song forms at the *Singstunde* are not a point of anxiety for them, nor for participants. Keeping acceptable practice in mind, leaders speak of textual content and maintaining youth interest as their primary concerns when choosing songs. To this end, varied repertoires are vital, as they exemplify Christian alternatives to the Spanish secular content heard on Spanish Mexican radio and recordings.

Expanding on the use of varied repertoire as an important means of engaging young people, Franz Dyck reflects on his own youth:

Es war nicht jemand was, was ihnen hat geholfen um, um Christliche Lieder zu spielen, oder gesagt, "Solche Lieder sollt ihr spielen," – nur was sie wollten. So wie ich sagte, ich hab' nur Country, Spanisch gesungen. Da was ich mir selber gelernt hab. Niemand sagte, "Jetzt wollen wir ein Chor zusammen stellen, mal gute Lieder singen, Christliche," – niemand. Und, ich glaub' das ist das Wichtigste. Warum wir solches tun, dass wir mit die Jugend, dass sie können das tun was gutes ist, und das geht schön. Das geht ganz gut. (2006)

There was no one to help us to play Christian songs, or who said, "Such songs you should play," – just what one wanted. As I said, I just sang country, Spanish. Those that I learned myself. Nobody said, "Now we want to put together a choir in order to sing good songs, Christian [songs]," – nobody. And, I think that is what is most important. Why we do it, that we [work] with the youth, [so] that they can do what is good, and that is fun. That goes very well.

In Tina's youth, song repertoires included Christian songs as well as folksongs sung in High and Low German. Laughing, she adds that they were "Nijch werkljijch schljachte Leeda, oba, frooa Leeda!" (*Not really bad songs, but [they were] happy songs!*) (2006). Tina's passing allusion to an affiliation between *schljachte* and *frooa Leeda* brings us to the heart of many critiques of Old Colony song repertoires, and to the impetus for *Singstunden* in the first place.

Descriptions of *lange Wies* as "slow and dragged," or as a form that "hardly has an ending," and "that no-one can really understand," (Anonymous, SBS student questionnaire), contribute to a portrait of Old Colony song as drudgery. For liveliness, one must look to Spanish Mexican *rancheros* or the praise and worship music of evangelical churches. Franz and Tina's dedication to the youth group poses a living challenge to the stereotype, a testimony to their belief that pious drudgery (accommodation) and rebellion (resistance) are not the only options available to Old Colony youth in Mexico. By engaging repertoires that both support and challenge the

expectations of conserving church leaders, *Singstunden* influence youth in ways that are at once “Old Colony” and controversial.

5.3 Performance Style

Fieldnotes February 14, 2006

How interesting it is to wake up, when one hasn't recognized their sleep. Such was my experience at the Singstunde on this Valentine's Day evening. I had been quite looking forward to the class, but had no idea that it would prove as subtly explosive for my mind as it turned out.

The evening began as expected, with singing from the Gesangbuch. We were asked if there were any hymns that we particularly wanted to hear, and the group obliged as best they could. First with some lange and korte Wies from the Geistreiches Gesangbuch. Their singing style was noteworthy because while nasal vocal production and unison unaccompanied form were consistent with other “performances” of the Wies, there was no obvious Vorsänger who took the lead from one phrase to the next. Instead, the group moved together without an official songleader. At the outset, however, it was Tina and her daughter Anna who started things off. In subsequent songs, as a matter of fact, it was Anna (a female AND a teenager) whose voice carried the group! “An interesting departure from what I have come to expect,” I thought to myself. But then came #38 from the binder collection, and my brain was befuddled further. There were moments of organum – parallel thirds and fifths! I don't know why this should have so surprised me, but I have never before heard Mexican Old Colonists sing in parts, and had simply not anticipated it. Was this not the very embodiment of “Kunst” (art) in worship? Of course, I only realized my stereotyping ways when faced with their absurdity, but so it goes.

Franz and Tina's *Singstunden* are not only noteworthy for their repertoire choices.

Woven into the fabric of unaccompanied song is an unexpected vision of musical leadership. As in school and church, song numbers are called out by a male leader (Franz Dyck). However, instead of a male *Vorsänger*, it is the voice of a female teenager – Anna Dyck – that emerges to lead singers into the first line of text. That Anna is Franz and Tina's daughter may account for her leadership role at the *Singstunde*; however this does not diminish its significance. Here, a two-fold innovation is enacted: not only is

there no official *Vorsänger* taking the lead between phrases, but the closest thing to a song leader is an unmarried woman.

One might argue that one of the social effects of singing *lange Wies* is the enforcement of a patriarchal social structure; the ‘unifying song’ of the community may only be sung if a male *Vorsänger* is present to lead it. However, if song performance is read in this way, it must also be recognized as enabling defiant agency. Women DO sing. Children DO sing. And men who are not *Vorsänger* also have a voice. Anna’s leadership in the context of the *Singstunde* implies that while certain roles are prescribed in certain contexts (i.e. *Vorsänger* and the singing of *lange Wies* in church worship) the parameters of gendered performance are not rigidly construed or enacted.¹⁵⁹

The introduction of part-singing to the group is equally compelling, and has been an initiative of Tina and Anna Dyck.¹⁶⁰ Neither has received training in reading musical notation, however exposure to part-singing has occurred in the form of gospel CDs from Canada, Germany, and the United States that utilize harmony in their arrangements. Tina notes that the youth at their *Singstunden* are largely unfamiliar with harmony, but are “very willing” to attempt it in the context of the *Singstunde*.

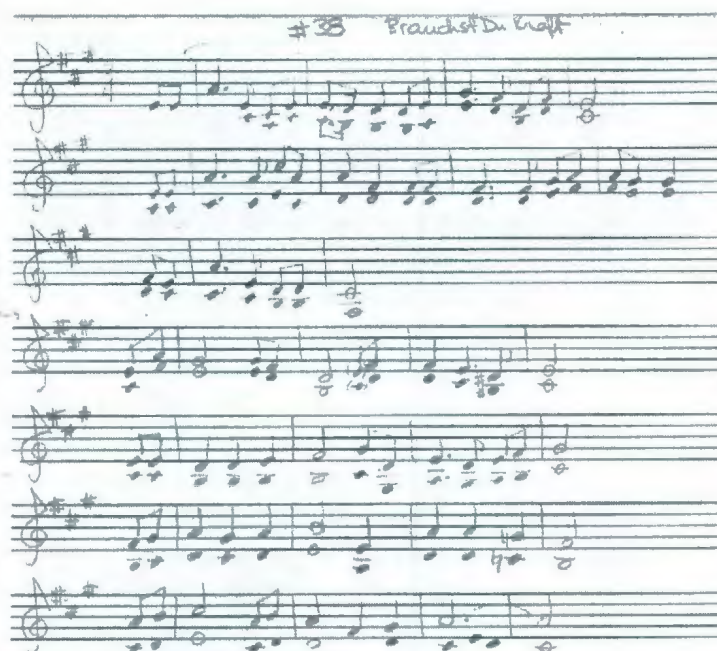
Facing one another to form a circle at the front of the class, harmony singers follow Tina’s lead when singing an alternate line. Under her leadership, these youth introduce both a new soundscape to the *Singstunde* and a new mode of formal public

¹⁵⁹ This type of departure from expected practice merits a study of its own, but is beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹⁶⁰ Subsequent to my first visit to the Dyck group, I also heard two-part singing at a *Singstunde* led by Bernard and Tina Loewen, also in the Manitoba Colony.

interaction: male and female students leave their desks to join a mixed circle of singers, and to sing a musical line that differs from the others.

While parallel motion at intervals of thirds and fifths is what caught my ear when I first heard part-singing at the Dyck *Singstunde*, it is not strict parallel harmony that the group practices. In the transcription that follows (Figure 5.3), movement between the third, fifth, and sixth is featured. Through most of the verse and chorus, the two lines are rhythmically synchronous. The final cadence of the chorus, however, features independent movement by the second voice.



"Brauchst du Kraft"	
<p>Brauchst du Kraft, bei ihm ist Stärke, Brauchst du Hilfe, er ist da, Er wird nie sein Kind verlassen, Nein bei beide Hände fassen, Fürchte nichts, er ist ganz nah.</p> <p>Chor: Nur getrost Jesus ist dein wahrhafter Freund, Der dich immer versteht, und alleine helfen kann,</p> <p>Drum glaub seinem Wort, vertraue dem Herrn, Fürchte nichts, Jesus ist dir nah.</p> <p>Er dein Gott weisz Rat für alles, Er erretet Welt und hilft, Seinen Blick ist nichts verborgen, Lasz in seiner Hand dein sorgen, Er ist sieger und er hilft.</p> <p>Vor ihm ist kein ding unmöglich, Er hat über Raum und Zeit, Über stürme Wald und Hügel, Hat er seines Friedens wogen, Und sein Ziel ist Herrlichkeit.</p>	<p><i>Need you strength, with Him is strength, Need you help, then He is there, He will never abandon His child, Nor bind his hands together, Do not be afraid, He is very near.</i></p> <p><i>Chorus:</i> <i>Just trust that Jesus is your true friend, One who always understands you, and alone can help, So believe His Word, and trust in the Lord, Do not be afraid, Jesus is near to you.</i></p> <p><i>Your God can advise you in all things, He saves the world and helps, His glance is not hidden, Leave your sorrows in His hand, He is victorious and He helps.</i></p> <p><i>For Him nothing is impossible, He has over space and time, Over stormy woods and hills, He has poured out His peace, And His goal is splendour.</i></p>

Figure 5.3. Transcription of "Brauchst du Kraft," sung in two parts by Old Colony youth in Campo 11, Manitoba Colony, Mexico. Translation mine.

Despite these unexpected innovations, there are limits as to how far boundaries of performance are stretched. The nasal vocal timbre associated with *lange Wies* singing, for example, also compatible with *korte Wies*, is utilized in all of the repertoire engaged by young singers in the Old Colony *Singstunden*.¹⁶¹ Further, while pitch pipes, cellular telephones, and female song leaders may be found in the *Singstunde* gathering room, musical instruments are not. Commenting on the importance of parental support for the gathering and the choice to keep instruments out of their *Singstunden*, Franz Dyck suggests,

Ich glaube dann würden sie, die Eltern, das nicht so, so lieben wie jetzt. ... Ich würde das gerne tun. Ich kann nicht gut, aber, ich würde es lieben. Aber das – viele von die Eltern würden sagen dann, “Das ist, das ist schon zu viel.” (2006)

I think that the parents would not like it as much as they now do. ... I would happily do it [use instruments]. I do not know them well, but I would like it. But that – many parents would say then, “That is, that is already too much.”

Parental consent, however, does not preclude difficulties born of instrument use at *Singstunden*. Despite some encouragement, Abram Wolf has kept *Musik* outside of his *Singstunde* as well:

Zwei Mädchen sagten sogar, ihre Eltern haben gesagt dann vielleicht doch wollten wir, sollten wir gleich noch Instrumenten, Spieldinge auch haben und dann, würd sich das noch schöner hören. [Laughs]. Na, das hab’ ich gesagt, “Nein.” Dann würde das doch Schwierigkeiten geben. (2006)

Two girls went so far as to say that their parents suggested that maybe we should use instruments right away, and then it would sound even better! [Laughs]. Well, to that I said, “No.” Then we would certainly have difficulties.

¹⁶¹ The introduction of new repertoires and song forms via Spanish radio has not undermined this manner of tone production, as many Spanish Mexican singers champion an equally nasal tone quality in *ranchero*, *corrido*, and other song forms.

As with repertoire, song leaders anticipate the social effects of particular performance style choices, adhering to certain prohibitions while challenging others.

5.4 Agency, Conviction, and Respect: Negotiating Responsibility for Youthful Defiance

Because *Singstunden* are more public than the family home, awareness of community norms, and challenges to them, are magnified. Still, teachers, students, and parents remain committed to the life skills and biblical foundations that the meetings enable. When asked about these tensions, *Singstunden* leaders provide varying responses. As my conversation with Abram Wolf demonstrates, the place of the family as a unit distinct from, yet integrated with, notions of individual and church does not go unrecognized. In Abram's case, it is in fact essential to the successful functioning of the classes:

JK: Ist das OK, diese Lieder zu singen, und das Spanisch und das alles?

AW: Ob das, mit Eltern Freiheit ist? Ja.

JK: Der Ältester auch?

AW: Um – [pause].

JK: [Laughs]. Du brauchst nicht fragen, ja?

AW: [Smiles]. Ich mag nicht nach alles fragen, und dann das besser, lieber tun.

[Laughter]. Die, die Jugend wollte das, und dann hab' ich, dann hab' ich gesagt, "Ihr sollt die Eltern fragen, wenn das mit Eltern Freiheit zu tun geht, dann 'ja.'"

(2006)

JK: Is it OK to sing these songs, and with the Spanish and all that?

AW: With parents' consent? Yes.

JK: And also the bishop's [consent]?

AW: Um – [pause].

JK: [Laughs] You don't need to ask, yes?¹⁶²

¹⁶² Prior to this conversation, I discussed with Abram the experiences of my grandparents in Manitoba's Old Colony church. Despite its proscription in their church community, *Musik* was not absent from my grandfather's home. As noted in Chapter 4, when asked about whether this was "OK," he responded, "We never asked."

AW: [Smiles]. I don't like to ask about everything; sometimes it is better to simply do. [Laughter]. The youth wanted it, and I said, "You should ask the parents, and with parental consent, then 'yes.'"

Requisite parental consent demonstrates that an individual-collective binary does not fully represent the spectrum of negotiations and experience within the church, even in contexts understood to empower participants. On one level, this may be understood to diminish youth agency in the classes (i.e. defiance of authority loses some of its bite when a permission slip is required). At the same time, however, the acquisition of consent protects young people from having to accept full responsibility for the *Singstunde's* controversial elements. Parental consent at once names *Singstunden* as contentious (if the classes were not, no consent would be necessary), and demonstrates commitment to an Old Colony understanding of family and community, wherein parents assume responsibility for youth prior to baptism. Here again, the weaving of church, family, and individual is exemplified, with family mediating individual and collective interests; "family" lies somewhere in-between.

For Franz and Tina Dyck, these integrated relationships are not incidental, and once resulted in the disbanding of a class in their village. Still, their commitment to the *Singstunde*, and recognition of its importance as a site for encouraging the gifts of Old Colony youth, is clear. While they do not offer specific details when asked about past experiences with opposition to the classes, Franz and Tina openly discuss the differences in perspective that, in their view, led to it:

FD: Ja. Es war, das war der Trouble was wir hier hatten, sie wollten nicht so etwas wie dies, deswegen haben wir aufgehört hier in diesem Dorf.

JK: OK.

TD: Ja, einige denken, "Wir dürfen nur so wie die kleine Kinder in die Schule." Und, die Jugend sagen das haben sie einmal durchgegangen, sie sind nicht mehr klein. Und, wir haben uns selber viele Dinge gemacht für die Jugend, interessant zu machen, und wir sehen das geht die Jugend gut, und das ist viel schöner.

FD: Wir müssen etwas [tun] das die Jugend nicht langweilt. Sie müssen nicht wie, da sitzen wie kleine Kinder. Und, dann, dann kommen sie bald nicht. Sie müssen noch etwas anders. Wir versuchen etliche Geschichten aus die Bibel oder Testament ihnen zu erklären dass sie, dass sie damit – viele wissen nicht zu viel von das. Und dann, sind sie sehr aufmerksam. Du hast gesehen wie sie haben zugehört.

JK: Ja, das war unglaublich!

(2006)

FD: Yes. It was, that was the trouble that we had here. They didn't want something [a class] like this, and that is why we stopped in this village.

JK: OK.

TD: Yes, some think, "We are only allowed to be like the little children in school." And, the youth say that they have already been through school, they are no longer little. And we have done many things for the youth, to make it interesting, and we can see that it goes well for the youth, and that is much better.

FD: We must keep the youth from becoming bored. First, they should not sit there like little children. Then, then soon they will no longer attend. There must be something different. We try to clarify some stories from the Old and New Testaments for them – many don't know much about that. And then, they pay attention. You have seen how they listen.

JK: Yes, that was amazing!

Despite their unabashed commitment to the classes, balancing convictions about the importance of the *Singstunde* with respect for community beliefs and understandings is not an easy task. For young people, *Singstunden* provide a space to learn about, participate in, and simultaneously challenge, the wider Old Colony community. As Franz and Tina point out, the success of this effort depends on maintaining youth interest. While they are not yet baptized church members, young people "should not sit there like little children." Here, an important aspect of training youth is exercising respect for them, and for their capacity to comprehend biblical narratives. Further, Spanish language instruction demonstrates trust in youth judgment. By equipping youth with skills for

engaging both biblical texts and “Spanish-Mexico,” *Singstunden* leaders enable youth to challenge the same Old Colony community they seek to build.

Regardless of these shifting skill sets, the place of Old Colony youth within the community remains ambiguous. Not yet church members but neither children, *Singstunden* participants are not yet responsible to the community for their defiance. Like the youth for whom they have been organized, *Singstunden* exist in a sort of liminal space.¹⁶³ Defiant of some church guidelines and encouraging of others, supported by some parents and leadership, and frowned upon by others, this ambiguity is seldom spoken aloud. While classes have been terminated in the past, that no official stance against the *Singstunden* has been levied, and that new classes continue to emerge, speaks to the strength of their tenuous position, and perhaps explains their vitalizing function.

5.5 Related Issues and Social Effects: Performativity?

Engaging in collective song has been cited as inherently powerful by Kropf and Nafziger, who write, “It is a potentially subversive truth (though often selectively ignored) that nearly everything that needs to be done in corporate worship can be done (and has been done) by singing together” (2001, 161). And from Wes Berg, “It is not surprising that, in a society in which preserving a way of life is one of the most important goals, there would be ritual practices, including musical practices, that support and symbolize those efforts” (1996, 86).

¹⁶³ In his writing about rites of passage, Arnold van Gennep describes liminal rites as “those executed during the transitional stage” (1960, 21). During this phase, an individual is on a threshold between social roles; this “in-between-ness” is understood to be accompanied by vulnerability (Grimshaw 2000, 760).

Building unity among Old Colony youth by engaging them in healthy social activities is perhaps the most obvious “social effect” intended with *Singstunden* gatherings. Here, continuity with the past is not conceived as incongruous with new expressions of faithfulness; *lange Wies* and Spanish gospel songs are sung side by side. By singing old and new repertoires and by learning new ways of singing, youth are able to merge so-called *schlajcht* (bad) and *froo* (joyful) in a context that is not divorced from the church. This “merging” is not without complication, however, nor are its effects easily contained and identified. Repertoire choices and performance styles demonstrate its ambiguous place as both an arm of, and a challenge to, Old Colony understandings of church.

Of diasporic Prespa communities, Jane Sugarman has written, “I have had to give particular attention to the renegotiations of meaning that are currently taking place among diaspora families within and through musical performance, and to the ways that musical practices may address, or mask, societal tensions” (1997, 26). This is also true for the *Singstunde*. The gathering’s primary impetus is to engage young adults, but outreach and interaction with the greater community is also part of their mandate. As a result, the youth sing in various community locations throughout the year:

FD: Wir tun oft, fahren wir. Nicht sehr oft, aber – was haben wir das vorheriger Jahr, vielleicht sieben mal?

TD: Ja, dass kann sein. Im Zentrum, im Altenheim, und bei kranke Leute –
FD: Hoffnungsheim –

TD: Oder wenn verunglückte Menschen sind, oder Todesfälle, so wie das. Wenn gewünscht wird dann, die Jugend sind immer bereit. Immer willig. (F. and T. Dyck 2006)

FD: We do often, we go out. Not very often, but – how often did we last year, maybe seven times?

TD: Yes, that could be. At the Centre, the Old Folks Home, for the ill –

FD: Hoffnungsheim –

TD: Or when people have had an accident, or there has been a death, things like that. When we are asked, the youth are always ready. Always willing.

Given the contentious place of *Singstunden* in some villages, the naming of the evening classes as a “singing hour,” or “choir practice” is interesting. Outreach activities, like those described above, further highlight the musical aspects of *Singstunden* to community members. Still, while singing is the face given to *Singstunden* in the Manitoba Colony, it is but one of a number of educational activities around which the gatherings are organized. Is this emphasis on song practice a straightforward description of one of the evening’s primary activities? Or is it a linguistic tool for *de*-emphasizing the contentious teaching of Spanish vocabulary? Returning to Sugarman, does *Singstunde* musicking mask or address societal tensions?

These questions are not easily answered. As Gerstin has written about Carnival in Martinique, specific social effects are not inherent in particular performance contexts; a single performance may embody both opposition and accommodation. Citing Turner and Bakhtin’s readings of Carnival as either a site for liminality, inversion, and antistructure, or conversely, a site co-opted by governments and advertisers, Gerstin posits the presence of both: “in their ambiguity, these movements invoke the highly qualified ‘everyday resistance’ and ‘hidden texts’ to which anthropologists and ethnomusicologists have paid increased attention in recent years” (2003, 298). At the same time, Gerstin recognizes that the performance of defiant repertoire is not inherently subversive: “In Martinique I

found a Carnival with very little political resonance either way, a Carnival without catharsis” (2003, 312).

In much the same way, subversive elements of *Singstunden* repertoires are not inherent in the songs themselves, or even in performances of those songs. By extension, external control is not inherent in song practices that adhere to accepted performance conventions. Just as a Spanish text does not always imply a defiant performance, neither does each performance of *lange Wies* indicate accommodation. Instead, it is the negotiation of performance, context, and text (by variously connected singers) that determines performative significance. It is in this ambiguity that the vitality of Mennonite song practice is uncovered. Neither wholly conformist nor unequivocally defiant, the primacy of on-going relationship in the church body is central to its functioning.

5.6 Conclusions

Pressures from outside churches, governments and organizations are real for Old Colony communities. But so too are forces of defiance and vitality that are born within their families and churches. Within this context, the weekly *Singstunde* has become a significant meeting place and serves important functions. Old Colony youth – with parental consent and adult leadership from within the church – find a healthy environment for social interaction and are equipped with tools needed for full participation in the church. Catechism prepares them for baptism, biblical instruction offers tools for understanding faithful discipleship, and Spanish instruction prepares them

for the increasing necessity for communication with their “Mexican neighbours.”

Through all this, song choices provide both continuity and challenge to expected modes of community participation.

Whereas Chapter 3 describes the singing of *lange Wies* and participation in Old Colony community as expressions of trust in *Vorsänger* and in the *oole Ordnunk*, the *Singstunde* in many ways turns this notion on its head. Here, it is Old Colony youth, and not church leaders, who are entrusted with skills that could serve to strengthen, or weaken, the fabric of the community, depending on how they choose to engage them. For instance, biblical exegesis may raise questions about how conserving churches have interpreted certain aspects of Scripture, but may also strengthen the commitment of youth to participating in the engaged maintenance of their own Christian communities. Similarly, exposure to Spanish songs and language education enables contact with Spanish Mexico, but this exposure occurs in a context that simultaneously encourages the strengthening of Old Colony community through collective singing and community outreach.

Regardless of how they are engaged, the acquisition of these skills and the introduction of new song styles and repertoires deviates from norms of Old Colony practice. Just as *Musik* was long forbidden in the colonies, so certain repertoires, genres, and language choices have been frowned upon by Old Colony church leaders. While engagement with contentious song practice – be it part-singing, singing in Spanish, or being led by a teen-aged woman – is not inherently subversive, youth participation in the *Singstunde* represents their intentional and engaged defiance of conserving norms.

Again, this is not a question of “dialectics of selfness and otherness, private and public worship, individual belief and community cohesion” (Bohlman 2006b, 239), but a defiance born within a collective group (the Old Colony church), practiced by a subsection of that group (youth, with parental consent), with the intent of strengthening that same collective group. Here, music does not *synthesize* an imagined dialectic between individual and community so much as it *reconfigures* boundaries of affiliation, *claims* agency, and *enables* the vitality of the community whose parameters its performance defies.

Chapter 6

A Defiant Praise: Navigating Evangelism, Orthopraxis, and “Christian” Song in Mennonite Mexico

Their religion was to go by rules, and our songs were that we can believe in Jesus Christ and then we can be saved. And we can – our sins can be forgiven and we can have eternal life. And that’s not how it worked for them, so that’s what turned them off I guess. (J. Heide 2006a)

* * *

6.1.1 *Background*

The functions of music among evangelical Mennonites in Mexico are no less diverse than those among conserving Mennonite groups. In some cases, Mennonites who have left the Old Colony church adopt new performance styles and repertoires to enact defiance against hurtful past experiences, experiences some attribute to their conserving upbringing. In others, new forms of musical expression emphasize personal and spiritual transformation – often related to release from alcoholism, abuse, or troubled family life – and celebrate redemption from sin through God’s grace. For evangelical Mennonites, the “gospel message” set forth in Scripture and its promise of eternal life through belief in Jesus Christ forms the basis of their faith. Forgiveness and assurance of salvation are understood to be at the heart of this transformation, and music is seen as a means of sharing that message. In the context of evangelical worship, this thankful expression is inherently connected not only to receiving the Christian gospel, but also to sharing it.

It is here – at the crossroads of defiance, thankful praise, and evangelism – that Old Colony and evangelical worldviews meet. This is a tricky convergence. The emphasis on assurance of salvation and personal spirituality among some evangelical Mennonite musicians challenges Old Colony discomfort with “higher education” and evangelism. Evangelical missions, the celebration of individual performance in worship, and openness to educational reform in schools represent to many Old Colonists a way of life that encourages individualism, pride, and association with “the world.” Evangelical worship services that emphasize personal accounts of spiritual conversion make these tensions explicit, with metaphors of transformation from “darkness” into “light” the focal point of many personal testimonies. By their very evangelical nature, public expressions of spiritual renewal for evangelical Mennonites pose a critique of Old Colony *orthopraxis*.¹⁶⁴

Still, discourse around conserving-evangelical tensions in Mexico is dynamic. During the course of my fieldwork, I heard language of “Christian” (evangelical) and “non-Christian” (conserving) from some evangelical Mennonites, but this was not the rule. Instead, many expressed respect for the community emphasis of the Old Colony church, and for the values of their Old Colony upbringing; narratives encapsulated both positive and negative reflections on experience in the Old Colony church. Similarly, conversations with conserving Mennonites did not condemn evangelical churches, but more often reflected curiosity about them.

It is in this precarious space that this chapter is set.

¹⁶⁴ This critique is central to Quiring’s argument that “other Mennonite groups have acted as one of the most disruptive factors to Old Colony life in Mexico” (2003, 131).

6.1.2 Introduction

Chapter 4 explored narratives of how secret *Musik* in domestic settings often relied on and, in turn, reinforced bonds between conserving Mexican Mennonite family members, supporting foundational community structures through which church *orthopraxis* was enabled. Chapter 5 considered the use of challenging song forms and repertoires by Old Colony youth in the public context of the *Singstunde*, and their equally paradoxical function as a means of building cohesion in Old Colony communities. Under the leadership of committed church members, and through exposure to Spanish language education, Spanish songs, Bible studies, and part singing, youth were able to simultaneously challenge restrictions within the *oole Ordnunk* and build community among their peers. The examples of defiance set forth in Chapters 4 and 5, however, are not without exception. Not every defiant act of home-musicking occurs in secret, circuitously working to strengthen northern Mexico's conserving churches. Nor does every public performance of unconventional repertoires mark the agency of young people committed to Old Colony communities. In some cases, *Musik* and song practices among Mexico's Mennonites appear to contradict conserving church norms and structures in ways that are explicit.

Evangelical, or "*Conferencia*" Mennonite churches in Mexico (e.g. EMMC, EMC, CMM), and related institutions are implicated here. The varied repertoires and performance styles at SBS, for example, point to ways in which diverse musical expressions are not only tolerated, but also embraced, in these contexts.¹⁶⁵ Further,

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 2 for a description of musical happenings at SBS.

despite affiliation with Mennonite conferences distinct from the Old Colony church, many *Conferencia* members engage in song practices that contrast with those of conserving church counterparts, while maintaining relationship with conserving family members. As explored in Chapter 4, family and church are closely linked in Mennonite Mexico, meaning that changes in one sphere often affect participation in another; what is musically appropriate in one's evangelical church community is not always welcome at extended family gatherings with Old Colony relatives or among Old Colony neighbours.

Having complicated distinctions between individual, family, church, and community in previous chapters, I return in this chapter to family song. I focus on a particular family, whose engagement with music – as a tool of transformation, unification, defiance, and celebration – is central to their understanding of faith and Christian experience. At first glance, the life experiences and musical practices of the Heide family embody the defiance suggested by encounters between Old Colony and evangelical churches in Mexico. They left their Old Colony church in Durango, Mexico, to attend an Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) church in the same colony; they vacated their home in Durango for three months to attend an evangelical educational institution (SBS) in 2006 and 2007; they openly study the Bible and host covert Bible studies in their home community; and some family members began music lessons in 2006 as part of what they see as their larger mandate to use music as a means of sharing the Christian gospel with conserving Mennonites in the colonies.

The Heide family considers music to be a vital activity both in and out of the domestic setting. On one hand, it builds relationships and unity among them. On

another, public performance is conceived by the Heides as a means of “witnessing” to their Old Colony neighbours; the Heides confront and challenge their past through music and religious testimony, and invite others to do the same.

Despite the seeming clarity of this break, however, Heide family song is not reducible to evangelical defiance of conserving church norms. While certain musical forms have been left behind and new practices introduced, the family engages them in ways that connect them both to the Old Colony church of their past and the evangelical church to which they now belong. In Section 2 of this chapter, I introduce the Heide family and establish the importance of music within their home, as described by family members. Section 3 extends this exploration beyond immediate family relationships to the evangelical mandate adopted by the family since joining the EMMC church. Finally, a case study in Section 4 problematizes the application of an evangelical-conserving polarity to the Heides’ musical efforts and responses to them. While their musical choices imply overt defiance of conserving regulations, the family is not indifferent to those regulations. Instead, their musicking demonstrates hybrid processes of engagement that do not depend on binaries of complacency and resistance (or “conserving” and “evangelical”). By examining this Mennonite family’s introduction of new repertoires and performance styles into their domestic and public music making, I explore in this chapter how song performance is sometimes affected by Old Colony proscriptions, even by those who have left the Old Colony church; it becomes apparent that for the Heides, a defiant enactment of external difference is secondary to their primary tasks: praising God and sharing the Christian gospel.

6.2 Meeting the Family



Figure 6.1. Photo of Peter and Anna Heide's 13 children, taken before the birth of their youngest daughter, Anna. Photograph from family collection.

JH: In Ontario my mom and dad attended Old Colony. When we moved back from Ontario to Mexico, they still were very much Old Colony (my mom and dad) so they were very scared of this – *Ütschluss* ... “excommunication” from the religion. So they would hide our van ... and they’d buy a horse and a buggy to show that we were not driving van, because it was against the religion back then, because Durango was way, way further behind than Chihuahua still. Like, Durango, [it was] just about four years ago that ... the preachers moved away from there, the Old Colony, and then everybody just bought trucks. But that only happened about four years ago.

When we were younger, we grew up Old Colony, Mom and Dad were very scared when we would talk about going and playing volleyball because it was against the religion; it was “bad.” And, most of us, we didn’t want to be on the streets because they were very wild, and things didn’t go very well on the streets for us. But that was the thing to do, so we would go and we’d get drunk and we’d do a lot of stupid things and we ourselves realized though that it wasn’t cool and we got invited from some friends to go to the youth meeting that they had. They played baseball, they played volleyball, and they did a little bit of singing, and they drank pop, so that was cool! And through that, some of us actually got to go to the school there because it was better school than the *Darpschool* – the school that they just had in the villages – and Dad realized that soon. So he sent, some of us got to go there. And through there we learned the plan of salvation, and that school was a Christian school, and it was the EMMC church that had the school there. And that’s how I got saved. I never got saved at school there, I just listened, I heard about it. I never, I never accepted Jesus Christ in school there though, but when I was driving truck, that’s when I accepted Jesus Christ. And from then on, my parents switched from *Kleine Gemeinde*. ... From them to

EMMC back and forth. They didn't want to settle in EMMC because my parents are very used to the clothing of Old Colony, so obviously, it turned them off – the clothing there. And they didn't want to be in Kleine Gemeinde because there were rules. ... I'm not saying they're all like that, I don't want to put any religion down or whatever, they just figured that there were too many rules there. And so they switched back and forth. But us kids, we just stuck to the EMMC because we had friends there, and then eventually they just came there too. They just became members of EMMC actually about two years ago. So there's been a huge change in our life, from when we moved back to Mexico until now, and it's still changing, like there's still a lot of things that Dad has to work with and stuff. So basically, we moved from Old Colony to Kleine Gemeinde to EMMC and then back and forth – EMMC and Kleine Gemeinde, and then now we're EMMC.

JK: So did you personally sense a big change in your family? It sounds like your family was all struggling with these issues together –

JH: Yes. Oh yeah,

JK: Was that –

JH: Huge. It was, very, very hard. [Pause]. Oh, I don't know. It was – [pause] – Dad, not knowing. He, he would dig. He would want to know, you know, "What is the truth?" You know? So he would, he would read the Bible a lot, but not understand it. He wouldn't know how to interpret it, and he would get a lot of things wrong and then he was scared, because he got excommunicated, ... Dad got excommunicated because he didn't come to the church, and Mom got excommunicated because they drove the van. But it [excommunication] worked because they thought that now they couldn't get to Heaven, because they believed that once you're excommunicated then the key to Heaven is thrown away for them or whatever.

JK: So it was because your mom was driving the van, that that was a problem? ...

JH: Yeah. We had a van, and us kids were going to that church [EMMC], so that was a problem too. But Mom and Dad also saw that if we were with those youth there, then we weren't in trouble like we were if we weren't – like if we were on the streets. So, all in all they knew that it was better for us to be there, but it was very hard for them to change, because, they just, the belief was that "we're doomed." And until, oh I don't know, five years ago I think, Dad really realized that it wasn't laws that we had to follow, that it was Jesus that we needed to accept. (J. Heide 2006a)

I met Peter and Anna Heide, along with several of their children (Johan and his wife Nettie, Sara, George, Trudy, and Anna) at the *Steinreich Bibelschule* in 2006. On the morning that my project was introduced to the student body in *Morgan Andacht*, Peter approached me in the hallway and told me that if I was interested in singing, his

family could *sing*! In the weeks and months that followed, my husband Simon and I were invited to participate in various musical activities undertaken by the Heides, both as observers and fellow performers. We were also welcomed generously into their home in Steinreich, and later in Durango, where singing was part of daily life activities. Because the family had recently begun to perform more publicly, there was an energy about their song that carried into interactions with one another and with those around them. It was in these contexts, as well as in more formal interviews and during music lessons at SBS¹⁶⁶ that I came to know the Heide family.

Peter and Anna Heide were born, raised, and married in Durango, Mexico. Descendants of Mennonites from the 1920s migration, they were baptized members of the Old Colony church at the time of their marriage, and it was within this community that they began their family. Of Peter and Anna's 14 children, seven live in Canada, and seven in Mexico. Of those in Mexico, the youngest four – Sarah, George, Trudy, and Anna – are teenagers and live at home in Nuevo Ideal, Durango (see Chapter 2, Figure 2.3 for map). Three of the four attended SBS with Peter in 2006.¹⁶⁷ Johan Heide is another of Peter and Anna's children. He and Nettie live and work in Ontario with their two young children, and also attended SBS in 2006.¹⁶⁸ Of Peter and Anna's other children, I was able to meet Isaak and his wife Lisa, and David and Agatha, who also reside in Durango.

¹⁶⁶ Sarah and Trudy Heide were two of my violin students at SBS in 2006.

¹⁶⁷ Peter and Anna's youngest daughter Anna was not yet 16 and attended the grade school in Steinreich. She did, however, participate in a number of music ensembles on the SBS campus.

¹⁶⁸ Johan and Nettie came to SBS with their newborn daughter, Kaley, from their home in Ontario.

Like many Mexican Mennonites in the 1970s, Peter and Anna faced uncertain financial circumstances early in their marriage, and traveled back and forth between Canada and Mexico in search of work. Following employment in Ontario, and opportunities to purchase land in Campeche and Durango, Mexico, they lived a total of seven years in Canada, with five of their children born in Ontario. Moving back and forth was not without complication, and reconciling their life in, and travel between, two countries was not easy. While both Peter and Anna speak of family life as a gift from God, financial hardships, anxiety around issues of faith, and related difficulties in family and community life are also part of their story.

At present, Peter and Anna live in Nuevo Ideal, Durango, where they own land and a small grove of fruit trees (Figure 6.3). During years of sufficient harvest, Anna and her daughters make and sell preserves from these trees; however, because of unpredictable weather patterns and limited precipitation, this is not guaranteed from season to season. Anna also maintains primary responsibility for the family's mud-brick home. Together with daughters Sarah, Trudy, and Anna, she looks after food preparation, cleaning, laundry, and cares for the chickens in the chicken coop (Figure 6.3). Peter's work history is diverse; he has been variously employed as an Old Colony schoolteacher, a labourer, farmer, restaurateur, in radio broadcasting, and as a tradesman of sorts – working with electrical motors, and bringing water pumps “into the mountains” with his youngest son George. Johan adds that Peter has rented out their land in recent years, and put his efforts into mechanical work: “He's very good at inventing things, so he's built mixers – cement – concrete mixers, to put in front of a tractor” (2006a).

During their years of travel between Canada and Mexico, Peter and Anna maintained their Old Colony church affiliation. However, differences between the churches in each country, especially around issues of material conformity (e.g. ownership of motorized vehicles), contributed to a sense of displacement upon their return to Mexico. While the Durango colony was, like Chihuahua, settled during the 1920s Canadian migration, the region's conserving churches have been less open to new developments like *Musik*, automobiles, and rubber tires, than their counterparts in Chihuahua or Ontario. As described in this section's opening narrative, Peter and Anna were excommunicated for owning and driving a van. Divergent understandings of how to interpret Mennonite *orthopraxis* contributed to Peter and Anna's excommunication and to their eventual break with the Old Colony church in Durango.

After this departure (1995), Peter, Anna, and their children¹⁶⁹ attended both Kleine Gemeinde and EMMC churches, becoming EMMC members in the years that followed. It is this transition that they cite as vital to the transformation of their personal and family life, with assurance of salvation as the foundation for new ways of relating to one another. Family members do not discuss in detail the difficulties they faced in the years leading up to their conversion experiences. They do, however, celebrate the joy they now experience, and express repeated thanks for the gospel message and its ability to work in their lives, both as individuals and as family. Throughout their journey, music has been an integral component in nurturing unity among them and expressing belief.

¹⁶⁹ At this time, Johan, George, Sarah, Trudy, and Anna were living at home.



Figure 6.2. *Above*, The Heide family home in Durango, Mexico. From left: Simon Neufeld, Judith Klassen, Trudy Heide, Anna Heide, Anna Heide, and Peter Heide; *below*, Members of the Heide family during visit in Steinreich. From left: Peter and Anna Heide, Agatha and David Heide, Isaak and Lisa Heide, Johan and Nettie Heide with daughter Kaley Heide.



Figure 6.3. Above left, Anna Heide prepares *Rollkuchen* (High German; “fritters”) at home in Durango, with daughter Trudy standing behind; right, Anna and Peter Heide show Simon Neufeld some of their apricot trees, Durango, Mexico; below, Anna Heide hangs laundry next to the family’s chicken coop, Durango, Mexico.

6.2.1 Disjuncture and Change: Leaving the Old Colony Church

Fieldnotes April 6, 2006

Durango, Mexico

The first night here, Peter told us about his, and Anna’s, Ütschluss. It was for having/driving a van. As punishment for using a motorized vehicle, Peter received his Ütschluss. Some time later there was talk in the community, suggesting that Peter was really innocent, since it was Anna who did the driving (Peter is extremely near-sighted). As a result, she too was ex-communicated. Nobody came to inform her, as would be customary. Instead, Anna received a piece of paper telling her of the news. This was very hard for the family because of friendships and family connections. People who are ex-communicated are to be cut off from contact with church members (e.g. communion, sharing meals), and married couples for whom one partner is banned are not to be

intimate with each other. Peter and Anna's Ütschluss was lifted (meaning forgiveness and allowance of meal sharing etc.), and owning a motorized vehicle is no longer grounds for excommunication in their past church, but Peter and Anna are no longer participating members.

* * *

The Bible. The Scriptures. The people are getting it wrong, they are going wrong. And then, after that you wouldn't say anything because they would get you at the church and judge you there. OK? ... And then I thought to myself, 'rather go out of there.' (P. Heide 2006b)

* * *

Transferring one's church membership is a significant decision in Mexico's Mennonite colonies. While at one level the decision is indicative of a personal choice, its ramifications extend beyond the individual to involve families and even entire communities. In rural areas, where church fellowship extends beyond Sunday morning worship to include everyday activities, myriad relationships are affected. In order to better understand the significance of this transition for the Heide family, I turn now to a narrative of Peter Heide. During an interview with Peter and his son Johan in 2006, Peter reflected on the challenges initiated by their family's transfer, and the ongoing challenges associated with negotiating altered personal, familial, and community relationships.

6.2.1.1 Peter Tells a Story

For Peter and Anna Heide, to join the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) church in Durango was not only to engage a new worship style on Sunday mornings, but to sever ties with a church community that consisted of neighbours, family members, and friends. Having grown up understanding participation in the Old Colony

church as integral to faithful discipleship, the implications of their decision were not only personal, but challenged the foundations of their belief system. That Peter and Anna left the church even after their bans were lifted highlights the intentionality of their choice. Despite excommunication, their decision to leave the Old Colony church was not easily made.

The reasons that Peter offers for their departure are complex, and resonate with Johan's narrative (related earlier, section 6.2). Telling his own story, Peter identifies politics around the *Ütschluss* and prospects for his children as Old Colony youth in Durango as the primary impetus for their departure. Describing the basis for excommunication as a form of church discipline as he sees it, Peter (with Johan) relays,

PH: OK, if you want to read that, if you want to find that, what they do, what their position is to do, or what they think what they are doing, read 1 Corinthian, Kapitel Fief [Chapter 5]. Easchta Korinta Kapitel Fief. There you will find it in the first ten verses.¹⁷⁰ ...

¹⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 reads,

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Should you not rather have mourned, so that he who has done this would have been removed from among you? 3 For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgment 4 in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. 6 Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? 7 Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. 9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons-- 10 not at all meaning the immoral of this world, or the greedy and robbers, or idolaters, since you would then need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler,

JH: The key of life. Whatever Peter [Simon Peter, Jesus' disciple] opens will be open, and whatever he closes will be closed in Heaven also.¹⁷¹

PH: Are you familiar with that?

JK: OK, yeah.

JH: They think that if they excommunicate someone, then, then,

PH: They take that [key to Heaven].

JH: They lock the Heaven for you. Like then you're doomed, whatever.

JK: Right, OK.

PH: So they think they lock the Heaven for the, for –

JH: People that they ex-communicate.

PH: For people that are ex-communicated. And so, that, that's a, what should we say, they are thinking wrong – they got it wrong ...

JH: They don't, they don't understand it right. Or they don't want to understand it right.

JK: Do you think ... it would still be that way in most Old Colony churches?

PH: ... Over here [Chihuahua colonies] not. Over where my brother lives, that's, that is still the way there. Campeche – is still the way there. And –

JH: It runs out. Like here, about what, 15 years ago? It would have been like that. Maybe 20?

PH: No that's more. ... That was before – I was 16 years old.

JH: So probably about 35 years ago, then it was like that here. Like very much you couldn't have a scooter. You couldn't have a bicycle. You couldn't have a tractor on rubber wheels. You couldn't listen to any kind of music. You couldn't have any instruments whatsoever. No vehicles. That's what it was like. And about ten years ago it was still like that in Durango. Like eventually it just kind of, gets –

drunkard, or robber. Do not even eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging those outside? Is it not those who are inside that you are to judge? 13 God will judge those outside. "Drive out the wicked person from among you." (NRSV)

¹⁷¹ Matthew 16:13-20 reads,

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. (NRSV)

PH: It broke up. That was not even ten years ago. About five.

JH: Five, yeah, you're right.

PH: It broke up. But still, the church will work the same way. If the preachers say the calculator is wrong, then that's what, that's what it is. (P. Heide and J. Heide 2006b)

Peter takes issue with what he deems the excessive control of church members in the Old Colony community of which he was part. His disillusion with the cliques among its youth is equally vehement, but stirred by an opposite frustration:

Noch een reason. Ekj jleijch nijch de Oolt Kolonie Bunch. So they ran oppe Gauss 'romm, aus looss je'lotene Kjalva. They drink, they do anything, they do all of it, they fight and so I try to teach my kids other things. (2006b)

One more reason. I do not like the Old Colony clique. So they ran up the street like calves that have been let loose. They drink, they do anything, they all of it, they fight and so I try to teach my kids other things.

Despite this seemingly transparent portrait of a family's defiance of past church affiliations, it is not only previous church experiences that fuelled the Heides' decision to join an EMMC congregation. A more central emphasis among family members is the transformation of their own journeys as individuals and with each other. Anna Heide, for example, shared that a Mennonite evangelist helped her to believe in and receive God's power, with her daughters describing the physical healing that she experienced as a result.¹⁷² In his personal testimony, shared at an evangelical program, Peter describes being "a lost man" before God set him free:

Well, ekj weet nijch. Ekj gleew ekj wea doa unja Mud. Dee Dach dee kjäm. Ekj kaun daut selwst nijch weeten wuaromm daut soo muss senn. Ekj kaun uck nijch weeten wua, woo daut aunjefangen haft. Ekj wea wajch, enn dee räd dan fon Saul. Ekj weet nijch aus daut daut rajchte Wuad es. Ekj gleew daut es daut rajchte Wuad eene jäft dän Fiend, daut doon waut hee eenem toohoolen deed.

¹⁷² Trudy and Anna shared that after the evangelist prayed over an unexplained bump on their mother's nose, it was healed.

Well, I don't know. I know that I was there under mud. The day, it came. I do not know myself why it had to be that way. I do not know where, how it started. I was lost, and he then spoke of Saul. I do not know if that is the right word. I think that is the right word that one gives the enemy [Satan], one who is trapped by him.

So nü wea ekj en fe'beiselda Maun. Ekj deed schmeaken, ekj säd emma ekj wea nijch een Drinkja je'wast, oba miene Frü sajcht, "Daut best goanijch aul enneworden. Deedst doch aul eene Buddel de' Wäajk, hast doch bie-aun ütjedrunken." Nü bruck ekj äwahaupt kjeent. Enn ekj foll wajch, ekj wea wajch je'follen. Dee Kjinja dee denken daut, dee weeten daut, woo seeja ekj je'roart hab. Ekj wull rüt enn ekj kunn nijch. Ekj wea faust enn Saump nennjerutscht. Zemorjess, ooda zeowents, dan deed ekj seeja hielen. Wull ekj han' see sullen sinjen, enn han see foaken fe mie je'sungen. Foaken, enn daut jing seeja scheen, daut see daut deeden. Enn ekj kunn doa nijch rüt. Enn ekj ha Gott je'prachat, "Ekj wull doa rüt!"

So now I was a lost man. I smoked, I always said I hadn't been a drinker, but my wife says, "You were not always aware of everything. You drank already one bottle a week in passing." Now I don't need any at all. And I fell away, I was lost. The children, they think, they know, how much I have bawled. I wanted out, but I couldn't get out. I was firmly stuck in a swamp. Mornings, or evenings, then I cried a great deal. I wanted them [the children] to sing, and they often sang for me. Often, and that was wonderful, that they did that. And I couldn't get out. And I begged God, "I want out!"

Met eenmol dan schekjt Gott en be'jeistate Maun. Dee kjeem enn dan deed a' Henj opplajen [...] enn bäden. Enn dee deed daut. Deed hee, hee deed daut em gloowen, enn ekj naum daut em gloowen aun, enn dan wea ekj looss fonn daut. No daut, woat Gott opp eenst senn fleijcht dicht bie je'wast. Dan wea dee Kjaumpft seeja seeja schwoa. Dan ha ekj je'kjaumpft. Seeja. Jing ekj enn jane Stow nenn enn jan Hüs waut wie doa hauden, mookt de dää too, deed dee säajen, enn Kraump dee too, schloot dee too daut mie doa kjeene wud nenn komen. Enn dan haft een Peeta Heide, waut featian Kjinja haud je'schräajen, "Gott, ekj senn en Sinda. Ekj ha je'sinnt jäajen Himmel enn fer Die. Kaust Du mie fe'jäwen?" Enn kjeem enn naum mie dän Kaumpft wajch. Enn dan jingt daut enn erfellung waut doa je'schräwe steit: Hee wauscht met Sien heetet Bloot een siene Sinden wajch.

And at once God sent to me a spirit-filled man. He came and he laid his hands on me and he prayed. And he did that. He did it in faith and I took it in faith. And then I was free from that. After that, God must have been very close. The struggle was very, very difficult. And I struggled a lot. I went into the next room in the house that we had then, closed the door, said a blessing, latched it so that no one would come in. And then one Peter Heide, who had fourteen children,

cried out, "God, I am a sinner. I have sinned against Heaven and before You. Can you forgive me?" And He took my struggle away. And then came into fulfillment what has been written: With his warm blood He washes one's sins away.

Aus ekj eascht foadijch wea dan wull ekj nenn'gonen mie wauschen. Doa stun de Kjinja, bie de dää, enn, ekj kaun mie fon kjeenmol be'senne daut dee mie soo aunjekjickt han aus donn. Enn lota kjeenmol, enn fer däm uck nijch. Irjend waut kunn dee aun mie seen. Oba ekj ha nijch je'froagt woat. Ekj wist je waut hinja mie wea. (March 11, 2006)

When I was finished then I wanted to go inside and wash. There stood the children, by the door, and, I can never remember them looking at me in that way. Never after, and never before. They could see something on me. But I did not ask what. I knew what was behind me.

For the Heides, the experience of "being saved" was not only about personal spirituality, assurance of salvation, and separation from the conserving church; it marked an abrupt move away from what they experienced as unhealthy relational patterns among family members, and enabled the formation of a new family body. In this sense, altered points of reference have less to do with the Old Colony church left behind than with new commitments and relationships of accountability within the family unit, commitments and relationships to which they credit the grace and power of God.

6.2.2 *Music in the Family*

And it wouldn't just be, you know we would sing on Sundays. If we were together, Dad would often, when we would get up in the morning, he would get out the old-fashioned *Gesangbücher*, and then we had to sing before breakfast a couple of songs. Like most of the days, almost every day we had to sing. It wasn't like we did it just once a month, it was definitely a part of our life. Like every day we had to sing. Often as kids, we didn't want to sing because we didn't feel like it or whatever, and but dad would always push us, and we – I – am very thankful that he did because it has done a huge thing in our life. (J. Heide 2006a)

* * *

Lange Wies was the first repertoire that the Heide family sang together, with hymns from the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* among the earliest they learned. Peter also remembers singing *Evangeliums Lieder* with his children, songs that he learned from his own mother. The family's repertoire of church music expanded upon moving to Canada, where Old Colony worship services used *korte Wies* instead of *lange*. As these new songs and melodies became familiar and normalized in worship, they were also adopted as part of the family's home repertoire.

After separating from the Old Colony church and becoming more involved in Kleine Gemeinde and EMMC school and youth programs, Peter and Anna's children were exposed to an increasing number of new repertoires and singing styles. Many of these innovations involved part-singing, and texts that reflected the evangelical emphases of the EMMC church. Cassette tapes and CDs of country gospel, praise and worship choruses, and other Christian musical genres also introduced new modes of singing to the family. As these new styles and repertoires entered the family's home repertoire, many songs and song styles from their past (e.g. *lange Wies*) dropped away:

The way we sing? Obviously we started singing in *lange Wies*, and when we went to church in Canada, the Old Colony church, they didn't sing it *lange Wies*, it was already short – *korte Wies*. And I think that's what got us singing more in *korte Wies*. Like just, songs with whatever melody, it didn't have to be *lange Wies* or whatever. I don't know, I think there has definitely been a huge change in singing from the *lange Wies* to now. We can understand what we are singing, and we can sing it quicker, and make it interesting, and not so long [as] *lange Wies*. It's not that *lange Wies* is bad singing – I think it's cool to sing it once in a while, as a memory. (J. Heide 2006a)

As Johan's summary demonstrates, it is not just repertoire and singing style that have changed in the years since the family joined an EMMC congregation. While he

links enjoyment to how “interesting” a particular mode of performance is deemed, textual comprehension is also significant: “We can understand what we are singing, and we can sing it quicker, and make it interesting.”

Peter and Anna’s children further describe the importance of extra-familial influences on their musical development. Sarah and Trudy, for example, credit their ability to sing in harmony to time spent at Kleine Gemeinde and, to a lesser extent, EMMC schools (2006). Johan remembers learning Spanish repertoire by ear, and singing Spanish songs with his brothers:

We didn’t, as far as I know we didn’t have any schooling in notes, until about, oh, I don’t know, I would say until I was about 16 years old. ... We just sang by ear, but also by listening to Mexican tapes. There would always be soprano and a guy singing tenor. ... And that’s how us guys picked up to the tenor note. So, and it didn’t take long for the girls to learn an alto. So, and I think that partially came from the church, singing in church, and, as we later on started going to church regularly, they started, the girls would sing alto, and they learned. (2006a)

* * *

Before I was a Christian, my brother and I we had a couple of music groups that were Spanish, because we worked so much in Spanish, among Spanish people, we would sing Spanish. And we worked together. And we actually had a nickname for a while, “the singing workers” or whatever. Like me and Dave would always sing together. He would sing the soprano, and I would sing tenor. And we were always singing. And we’d know a bunch of Spanish songs off by heart, just from hearing them all the time, and we would sing them all the time and it was awesome. It was really, really fun. It was a huge part of our life, singing. And often, like – when we weren’t very happy or whatever, we’d start singing, and it would make our day. It was a cool gift. (2006a)

Employment outside their Mennonite community and involvement in EMMC youth and Kleine Gemeinde school activities affected the musical pathways of Peter and

Anna's children.¹⁷³ For Johan, these influences were about more than exposure to diverse musical styles. He describes Spanish musical forms as personally and spiritually significant:

For me, music is just part of life. I don't think I could go without it. Life would be a lot more boring. Singing makes my soul jump, rejoice. I just love singing, and it makes my day. ... One of my favourite ways to worship is to sing. Singing a melody with my own words to God. In Spanish. I would most likely do that in Spanish because I got saved when I was in Spanish, and I still feel connection with God best in Spanish. I don't know, I'm not saying that God is Spanish or anything, I think He speaks Spanish, but I think he speaks every language. [Laughter]. Often, even at work now, I work with a bunch of Canadians, and I'll sing in Spanish, like just, not extremely loud because they would get very much annoyed, but it's one of my ways to talk with God wherever I am, in song. But also in my own words. That's basically what singing is for me. (2006a)

Johan characterizes singing as an activity that keeps life interesting, nourishes his spirit, and 'makes his day.' But in this description it is explicitly linked to his spiritual life; singing alone is a form of prayer, a conduit for talking to God.

The diversity of the Heide family's life experiences – their "dwelling and traveling" (Clifford 1992) – has exposed them to varied repertoires of music. While their repertoire and stylistic choices have changed over time, their commitment to singing only "good" music (i.e. songs that are in keeping with their values as individuals, family members, and as part of a larger church) has not wavered. In Peter's words, "[We] never taught them the bad songs" (2006b).¹⁷⁴ Despite these efforts, however, so-called "secular" song forms were not entirely absent from the Heide family setting. Peter

¹⁷³ Trudy Heide suggests that she learned to sing at home, with "harmony" learned at school. Sarah adds that harmony was emphasized at the Kleine Gemeinde school (2006).

¹⁷⁴ In recent years, Peter and Anna's children have become committed to supporting Christian musicians, with some, like Johan and Nettie Heide, insistent on the exclusive support of Christian artists when purchasing CDs.

describes his enjoyment of *corridos* during his youth and much of his married life and still remembers many of the harmonica tunes that he learned as a young adult. His decision to remove some of these songs from his personal repertoire in recent years reflects a change in his understanding of music's function in his life: "The preacher said at the church, 'if you sing, sing to God, don't sing to anybody else. Sing to God.' And that changed my whole attitude about singing. How are you going to sing bad songs to God? You wouldn't do that, would you?" (2006b).

6.2.3 *Worship and Unification*

For the Heide family, music's significance in building family relationships, in domestic worship, and in nurturing personal spirituality is unequivocal:

Singing. I don't know, it binds us together. Once we sing in harmony or whatever, it's just like we're in it together. Oh, I don't know, it's just an awesome, awesome way of spending time together. And also songs. I love singing Spanish. I can't say it's just the music. I love the words in the music also. Like it's, singing is powerful – the messages that are brought through the music – for me it's, it has an impact, it definitely has had an impact in our life. And my family's life. A huge impact. (J. Heide 2006a)

Johan's comments allude to music's ability to build unity within the family, almost of its own accord. When asked why singing is important for the family, Anna (mother) answers, "Daut scheen jeit" and "daut scheen heat" (Low German; "It is enjoyable" and "it sounds nice") (2006a). For some others in the family, the experience of singing together is described in much the same way that Johan articulated earlier – as an extension of personal faith experience. In these responses from Sarah, George, and Anna, a close connection between personal experiences of emotion and a unifying function is expressed:

JK: What do you like about it [singing]?

SH: I guess the way it sounds. Like, the way it makes you feel when you sing.

GH: Singing sometimes if you sing, it feels like it's warming up you, and it feels like ah, holy or –

AH: It feels so spiritual.

GH: Spiritual – yep. Makes you feel very good. Sometimes. Like just when you, sometimes when you pray it's difficult. Sometimes when you pray it feels like it's all empty, but sometimes, it just gives you power. That's what the song does, when we sing. Praising God is, is awesome! (2006)

Worship is implied in these responses, but it is the feeling that accompanies the singing of praise songs and its effect on personal experience that constitutes its significance for Sarah, George and Anna. Only in Trudy's response is singing named an explicit means of worshipping God:

I like singing too because, it's just wonderful that you have someone to sing to. Because we have the voice, and too Dām well wie daut sinje [to Him we want to sing it]. We have a God – we can worship Him. (2006)

In conversations with Heide family members, music's unifying role is explicitly named. So too is its importance as a means of facilitating worship and personal experience in praise of God. Experiences of heightened personal emotion are significant for many family members, but "home music" is not purely a collectively-practiced individualistic endeavour. The family's use of Christian song to encourage one another in times of need and their belief in its ability to transform lives indicate a broad understanding of its value. Peter and Anna's son Johan, however, takes this one step further. For Johan, the act of singing is not just a tool for deepening familial connections, but a vehicle of transformation. Describing family singing during times of stress at home, Johan shares,

Most of the time, what I remember doing it, we would be about eight of us that would be at home, and we'd all just go and sing whatever songs, and, Christian

songs obviously, that we had learned in school, and Christian school, and just sing, and kind of tune him [Dad, Peter Heide] out of his world. And, I don't know, it just relaxed him and in minutes he was sleeping. (2006a)

In this story, music is a gift offered from the children to their father. Peter's direct participation is not required for music to affect his experience. Not only do Peter's children express presence and unity of spirit by singing to him, they transform his immediate circumstances and dissipate anxiety. In Peter's own words: "You can't believe how nice that is if the family will sing to you" (2006b). Re-visiting performativity in family song, Johan continues,

One thing that has brought us to where we are is Dad – and I think that's part of what worked at Dad's heart – was singing. And that's part of what changed our whole life. Because we would learn Christian songs, and Dad would like the sound of it so much that we'd have to sing them over and over. Often if Dad had a very hard time, struggling with either business or whatever, he would go lie down and we'd go and sing in his room. And in no time he'd be sleeping. And he just loved singing. And, I don't know, the songs that we sang, I guess got us thinking. And not really knowing that the music that we were singing was changing our lives. (2006a)

What is provocative about Johan's reflections is the way in which he perceives family singing to have transformed not only particular situations and relationships, but the family itself. For Johan, it is not individual intent, but music itself and the act of singing together that enabled the gospel message to work in his family. Recognition of this potential was not required for these "changes" to occur. Whether recognized by singers or not, Johan attributes to music the ability to forge both interpersonal and spiritual connections.

Music's performative capacity – in this case its ability to transform realities and to "change lives" – comes through in many Heide family narratives. While unity and

connection across distance are cited as important, they are described as by-products of a more fundamental transition. It is the family's conversion experiences and their acceptance of Jesus' message of salvation that make family unity and ongoing transformation possible. Given the role of music in enabling their own transformations, it is perhaps not surprising that music is the vehicle through which they now seek to share the Christian gospel.

6.3 A Family Sings the Great Commission: Challenge and Evangelism in Family Music

6.3.1 The Musical Connection

PH: Woo wurscht sajen, "*die Botschaft*"? [How would one say, "*die Botschaft*"?]

JH: "Message."

PH: There are a lot of people that take the message out of the songs when the kids are singing. So, that's my vision to do now, and the kids our vision. Try to get more people for God.

JH: Through singing. (P. Heide and J. Heide 2006b)

* * *

Through our singing we've been able to reach to Old Colony pastors, like Dad can connect with them. They come and listen to the singing and then Dad and them can talk about the Word. I think God is going to use it in a lot of different ways yet, if we let Him use us. With our singing. And, I don't know, I just think that – it's a way of spreading the Word. I *know* it is. I don't *think* it is. (J. Heide 2006a)

* * *

The Heide family's understanding of Christian faithfulness affects more than their relations with one another. It also implicates their Old Colony neighbours. Because evangelism is inseparable from faithfulness as they have come to understand it, their

commitment to this task is a central component of the music that they make. It is not enough to merely celebrate their new life in Christ; the gospel message must also be shared.¹⁷⁵

The facilitation of Bible studies among Old Colony family members and conversation with Old Colony leadership in their community has been part of this mandate. However, Christian messages delivered through song are considered by the family to be the most meaningful and effective means of sharing the Christian gospel:

Song is one of the best ways to connect with the Old Colony. They love music for some reason. And it's one of the ways to share the gospel through the singing that we as a family can do. I remember last Christmas we were there, through the singing we can have a Bible study with Old Colony people that don't know about Jesus. They come because they want to hear the singing, but then also we had a little bit of a Bible study, and that way the word gets spread out, and – if it weren't for the singing I think we would get very little people coming, but they love the song. They love the music. And, I think that's one of the biggest reasons why we can connect with them, and get together with them. (J. Heide 2006a)

Encouraged by the way that song worked in their own lives, and viewing it as a significant point of connection with Old Colony Mennonites unfamiliar with *die Botschaft* as they have experienced it, the Heides speak of music ministry as the embodiment of their call to use their God-given *Gowen* (Low German; “gifts” or “talents”) in God's service.

¹⁷⁵ While the family's evangelism is a clear marker of their departure from the Old Colony church, church affiliation and worship style were not their first foray into challenging Old Colony expectations. During our interview, Johan Heide relayed how he and his brother David acted in “One Man's Hero,” a Hollywood film about warring between Mexico and the United States, starring Tom Barringer. Johan, who was 14 years old when he snuck onto the bus carrying extras to the film site in Durango, quickly became a translator on the set, and like many of the other Mennonites present received military training in order to fill his role as a soldier in the army. With the monies earned from this project, the Heides brought electricity to their house in Nuevo Ideal (2006a).

The family's separation from the Old Colony church and their subsequent participation in evangelical outreach to conserving church members may be construed as a defiance of their past. Not only did they leave the church, but their evangelical efforts challenge its very structure. The family's actions, however, are not fuelled by resentment. Instead, their outreach stems from a wish to share their own transformative experiences with others. Put another way, the evangelical programs presented by the Heide family do not depict an unwavering defiance *against* their past, but passion *for* their new life in Christ.

Like the transition from Old Colony to EMMC church, the task of sharing this passion is not without challenges. The congregational church family is an important community for the Heides, and a primary reference point in their lives as Christians. However, church and family are not neatly partitioned entities in Mexico's Mennonite colonies, making changes in either sphere a matter of no small consequence. Because most of their extended family belongs to Old Colony churches, the Heides' introduction of "new song" when gathered together with them is differently received. Here, music does not so much build and transform relationships, as it challenges them:

JH: Dad's mom and dad, they were, they were into it more. Mom's mom and dad, they aren't Christians [they are Old Colony] so the songs that we sang were obviously not good for them to hear. They didn't like it very much. We still tried sometimes but we got turned off quite quickly – but Dad's mom and dad, we would sing. We have cousins. My dad's brother and his family also sing a lot. So if we would get together, then we would sing. But also the same thing would happen there. See, we were the only ones that would be singing Christian songs. And the rest of them that would hear it if we had a family gathering they weren't Christian, and they would be very much against it what we were singing, so it wouldn't work very well. Mostly we sang alone.

JK: Do you know what it is that they wouldn't like about the songs?

JH: Um. [Pause]. The gospel message that came through the songs. Obviously, when you sing words, they hear words, and if you sing it clear enough they can understand it, and it was against their religion. Like totally against their religion. Their religion was to go by rules, and our songs were that we can believe in Jesus Christ and then we can be saved. And we can - our sins can be forgiven and we can have eternal life. And that's not how it worked for them, so that's what turned them off I guess. [Pause]. We would be called evangelists sometimes, from them. And an evangelist is something very bad for them. So they, like, I overheard one of my uncles once say that evangelists were from the devil or whatever, so it kind of hit you, but we also knew that it wasn't quite true. Like, they didn't know what an evangelist was. They just said it. But mostly, we wouldn't sing at our gatherings much. If we would sing, if they would want us to sing, they'd mostly want us to sing Spanish, like *corridos*. Like those old-fashioned songs. ... Then they would be all happy about it, but we didn't like singing that because [laughs] we didn't know them as well, and because they were very cheesy and stuff - ... So that was interesting. (J. Heide 2006a)

The Heides' decisions to sing, or not to sing, in particular contexts like the family gathering illustrate their awareness of, and respect for, worldviews that differ from their own. Still, criticism from extended family members does not dissuade them from their desire to share the gospel through music. By considering the family's background and prior musical experiences, it becomes evident that defiance of an Old Colony past is not the sole impetus for the Heides' unabashed evangelism. Instead we discover a thoughtfully enacted faithfulness to the Christian path they have chosen to follow.

The following case study explores the diverse routes that this "thoughtful enactment" travels. Combining performance ethnography and narrative analysis at a site where familial focus is extended beyond the bounds of "home" through evangelism, it follows members of the Heide family to the Rempel *Spikja* (Low German; "granary") on an Old Colony farm in northern Mexico, where they have been invited to present a program of music and testimony to a mixed audience of Old Colony, *Conferencia*, and

Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites.¹⁷⁶ Despite – or perhaps because of – friendships and family connections among the groups represented at the event, the *Spikja* becomes a space of negotiation where church affiliation is accounted for in the planning and carrying out of the program. Here, issues of repertoire choices, language use, and performance styles converge to reveal multiple music literacies and ideologies among performers and audience members, and their careful navigation by the Heide family.

6.4 Where Defiance, Praise, and Evangelism Meet: Encoding Song at an Old Colony Spikja

Fieldnotes March 8, 2006

This morning, Peter Heide asked Simon and me about playing music with their family on Saturday night at a program in somebody's Spikja. Apparently, it's not an Altenheim show as originally discussed, but a farmyard program in which we have been invited to participate. (The Heide's are not organizing the event, but will be responsible for most of the evening's music and sharing). Peter said, "They want the program like on Saturday night"¹⁷⁷ – the violin breaks their hearts, and maybe it will."...

This conversation offered fodder for a minor anxiety attack on my part for a number of reasons. A) This could be a great deal of fun. I enjoy playing music with the Heides, and would love to play a concert in a Spikja. B) But what if it turns out to be an overtly evangelical service and I unwittingly participate in something that would offend conserving friends that I've made in the village? C) Of course, Peter Heide is a considerate person whom I trust not to be offensive. D) And a barn concert is a voluntary activity that people may attend or ignore by choice. E) Still, participation would very clearly obscure my neutrality in this community. F) But whom am I trying to kid? I'm hardly masquerading as an Old Colonist in northern Mexico... Perhaps a little vulnerability on my part wouldn't hurt – This is complicated.

* * *

March 11, 2006

Peter and Sarah Heide just stopped by to give us copies of some more song texts for the Spikja program tonight. Peter went on to mention that he thought we should all

¹⁷⁶ The "Rempel" surname used to identify the *Spikja* is a pseudonym.

¹⁷⁷ Simon and I accompanied the Heides at the *Zentrum* the Saturday previous.

wear black and white, since "it wouldn't make sense to look like we'd just come in off the fields." I told him that we would happily do so, but that given the location I'd likely need to wear a jacket (the nights have been really cold of late!) ... Peter also clued me in as to recording potential for the evening. Apparently the organizers would like the event recorded on video, but without capturing to film any of the people who've come to watch (there is some concern among event coordinators around implicating audience members or some such thing).

* * *

March 11, 2006, later...

Well. We have returned from what was a particularly cold, but particularly good, evening. The Spikja was big, and relatively full of people (I was pleasantly joy-struck when I recognized the warmth in the faces of some Old Colony friends seated in the front row). In the corner was a pile of hay bales reaching the ceiling – they looked like the spun gold that I always imagined Rumpelstiltskin to have weaved in his wooing/blackmail of the miller's daughter. Too bad it was SO COLD in there (you'd think I'd lost my prairie roots entirely for all my shivering)!

Anyway, the program went well. In the end, Simon and I were the only ones dressed in black and white (the Heide girls decided to dress "Old Colony" since they didn't want to wear the same thing two days in a row – choir program tomorrow and all... lovely!). The video is a bit comical on account of Simon and my inability to tend to the camera during the program, and our attempts to avoid capturing audience members on film. We ended up with a surprisingly successful two hours of nothing but performing upper bodies standing in a row against the white barn doors that comprised the backdrop of the "stage." Not particularly captivating cinematography, perhaps, but meaningful nonetheless.

The program itself was very much like the one that we brought to the Zentrum last weekend, and seemed well received. The evening began with a welcome from the man who extended the invitation to the Heides in the first place. Following his introduction, were congregational renderings of "Grosser Gott Wir Loben Dich," and "Dies ist der Tag," introduced by Peter. He proceeded immediately to introduce the rest of us, noting the ages of his children, and drawing attention to Anna, who was seated amongst the rest of the listeners. He introduced her as his wife and as a mother to Johan, Sarah, George, Trudy and Anna, all of whom were singing tonight.

We (Peter, Simon, and I) initiated the "Heide segment" of the program with a few instrumental numbers: Peter and I shared the lead on melodies (playing harmonica and violin, respectively), and Simon accompanied with guitar. We were perhaps not entirely successful in our togetherness, but Peter's harmonica playing in "Me voy in este Tren" is joy incarnate. After this, Trudy joined Peter at the front, and they sang the Kjinja Leed (Low German; "children's song") called "Jesus jleijcht de kjliene Kjinja, aule Kjinja oppe Welt" ("Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world"). A children's story followed.

The program carried on with singing from the Heides. Simon and I accompanied most songs, save one or two Spanish numbers for which the instruments detract from the close harmonies of the singers (my judgment call here – does this count as being in or out of the way?). Before each song, Peter, Johan, or George paraphrased the meaning of the text and relayed it to the audience in Low German. It was quiet between songs, making it difficult to “read” audience response to the program, but there were some brief moments of applause at its close. Peter’s testimony was placed in a central position and was followed by three congregational songs, accompanied by the organizer’s daughter on the electric keyboard. Peter spoke very personally during his testimony, sharing his struggles with being trapped in Satan’s cages of depression and sin, and how, through Jesus’ blood and by the grace of God, his sins were washed away and he was utterly transformed. [...]

Subsequent songs were consistent with Peter’s message – redemption in Jesus’ blood. Somehow the texts seemed to sound differently after hearing him tell his story of conversion. It was as though the music the family sings is not significant only because theirs is an evangelical message and the songs share the “Christian gospel.” I began to sense that they read themselves into the stories, plots, and characters in the songs that they choose. That the songs the family performs publicly are nevertheless part of the family repertoire that they hold as central to their own redemption narratives. Still so much to learn. I am humbled.

* * *

6.4.1 Repertoire

Marz-11-2006
Singen bei Isaak friesen

Dies ist der tag. *Key D*
Harmoica music
C- Me voig in este Trein. *Solo harmonica*
C- Auf denn die nacht wird kommen. *2 versen*
C- Ein starker felsen milden sturm. *2 versen*
G- Wo sheen bess du. *Jesus is the little chutchen
gleich de kylline kijnja*
D- De droom. *God is good.*
F- Saij daut to Jesus.
D- tocaste a mi puerta. *Offenbarung 3:19-20 NO TAPER*
A - Que bonito es conoser a Christo. *No Paper*
B - He rickt siene hont nu mi.
Die erfahrung von dad. *Matt. 16:16-18.*
D - Een tus em Himmel.
Bk *E* - Mi darscht. *yes I know... (D?)*
A - Son tres cruces. *Jo daut es soo*
E - Tears will never stain. *Scapp v. 1*
C - There is peace and contentment.
D What a beautiful day.
D - En schena dach *Enden mit Gebet*

Figure 6.4. Heide set list from Rempel *Spikja* program on March 11, 2006. Capital letters to the immediate left of the song titles indicate the key signature for each song.¹⁷⁸

Of the 15 songs performed in the *Spikja*, nine were sung in Low German, three in Spanish, and four in English. Congregational singing occurred in High German with two hymns at the beginning of the program, and three immediately following Peter's testimony.¹⁷⁹ Each song – whether performed in German, Spanish, or English – was preceded by a Low German paraphrase. Song themes focused on redemption in Christ and assurance of salvation through God's forgiveness of sins. Peter's testimony further

¹⁷⁸ A second testimony was also included in the program, but has been removed from the bottom of the set list (below "En schena dach") for reasons of confidentiality.

¹⁷⁹ These congregational songs were chosen by the event organizer, and are not listed on the Heide set list.

emphasized this message, highlighting his own transformation and the positive changes that it inspired in his personal and family life. The presence of Peter's children and their willing participation in the program underscored the tangibility of the changes he described.

Repertoire for the *Spikja* program was carefully chosen, and began on familiar ground. High German hymns in *korte Wies* were sung collectively, bringing audience members and performers together. Of the three instrumental numbers that followed, two were *Evangeliums-Lieder*, melodies with which most Old Colony, Kleine Gemeinde, and *Conferencia* Mennonites in Mexico are familiar. The introduction of lesser-known or unfamiliar song repertoire occurred only after common reference points had been established.

This intentionality is intimately connected to the evangelical mandate of the Heide family. It reflects their commitment to meeting audiences on familiar ground, even while introducing new material to them. In this context, presenting a Christian message is not only a matter of textual content. Song themes, related imagery, and language choices affect audience interpretation of particular repertoires, and in turn, their reception. Because beliefs around worship are closely tied to song choices in Mennonite churches, the Heides' repertoire decisions connect them to, and distance them from, audiences in ways that extend beyond personal taste.

6.4.1.1 *Song Themes*

Song texts at the *Spikja* program were thematically consistent with the Heides' mandate of sharing the Christian gospel. To this end, evangelical emphases on accepting

Jesus Christ as saviour were common, as were texts praising a merciful God or anticipating one's heavenly home. Translations of song titles from the March 11 set list demonstrate some of these connections (Table 1).

Table 1. March 11, 2006: Song Titles from Heide Set List with English Translations

Dies ist der Tag	<i>This is the Day</i>
Mi voy in este Tren	<i>I Want to Go with that Train</i> ¹⁸⁰
Auf, denn die Nacht wird kommen	<i>Work, for the Night is Coming</i>
Ein Starker Fels im wilden Sturm	<i>A Shelter in the Time of Storm</i>
Jesus jleijcht de kjliene Kjinja	<i>Jesus Loves the Little Children</i>
Woo scheen best Dü	<i>How Great Thou Art</i>
De Droom	<i>The Dream</i>
God is Good	<i>God is Good</i>
Saj' daut too Jesus	<i>Tell it to Jesus</i>
Tocaste mi Puerta	<i>You knocked on my Door</i>
Que bonito es conocer a Cristo	<i>How Beautiful to Know Jesus</i>
Hee räkjt siene Haunt no mie	<i>He reached out His Hand to Me</i>
Een Tüs em Himmel	<i>A House/Home in Heaven</i>
Mie Darscht	<i>I Thirst</i>
Tres Cruces	<i>Three Crosses</i>
Jo daut es soo	<i>Yes I Know</i>
Tears will Never Stain	<i>Tears will Never Stain</i>
There is Peace and Contentment	<i>There is Peace and Contentment</i>
What a Beautiful Day	<i>What a Beautiful Day</i>
En Scheena Dach	<i>A Beautiful Day</i>

Opening with a set of congregational praise songs, images of God as protector ("Ein Starker Fels"), giver of unconditional love ("Jesus Jleijcht de Kjliene Kjinja"), and generous Creator ("Woo scheen best Dü"), are sung. "De Droom" departs from these points of focus, instead depicting humanity's need for salvation. Subsequent songs return to images of God as comforter of the weary ("Saj' daut too Jesus," "Hee Räkjt siene Haunt no mie"), and giver of salvation and forgiveness to those who ask ("Mie Darscht").

¹⁸⁰ This translation is by Peter Heide, who played the song as an harmonica solo.

The final set of songs (“Jo daut es soo,” “Tears will Never Stain,” There is Peace and Contentment,” “What a Beautiful Day,” and “En Scheena Dach”), imagine and celebrate hope for peace in Heaven. Not only do these song choices incorporate the personal message of salvation that the Heide family wishes to impart. They also invite listeners to mirror the ordering of their content – from sinfulness to hope – in their own lives.

A closer reading of particular song texts makes this more explicit. “De Droom” (Figure 6.5), “Hee Räkjt siene Haunt no mie” (Figure 6.6), and “Mie Darscht” (Figure 6.7), for example, are narrative forms that tell stories of transformation.

De Droom

1. Ne Nacht weins ekj ded schlupen dan dreimd ekj saiija kloa
Ekj dreimd fon Enj fon dise tit daut wort mi upenboa
Ekj sach doa Miljion Sinda doa kjerneien em jebääd
De Har kjeim truerich nu de dan en dit es waut he säd.

Chore Sinda ekj kjan di goanich gu waich ekj kjan di hieso nich
Sinda ekj kjan di goanich gu waich en dein wäm du jedeint up
dise Ied.

2. De Har de kjeim en sach tom rechten mi doa dan
Ekj säd to am ekj ha je doch jeläft se di doa dan
De Har de kjikj upem blot nup en trurich dugt met'en Kopp
He haud doa dan ne hoade rääd en dit es waut he säd.

Chore

3. Ekj sach doa miene ~~Leewe~~ Kjinja uk äare leewe stem
Miene Fru de sach doa jinja uk Jesus gaunz met en
Jo soone wite Kjeida jesechta gaunz em Fräd
Mien kjlinet Mäagsje kjikjt nu mi en dit es waut se säd.

Daddy wi motten scheiden wi gunen aula ni em scheena Himmel nen
Doch dou wi di noch Leewen du koss nimols nich maija ons Daddy sen

4. Dan's ekj iesch kun upwakjen de Uegen gaunz fehieft
Ekj ded mi so feschrakjen dan's ekj mi kjikj doa rom
Un sach de Leewe Kjinja O jo dit es en Droom
De Leewe Fru besid mi lich en freid ekj dan up schrich.

O Har em scheena Himmel ekj weit du hast jeschekjt dien Leewa Sän
O Har please fejef mi ekj wel jiern nu senen reid wan du iesch kjemst.

The Dream

1. At night while I was sleeping, I dreamed very clearly,
I dreamed of the end of this time, it was opened up to me,
I saw millions of sinners kneeling in prayer,
The Lord came sadly to them and this is what He said:

Chorus:

Sinner, I do not know you. Go away I do not know you here.
Sinner, I don't know you. Go away and serve whom you served on this earth.

2. The Lord came to judge me there and then,
I said to Him "I have lived for you" there and then,
The Lord looked at the page and sadly shook His head,
He had a difficult speech, and this is what He said:

Chorus

3. I saw my children there and also their loving voice,
My wife looked younger there too, and she was with Jesus,
With such white clothing and faces all at peace,
My little girl looked at me and this is what she said:

Daddy, we have to part, now we are all going into beautiful Heaven,
Yet we still love you, but you can never more be our father.

4. Then as I first awoke, my eyes all red from crying,
I became so alarmed as I looked around,
And saw my beloved children, "Oh yes, this is a dream,"
My dear wife lies beside me and in peace I cried out:

O Lord in Heaven, I know You have sent Your beloved son,
O Lord, please forgive me, I want to be ready now when You come.

Figure 6.5. *Previous page*, Low German song text for "De Droom," copied from Heide compilation binder; *above*, English translation by the author.¹⁸¹

The narrator of "De Droom" is a father who loves his family, but who dreams that he will be separated from them for eternity because of his sinfulness – God 'does not know him.' It is only in the final verse that the possibility of reconciliation is presented, and in the final refrain that repentance occurs. A caution to preparedness for Christ's

¹⁸¹ For Low German interview transcriptions, I have used the dictionaries of Herman Rempel and Jack Thiessen as guides. In examples like these Low German songs, however, where Heide family members have done independent textual transcriptions, I include images of their song texts and spellings.

return is central to the text of this narrative. Despite its emphasis on judgement, however, God is not depicted as unjust or cruel. Rather, the suffering of the protagonist is rooted in his own unbelief. When he wakes, the man is not afraid of God, but thankful that it is not yet too late to accept God's mercy.

Other narrative songs emphasize similar themes of transformation and salvation:

He Riekjt Siens Hont Nu Mi

16

- 1. Ekj wia gaunz deep en Sind wia en feloarnet Kjint**
Wia fehistat en dunkle Nacht
Doch ons Jesus en Leew met dän Fred doa gaunz reid
Riekjt de Hont un rof un mi.

Chore He riekjt siene Hont un mi
Jo he riekjt siene Hont un mi
Ekj wia schlaicht en nich raich
Unen Gott up dän waich
Doch he riekjt siene Hont nu mi.

- 2. Ekj wia meid fon mien waich**
En mi jink daut so schlaich *En eki jink rom en soch nu dän Fred*
Dan wia Jesus fer mi hia's de waich he dan säd
En he riekjt siene Hont rof nu mi.

- 3. Un si ekj aul so fro O ekj frei mi un so**
He halp mi rut ut daut distre loch
En sien Jeist es bi mi uk muck he mi raich frie
Wein he riekjt siene Hont rof un mi.

He Reached out His Hand to Me

1. I was deep in sin like a lost child,
Was disoriented like in a dark night.
It was our Jesus who in His love with His peace all prepared,
Reached out His hand and called to me.

Chorus:

He reached out His hand to me,
Yes, He reached out His hand to me.
I was bad and not right,
Without God on that road,
Yet He reached out His hand to me.

2. I was tired of my way,
And I felt so bad, and I went around and looked for this peace.
Then Jesus stood in front of me, "here's the way," He said,
And He reached down His hand to me.

Chorus

3. And then I am so glad, Oh I am so glad,
He helped me out of that dark hole.
And His spirit is with me, and He made me free,
When He reached down His hand to me.

Figure 6.6. *Previous page*, Low German song text for "Hee Räkjt siene Haunt no mie," copied from Heide compilation binder; *above*, English translation by the author.

"Hee Räkjt siene Haunt no mie," tells the story of a person lost in sin. Unlike "De Droom," however, God "reaches out" to the narrator in the first verse of text. Here the story moves beyond darkness and repentance to the gladness ("I am so glad") and freedom ("He made me free") of Jesus' peace.

Explicitly naming the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross is a third Low German song, titled "Mie Darscht." Here, the thirst of the narrator is quenched by Jesus' sacrificial death and the holy waters of Heaven.

Mi Darscht

- 1. Een dach kom ekj nen en mi darscht so saija
Ekj fruech nu Wuta mien Hols wia so drich
Mien Leewa Heilant aum Kjritz darscht noch maija
He gof mi Wuta en Storf doa om Kjritz.**

**Chore He säd mi darscht Doch muck he daut Wuta
He säd mi darscht doa rad he mi dan
Mi darscht dan store he noch luta
En sienem darscht Erlöset he mi dan.**

- 2. Un es doa Wuta so kloa en so rein
Daut kjemt fom Himmel en Harlicha strom
Jo so's en Riwa so maglich en fein
He bringt ons nuda nu Gott sienem Thron .**

**O Jo mi darscht nu sien Heiljet Wuta
O jo mi darscht un sien Heilja strom
Kumt aula top en wach nich un luta
Kumt welwe drinkjen fer Gott sienem Thron.**

I am Thirsty

- 1. One day I came in and I was so thirsty,
I asked for water, my throat was so dry.
My loving Saviour on the cross thirsted even more,
He gave me water and died there on the cross.**

Chorus:

**He said "I'm thirsty" and yet He made the water,
He said "I'm thirsty" and there He saved me,
"I'm thirsty," and then He cried louder,
Through His thirst He saved me then.**

- 2. And there water so clear and so pure,
That comes from Heaven in a beautiful stream.
Like a river so comfortable and so clean,
He brings us nearer to God's throne.**

**O yes I'm thirsty for the holy water,
O yes I'm thirsty for His beautiful stream,
Come all together and don't wait till later,
Come let us drink before God's throne.**

Figure 6.7. *Above*, Low German song text for "Mie Darscht," copied from Heide compilation binder; *below*, English translation by the author.

Because salvation in Christ is central to the Heides' message, the inclusion of songs like "De Droom," "Hee Räkjt siene Haunt no mie," and "Mi Darscht" are fitting. Because Low German is the first language of most people attending this event, the use of Low German song texts seems equally logical; if the family desires to share a particular message, it is helpful to speak in a language that listeners understand. As previous chapters have already alluded to, however, the navigation of music and language use in northern Mexico requires more than a theory textbook and a dictionary; when performing in a *Spikja* on an Old Colony farm, the singing of Low German gospel songs takes on additional layers of meaning.

6.4.2 *Language Use and Low German Transcriptions*

6.4.2.1 *Previous Studies of Language Use in Mennonite Mexico*

Language use among Low German speaking Mennonites has been described as diglossic by scholars like Doreen Klassen (1989). Discussing diglossia in reference to her collection of Low German songs among Mennonites in Manitoba, Klassen describes it as a situation in which "two varieties of a language are spoken by the same speech community" (1989, 7). Citing Charles Ferguson (1959, 330), she goes on to describe how the "high or prestige form" of a diglossic language is often considered to be "more beautiful, more logical, [and] better able to express important thoughts" than its "low" counterpart (1989, 7). While Klassen's research was carried out in Manitoba, the functional divisions around language use among Mennonites in northern Mexico have

been described using a similar framework.¹⁸² High German is the language of church and school, while Low German is used at home. Based on “the Old Colony Mennonite tendency to designate all events and practices into either an ‘everyday’ or ‘Sunday-like’ realm” during her fieldwork in northern Mexico (1996, 12), Hedges describes High and Low German as *sindeosche* and *auldeosche* languages, respectively (1996, 15).

Distinctions between High and Low German based on social function have significantly shaped how Mexico’s Old Colony communities have been understood, and are often linked to language comprehension. As Hedges has noted for example, criticisms of Old Colony education systems often argue that while students learn to read High German words and to write in ornate gothic script, they are unable to comprehend the meaning of the texts with which they are engaged.¹⁸³ If High German is the “sacred” language of church and worship (Brandt 1992, in Hedges, 190), then High German illiteracy and minimal comprehension among Old Colonists in Mexico take on significance beyond the school classroom. So-called High German illiteracy among church members implies an inability to understand what is being sung and spoken during Old Colony worship.¹⁸⁴ With this in mind, there has been movement in recent years to translate the Bible, and more recently the catechism, into Low German, so as to make

¹⁸² Wolfgang Moelleken has argued for a diglossic interpretation of the Mexican Mennonite case (1987, in Hedges, 187).

¹⁸³ Some of the authors cited by Hedges include Bender (1957), Fretz (1945), Schmiedhaus (1947), Redekop (1969b); and Sawatsky (1971) (Hedges 1996, 181-87).

¹⁸⁴ Kelly Hedges addresses this in detail in her dissertation, suggesting that comprehension is not the only conduit of meaning in Old Colony rituals of worship.

these primary church texts accessible to Low German speaking Mennonites in their first language.¹⁸⁵

Hedges complicates this framework in the Mexican Mennonite case, however. She does not dispute that many Old Colonists exhibit “real difficulty in reading and writing High German” (1996, 180), but neither does she rely on a literate-illiterate dichotomy in her reading of Old Colony literacy. She recognizes instead the social significance of language use. For Hedges, a lack of High German comprehension among Old Colonists does not mean that its use as a “sacred language” is without purpose, meaning, or significance. The recitation and memorization of texts by rote in schools and their central place in worship are significant not only for their dis-emphasis on comprehension, but because it is through these mechanisms that the *oole Ordnunk* and boundaries with the world are maintained. Hedges writes, “blanket categorizations of High German as a ‘sacred’ and ‘ritual’ language and of the Old Colonists as barely literate or even illiterate obscure the more significant social embeddedness of Old Colony Mennonite literacy and literacy practices” (1996, 180).

¹⁸⁵ See, for example: *De Bibel*, published jointly by Kindred Productions (Winnipeg, MB) and United Bible Societies Caribbean and North America Regional Service Center (Miami, FL) in 2003, and *Der Katechismus in Deutsch und Plattdeutsch*, translated by G. E. Rempel and printed in Mexico in 1999 and 2003 (*De Bibel; Der Katechismus in Deutsch und Plattdeutsch*). Efforts at increasing High German comprehension are also being made in some of Chihuahua’s colonies. In the Manitoba Colony, for example, a school committee has been established in order to develop curriculum specific to Old Colony schools, with an aim of increasing functional literacy among Old Colonists in the region. While so-called “traditional” *Darpschoole* continue to function, a number of committee schools have been opened in recent years (Lisa Wolf, March 26, 2008, conversation with author).

6.4.2.2 Heide Family Low German Transcriptions

This conversation merits attention in relation to repertoire choices made by the Heide family at the *Spikja* program. Not only is Low German repertoire chosen for events like this one, song transcriptions are rendered by family members, underscoring the intentionality of their use:

Myself and my sister have translated a lot of English songs into Low German. ... Because ... , Dad's goal is to get the message across to the Low German people. If there was a cool song that we knew in English or in Spanish, then we would translate it into Low German so that they could understand what we were singing. There's tons, we have a whole binder full of ... songs. ... Not all of them that we've translated, but a lot of them that we've translated into Low German. ... Sarah is very good at translating from English to Low German and from Spanish to Low German. When I was home, then Dad would have me do it, but when I moved out then Sarah was the one. It's really interesting how it works. It's hard to get it into the same rhythm, because there's a whole bunch of different words and sometimes there's more syllables. But most of the time we could get it very – very, very close. Sometimes we'd have to make a line a little longer, or sing a little faster, but we tried to get it as accurate as possible, and just sing it. (J. Heide 2006a)

Sarah talks less about translation than Johan, and instead emphasizes transcriptions of Low German texts from audio recordings. Still, she registers the same intent: “We’re trying to learn how to translate songs. But most of the German, Low German songs, they’re from cassettes and CDs” (2006). To date, the Heides have transcribed over 38 Low German song texts, typing them up for inclusion in a compilation binder used by the family when choosing repertoire for programs or when singing together at home.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Peter Heide puts the number of Low German songs in their repertoire much higher, at around 70 (2006b). To organize their extensive repertoire, the Heides have created compilation binders where photocopies of hymnal repertoires, transcriptions of song texts from CDs, and evangelical Christian choruses from the EMMC youth group are

Aware of its conventional role as an *auldeosche* language for Mexican Mennonites, and despite experiences of disapproval in the context of their own extended family gatherings, the Heides nevertheless include Low German songs in their programs of worship. For them, the language is a means of strengthening faith and enhancing their evangelical message. The predominance of Low German songs illustrates the family's eagerness to share *die Botschaft* in a language that their audiences can comprehend. The use of Low German to "get the message across" demonstrates the importance of textual comprehension in this process.

However, as Hedges has carefully described with regard to language use, sacrality is embedded in forms of social structure for Old Colony Mennonites (i.e. the *oole Ordnunk*). In Mexico, where High German is the primary language of worship for conserving groups, settings of Low German texts in evangelical songs are significant because they remove the language from its usual functional position, connecting it explicitly to worship; the transcription of evangelical gospel songs into Low German

collected. When I explored the contents of the Heide binders in 2006, they were divided into four main sections and organized by language: Low German, High German, Spanish, and English. Section one contained 38 Low German song texts. Many of the songs were transcribed from CDs produced in Canada and Mexico, and they included a number of country gospel songs translated from English and German. The following section, containing 14 High German entries, included photocopied hymns and praise songs from a variety of sources (e.g. *Evangeliums-Lieder*; *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde*, *Zum Lob Seiner Herrlichkeit*; and the *Kleine Gemeinde Glaubens Lieder Buch*). Section three was comprised of eight Spanish songs. Notably, the Spanish repertoire most frequently sung by the Heide family were not included in this section, having been learned by rote from recordings. The final section of the binder held English songs, of which there were seven. It is worth noting that while the compilation binder is a useful reference point for this study, it is not inclusive. Less than half of the songs performed at the *Spikja* program are included, reflecting the dynamic nature of repertoire choices.

demonstrates not only linguistic adaptation, but marks a transition from common utilizations of Low German among Mennonites in Mexico. In the context of the Old Colony *Spikja*, then, a religious text and a “mother-tongue” are not the only ingredients of sacred song. Indeed, if High German is the language of worship, and Low German the language of everyday, then their inversion in the context of an evangelical program could be received as sacrilegious to Old Colony listeners. Nevertheless, the Heides consider Low German song texts as important means of connection and are not concerned by this possibility.

6.4.2.3 *Bloos Tranquillo*¹⁸⁷

Members of the Heide family are not the first to grapple with issues around language use in their music making. Writing about the implications of language use and dialect in her work with identity and contemporary Native American music, Diamond asserts,

Whether musicians choose English or use a local Indigenous language, whether they ally with a specific region, ethnicity or class by using a particular dialect or accent, the way one speaks and sings is loaded with signification. Aboriginal musicians must decide whether to perform in English in order to reach a wider audience, or to use their native language to reflect on political, intellectual, or social issues. (2006, 18)

She goes on to describe decisions made by specific artists, such as Forever and Kashtin:

¹⁸⁷ This turn of phrase, mixing the Low German *bloos* (“just,” or “only”), with the Spanish *tranquillo* (“tranquil”) occurred during a testimony given at SBS during *Abend Andacht* in 2006. A guest speaker presented to students in Spanish, with live translation given in Low German. The translator’s momentary mixing of languages was immediately noticed by students, and greeted with laughter.

Each decision has implications. Hence, Forever chooses not to locate themselves. They write in English but utter words in a vaguely “American” way. They create songs that could be interpreted as First Nations related, or not. Kashtin on the other hand, chose to remain close to their communities by writing in their first languages and by reflecting themes and issues that stem from their community-based experience. ... Language is used, not to pin meaning down, but to open it up. (2006, 18)

Like the Aboriginal musicians that Diamond writes about, the way that the Heides speak and sing is “loaded with signification.” In their case, the decision to sing in a Low German dialect known to their audiences identifies them as Mennonites and allies them with those audiences. This alliance is not unqualified, however. As Hedges’ work demonstrates, language use holds social significance in the Mennonite colonies, meaning that the Heides’ divergent use of an *auldeosche* language (Low German) in the context of worship signals a potentially subversive song. Again paralleling Diamond’s example, the family’s choice does not squarely align them with a particular group or body. By making God their only explicit reference point, the Heides are able to – as Diamond has written of certain Native American artists – “emphasize difference and solidarity at the same time” (ms.). Whereas Diamond refers to hybrid stylistic references, I suggest that the Heides engage hybridity of performance context and audience, to the same social effect. Their performances do not only demonstrate hybrid musical forms, but hybrid processes of engagement.

Why is it that language choices that seem to contradict conserving worldviews nevertheless enable connections to Old Colony audiences? Here, Hedges’ work is again informative:

Conceptions about language and society are culturally constructed and are enmeshed in issues of societal and institutional conflict and power struggles. The

different uses of languages and literacies among the Old Colony Mennonites not only encode and mediate the Old Colonists' conceptions of themselves and their world ... , but they do so with real and direct consequences for both the community and for particular individuals. Conceptions about language and literacy are constructed and maintained, contested and defended, and sometimes changed. (1996, 195)

That Low German is no longer explicitly divorced from the "sacred" realm among Old Colony Mennonites is evident in the sale of Low German Bibles in the colonies. That language comprehension in the "sacred" realm is taken seriously by some Old Colonists is evident in the presence of *Der Katechismus in Deutsch und Plattdeutsch* (High German; "The Catechism in German and Low German") in their homes. Hedges writes about language use and literacy, but the issues that she addresses also apply to music. While conceptions around Old Colony song and worship are encoded in specific language choices and song practices, these conceptions are socially constructed and are maintained only through the lived experiences of engaged participants. That is to say, Old Colony audience members participate in the construction of sacrality within Old Colony communities. While in some ways the song choices of the Heide family contest acceptable Old Colony practice, their significance extends beyond particular performances. Openness among audience members to new repertoires reflects the engagement of those audience members in encoding song with meaning. This participation may sometimes result in the maintenance of musical norms, but these norms may also be "contested and defended, and sometimes changed" (Hedges 1996, 195).

6.4.3 *Performance Style*

The Heides' repertoire choices and language use have multiple ramifications, forging connections with some audiences and hindering them with others. Their performance style is equally complex. In each case the family establishes intimacy with audience members by drawing on shared experiences and points of cultural reference. At the same time, however, the Heides challenge the terms on which this intimacy is premised. Connecting points that embody both continuity and challenge enable the Heides to use aspects of a shared history to initiate a dialogue that challenges the same. This is exemplified in a number of ways, most predominantly: performance contexts, vocal production, clothing choices, and use of musical instruments.

6.4.3.1 *Performance Contexts*

Because attendance at evangelical services is contentious behaviour among some conserving groups, performance contexts are noteworthy and frequently take on political weight. Attending a religious service in a church or auditorium affiliated with a church or conference different from one's own, for example, may be considered suspect because it intimates connections between conserving church members and the "worldly" influences of those outside the conserving church community. As a result, religious programs are often held in "unaffiliated" spaces, like storage warehouses, where attendance is not inherently contentious.

Given this background, the location of the March 11 program becomes significant. Not only does it mark the first time that the host family opened their yard to such an event, the contextual ambiguity of the *Spikja* demonstrates the engagement of Mexican

Mennonites in determining the parameters of “rules” around religious expression. For example, that a granary on Old Colony property is not an entirely “neutral” space is evident in the stipulations around my recording of the event. Organizers wished for the event to be documented, but did not want community participants to be captured on film. Still, a *Spikja* is not specifically affiliated with worship, and substantial community interest was demonstrated by the size of the audience.¹⁸⁸ While I did not discuss the ramifications of attendance at this event with conserving audience members, one might argue that participation here follows a trend of defiance intimated in previous chapters; namely, that one need not “nach alles fragen, und dann das besser, lieber tun” (*ask about everything; sometimes it is better to simply do*) (A. Wolf 2006).¹⁸⁹ Like repertoire choices that are at once familiar and challenging, the *Spikja* enables spatial familiarity to conserving audience members, while introducing new ways of being in that space.

6.4.3.2 Clothing Choices

The Heides do not spend excessive time co-ordinating their wardrobes before a singing engagement. Still, when preparing a program, clothing choices are not incidental. A consistent style of dress is determined by the group, one that takes performance context and audience values into account.

Upon leaving the Old Colony church to join an EMMC congregation, Peter and Anna Heide continued to dress in accordance with Old Colony convention: for Peter, *Schlaubbekjse*, and for Anna, a *Düak* (Low German; “kerchief”) in her hair and a pleated

¹⁸⁸ There were an estimated 75 people in the audience on the night of the *Spikja* program.

¹⁸⁹ In its original context (quoted in Chapter 5), Abram Wolf refers to the use of Spanish repertoire during the Old Colony *Singstunde*.

– usually polyester – dress. While it is not uncommon for Mennonites to maintain previous patterns of dress after leaving a conserving church community,¹⁹⁰ there is an element of intentionality that goes beyond familiarity and comfort in this instance. The Heides understand their clothing to be part of their conversation with conserving Mennonite listeners, and as such, it is important that they speak the same language. Just as Low German makes the family's song texts accessible to Old Colony listeners, so the visual cues offered by their modes of dress signal shared values and open audiences up to receive the family's offering. Gesturing towards his *Schlaubbekjse*, Peter comments, "They don't expect to see somebody dressed like me doing such things. My clothes do almost more than the singing" (February 11, 2006, conversation with author).

In addition to the important visual cues that the family's conserving dress conveys is the unspoken message that one's accepting assurance of salvation does not always require the complete renunciation of familiar modes of living. Here, challenges to conserving church ideals also demonstrate respect for those ideals.

As previously mentioned, the valuing of Old Colony dress is typical for singers in the Heide family, despite its element of intentionality in the performance context. Still, Peter and Anna's affinity for conserving dress is more established than that of their children; in a family with four teenagers, enforcing "simple" modes of dress is not always easy. While Sarah, Trudy, and Anna wear their hair long and have many pleated dresses

¹⁹⁰ Nettie Heide recalls that her grandmothers continued to wear the kerchief even after switching church affiliations: "Ever since I can remember they've [grandparents] always gone to the same church as me. But my grandmas would still wear their *Däkja*. And I think they still do too. Just because, for lack of not knowing how else to do their hair, I think. And just comfort. But they don't believe that it will save them or anything" (2006b).

in their wardrobes, there is an increasing tendency towards jeans and T-shirts among them. This affinity for “progressive” modes of attire is encouraged at SBS, where most students dress in “Western” fashions.

Still, Peter and Anna’s children are not immovable on the issue. In preparation for the *Spikja* program, both the flexibility of the Heide children and the willingness of their parents to take their perspectives into account were demonstrated. On the afternoon of the *Spikja* program, Simon and I were told that we would be wearing black and white. Peter had been wavering somewhat in making this decision, weighing audience reception of his family’s attire. If they dressed “Old Colony,” an immediate connection with an unfamiliar audience might be enabled, one that would endear the family to listeners before the singing had begun. At the same time, wearing black and white would mark their performance as a special event and indicate that the family took their singing – and their message – seriously. In the end, however, it was not ideology that determined what the family would wear to the program. Instead, it became a matter of practicality and personal preference. Shortly before the service, Sarah, Trudy, and Anna expressed that if they were to sing with SBS ensembles in church the following morning, their black and white clothing would be required. In order to keep from wearing the same thing two days in a row, and in order to keep their clothes clean for Sunday morning, it was the girls – and not their parents – who suggested conserving dress for the *Spikja* program. Thus, while I arrived in black and white, the other women wore long skirts or dresses in various colours. It would appear that despite the family’s ideological differences around clothing choices, practicality of dress is a point upon which they can all agree.

6.4.3.3 Vocal Production and Use of Musical Instruments



Figure 6.8. Sara Heide holds a violin as Trudy Heide looks on, Steinreich, Nord Colony, Mexico.

Vitally connected to textual comprehension in the Heides' presentation, is a form of delivery that invites, rather than alienates, listeners who may or may not have "musical" training. The performance styles implemented by the Heides do not deviate significantly from what is heard in public media and while their music bears an evangelical message, their repertoire consists more of country gospel than of praise and worship choruses often associated with evangelical worship. As with clothing choices that enable accessibility, for example, the Heides' nasal vocal production resembles the timbre, if not the repertoire, used in the Old Colony church. The high tenor line in many of the family's harmonisations also mirror sounds heard on radio and Mexican *ranchero* recordings.¹⁹¹ By singing in a voice that aurally signals connections to familiar church

¹⁹¹ Abram Siemens, who runs a radio station with Low German programming for Mennonites near Cuauhtémoc, suggests that a nasal vocal timbre is prized among Mennonites in the region. By contrast, he suggests that the sound of classically-trained voices has not caught on among his listeners (2006). While this example does not

and domestic contexts, the Heides are able to share *die Botschaft* in a familiar musical language.

The use of musical instruments in the Heide's performance style is more variable than their vocal timbre. Prior to 2006, no one in the Heide family had taken music lessons, and instruments were seldom used when singing in public.¹⁹² At a youth event in 2005, however, Johan and Tina Peters of Chihuahua heard George and Sarah sing. Moved by what they heard, and aware of the Heide family's dream to use music in Christian ministry, the couple demonstrated their support by gifting the family with a collection of instruments and sound equipment. This collection, received in 2006, consisted of two acoustic guitars with inputs and amplifiers, two speakers, a PA system, a microphone and microphone stand, two violins, and an electric keyboard.

While *Musik* is no longer perceived as a threat to community cohesion or individual faithfulness among most Old Colonists in northern Mexico, introducing instruments to what was unaccompanied song (with the exception of occasional guitar and violin accompaniment) is significant, and points to a potentially dramatic transition in performance style. Because music is perceived to be an imperative point of contact in ministering to conserving Mennonite groups, choices about musical instruments and performance style take on added weight and are carefully considered.

The practical implications of introducing new instruments are myriad. In addition to negotiating how instruments will shape their performance style, George, Sarah, Trudy,

represent the whole of Mexico's Mennonite listenership, it points to the popularity of the Heide family's performance style.

¹⁹² On occasions when brothers David and Isaak are available, they often accompany the singing with guitars.

and Anna must also learn to play those instruments. While brothers David and Isaak are guitarists who accompany from time to time, the keyboard and violins are completely new additions. The Heides are aware of this learning curve, however conversations about related issues suggest that the instruments' impact on their sound is in some ways peripheral. Despite new acquisitions, the family is more concerned with modes of performance that prioritize listeners and are sensitive to potential discomforts among them:

SH: Among our family, we would like a drum set, but we have family that's Old Colony. They wouldn't like it. So we would rather not play it there.

GH: And guitar, sometimes they don't like it either, cause they don't –

SH: They don't believe in instruments. (G. and S. Heide 2006)

Grounds for this sensitivity are not merely interpersonal, but stem from the family's acceptance of the instruments as gifts from God, gifts that the family does not own, but for which they are responsible:

SH: See, God gave us the instruments through some other people. Now we just want to, like, give them to God, you know? They're His instruments, but He's going to use us to play with them.

AH: And we're gonna' pray so that we won't play rock or un-Christian music – that's what we're trying to do. (A. and S. Heide 2006)

The mandate to balance accessibility with sharing the gospel in a way that the family deems effective is consistent with the use of musical instruments at the *Spikja* program. Peter, Johan, George, Sara, Trudy, and Anna did not play the new instruments, but rather sang together a cappella. Peter, Simon, and I played a short set of instrumental numbers early in the evening, and Simon and I later accompanied the family on guitar and violin, respectively. While violin is perhaps less common on the colonies than the guitar or the harmonica, my participation was welcomed by the family and by organizers.

This welcome was not only extended because the family enjoyed our combined sound. Instead it was the function that the combination of instruments might serve for audience members, its potential to “break hearts,” that surfaced in conversation about the use of the violin.

Whereas the Heides perceive their repertoire choices to push theological boundaries among audience members, their performance style balances cultural challenge and sensitivity. They are aware of how they present themselves, and concerned with how that presentation is received. Still, their self-consciousness appears to be more about faithful commitment to “doing God’s will” (sharing the gospel) than it is about achieving a particular style. Despite their active engagement, the family continues to refer to themselves as vessels, working in service of their Creator.

6.4.3.4 *Signified or Signifier? An Ethnomusicologist in a Mexican Spikja*

Because David and Isaak Heide – who often play guitar with the family – were not in Chihuahua for the *Spikja* program, the presence of musical instruments brought with it an added dimension, namely the participation of extra-familial musicians: Simon and me. Not only were we extra-familial, we were also Mennonites from Canada and instructors at SBS.

My presence as an ethnomusicologist – or at least a student interested in Mennonite song practices – was known in the colonies by this point in my fieldwork, as was Simon’s contribution to the project, but as discussed in Chapter 2, determining my role in this context remained complex. Standing, violin in hand, at the front of the *Spikja* on this cool March evening, I questioned my judgement. Was I being inconsistent by

playing violin at a gathering like this one on Saturday night, while expressing respect and interest in the unaccompanied song practices of conserving friends and acquaintances on other days of the week? Was it possible for me to articulate issues like these in a way that did not compromise my deep respect for the Heide family? And did my very concern with “placing myself” reflect the folly of attempting to control my relationships instead of allowing their parameters to be determined by the communities whose stories and life experiences I had been invited to share?

Marcus’s concept of circumstantial activism, where “in certain sites, one seems to be working with, and in others one seems to be working against, changing sets of subjects” (1998, 98) is again apt in this context. But even circumstantial activism becomes complicated here, as the “changing sets of subjects” are no longer at different sites. Instead, they are gathered in a single *Spikja*. Situations like these highlight the importance of honesty and the reality (and scariness) of vulnerability when doing fieldwork. But they also enable the possibility of surprise.

Thus far I have emphasized the careful navigation of repertoire, language use, and performance style by the Heide family in the preparation and presentation of evangelical musical programs. These navigations have suggested a relatively congruous map of ideologies among family members. Peter’s professed ideology of music, for example, is relatively straightforward: music, like life itself, is a gift from God, and should therefore be centred on praise, worship, and turning people’s hearts to God. However, while its apparent adherence to simplicity and faithfulness of spirit is pleasant to recognize and easy to comprehend, this description does not fairly reflect the intricacy of Peter’s

ideological framework, nor is it representative of the entire family. Not unlike their choices around clothing, Peter and Anna's children express alternate viewpoints through their words and actions. Sarah, for example, would like to be a professional singer and enjoys singing solos when the family performs. George, a twin to Sarah, would challenge the family's stance on using musical instruments by playing a drum kit, were it available to him. I am not suggesting these divergences to imply reticence on the part of the family's youth. Still, it is important to note that familial compliance with the family's vision for music ministry is not passive, but engaged. By expressing individuality in subtle ways such as dress and in conversation during preparations for performance events, family members participate in the ministry and assert their agency in the family's ideological practice.

6.4.4 *Receiving the Program*

The construction of a musical experience by performers inside the Rempel *Spikja* is only part of the equation. While the program's organization is significant and signals careful preparation by the Heides, the minutes that immediately followed the March 11th program were also telling. It was during this time that face-to-face interaction between and among listeners and performers occurred.

Prior to these moments of "clean-up," my anxiety over participation in an evangelical program presented in the *Spikja* of an Old Colony farmer was tangible. Looking out into the audience, I saw faces of people that I had met in the village, and yet whose faces and thoughts on my participation in such a program I could not infer. Our songs were not punctuated with applause, but nor did I recognize disapproval among

listeners. Was I “helping out,” “melting hearts,” or “playing *Musik*”? Was I opening conversation or incriminating myself? And did I want to do any of these things in the first place? Questions and insecurities would have circulated endlessly, were it not for the encounters that followed the program.

In the few minutes it took for people to fold up their lawn chairs and to stack borrowed stools, audience members completely turned the tables on the event. Indeed, it was not just performers who were responsible for shaping the evening’s direction; the musical experience was dynamic. The generosity of presence and conversation shared by listeners – words of thanks and invitations from community members never before encountered – marked an alternate sort of transformation to the spiritual one presented by the Heide family. It offered a reminder that collective gatherings are not controlled by individuals or groups, but navigated by engaged participants. That is to say, it was not only the Heides who sought points of connection with their audience, but audience members who sought, enabled, and sometimes initiated such encounters.

Karen Pegley’s (2000) engagement with terminologies of space and place become meaningful here. For Pegley, who cites Relph (1976) for her understanding of space, space is “a context within which places are constructed. ... Place, then, is phenomenological, for its meanings are based on peoples’ lived experiences” (Pegley, 308). Building on Rodman’s “multilocality,” wherein a single place can hold multiple meanings (1992), Pegley goes on to explore what she calls multilocal reflexivity,

“viewing each new place in relation to a more familiar one,” as a potentially powerful strategy for negotiating unknown territories (2000, 308).¹⁹³

Identifying multilocality in the context of the *Spikja* program is in some ways made easy by the diverse church affiliations of participants and the related diversity of their life experiences and worldviews. Understanding the negotiation of space and place by these diverse participants, however, is more involved. While most audience members and performers were familiar with agrarian living and the physical terrain of a *Spikja*, the particular gathering of individuals and the activities in which they were engaged on March 11th were unfamiliar in this instance. For example, the Heide family was in a *Spikja* on somebody else’s yard, and that “somebody else” had never before opened up their *Spikja* to a program of this kind. Community members in attendance received the resulting mix of familiar and unfamiliar audio, visual, and social cues. Missing were common reference points for constructing “place.”

Yet, when exploring relationships to place among participants at the program, one must also recognize that audience members are not only in the business of “receiving.” In a space like the *Spikja*, where typical cues are missing for both performers and listeners, possibilities for new modes of interaction and engagement are enabled. Here, the “social embeddedness” (Hedges 1996, 180) of community practice enables meaningful engagement between participants, whether “on stage” or seated in lawn chairs. Because of proscriptions around particular musical conventions, the social

¹⁹³ Pegley does not stop with “space” and “place,” but also uses “location” and “landscape” in her framework. “Location” is used to refer to specific places, and “landscape” to identify “the physical component of place – what the individual views or inhabits” (2000, 308).

significance of those conventions is heightened, and deviations from them can be profound. Again, participants demonstrate agency as they ‘construct, maintain, contest, defend, and sometimes change’ the parameters of the musical experiences.¹⁹⁴

There are many lenses through which the Rempel *Spikja* program might be examined. While some highlight evangelical hues, others draw out points of convergence and conversation between the various groups present. In the end, however, we discover a gathering of people. People *spat*’sear-ing and laughing together after an evening of music and song. Whether offered as defiant evangelism or hopeful gift, whether received as pious personal spirituality or thoughtful sharing, the barn is significant here not as a context for generic engagement, but for the range of diverse experiences that culminate in encounters between neighbours, church members, siblings, and friends.

6.5 Conclusions

By describing and reflecting upon the experiences of music making by members of a single family, this chapter has addressed the convergence of multifaceted functions of unity, praise, challenge, and transformation. Embracing musical instruments and evangelical Christian worship, the Heide family praises God in a way that defies the conventions of their Old Colony upbringing. For the Heides, singing is conceived of as one of the most important ways of making contact with conserving groups. As such,

¹⁹⁴ Here again, I compare musical agency to Hedges work with Old Colony literacy. As previously cited, she writes, “conceptions about language and literacy are constructed and maintained, contested and defended, and sometimes changed” (1996, 195).

performance decisions – whether in choices of musical repertoires, instruments, or dress – are understood to be as important as what is sung or said.

Previous chapters have shown that despite seemingly unambiguous linkages between Mennonite music and belief, their enactment is far from simple. Further, music's function in Mennonite families and churches has been shown to be more complicated than notions of 'building unity among individuals' or 'embodied social control' allow. In the example of the Heide family, a paradox of simultaneously ambiguous and unabashed familial connections and church affiliations is set forth, marking a delicate interplay between music and belief.

Commitment to the life of the church community is a thread integrally woven through the fabric of Heide family narratives. Their primary focus, however, is not community life, but rather a personal faith in and relationship with God. It is this relationship that guides their choices and decision-making as individuals and as a family. Grace and assurance of salvation, rather than *orthopraxis* and hope for God's grace, guide their daily actions, and demonstrate the evangelical ground in which their faith is rooted.

Outstanding about the example of the Heide family is that their evangelism challenges the notion of defiance itself. Their concern is not to mark external differences from who they were as Old Colonists nor to pass judgment on those affiliated with the same. Instead they seek to share the personal transformations that they experienced, and continue to experience, through Christ. Theirs is a thoughtful engagement; a desire not to critique, but to share. While this complicates easy delineation between "evangelical" and

“conserving” groups, it is a healthy complication. Their example demonstrates again that musicking in northern Mexico cannot be reduced to essentializing polarities, and points to the vitality of a diverse and dynamic Mennonite song.

Chapter 7

Encoding Song: Defiance, Vitality, and Process

7.1 Introduction

Stories are told, both with and without music. More important than their content is the fact that during the process of performance the dramatic power of narrative as a form is celebrated. The simple *content* of the stories is dominated by the ritual act of story-telling itself. This involves a very particular use of language and a special cultural dynamics. (Gilroy 1993, 200)

Paul Gilroy writes about narrative power in African American diasporic experience, but his words resonate equally with the song practices of northern Mexico's Mennonite communities. Despite obvious contextual and historical divergences, Gilroy's emphasis on process, on the significance born of "story-telling itself," shifts emphasis away from music as object and towards musics of active social significance. It enables engagement and intent in analyses of expressive culture and song practice, a notion carefully nuanced in Beverley Diamond's concept of musical alliances. Diamond writes, "I premise my comments on the belief that we should regard musical practices *as* theory, not as objects to which we might apply theory" (2006, 1). It is this recognition of ongoing engagement that draws the themes developed in this dissertation together.

7.2 Overview

While a strong choral tradition is frequently emphasized among Canadian and American Mennonites, it is not ubiquitous among diasporic Mennonite groups. Some

scholars have addressed this imbalance by exploring the presence of Low German folk songs in primarily domestic contexts (Klassen 1989), or suggesting new parameters for what constitutes “Mennonite music” (Epp and Weaver 2005). By considering the song practices of conserving diasporic Mennonites in northern Mexico, I seek to participate in this conversation, and to extend its parameters beyond the borders of Canada and the United States.

I begin by describing the song practices of conserving Mennonites in Mexico and, more specifically, outlining proscriptions around the use of instruments in worship and at home. Intimately connected to beliefs around technology use and humility, beliefs that oppose interaction with “worldly” objects and ideas that detract from faithful *Gelassenheit*, the rejection of *Musik* is shown to be consistent with non-conformist values and commitments to *orthopraxis*, or lived belief, among community members.

In describing musical proscriptions and values that distinguish diasporic Mexican Mennonite song practices from their Canadian and American counterparts, however, I do not wish to suggest an essential Mexican Mennonite music. As I have shown in Chapter 2 and again in Chapter 6, there are varied Mennonite denominations in Mexico with diverging ideas about what it means to worship and to live faithfully. My awareness of, and engagement with, tensions between evangelical and conserving Mennonites in Mexico affected my fieldwork and continues to inform my writing about musical practices in the northern region. I emphasize, however, that a tension between evangelical and conserving Mennonite church groups is not the primary lens through which I conceive my work. To do so would polarize Mexico’s Mennonite churches in

precisely the fashion against which I have argued, nurturing essentialized portrayals of church members and ignoring the dialogue that continues between groups and among individuals. I write informed by this tension, but not “from” it.

I extend this recognition of diversity to particular Mennonite denominations as well. Whereas ethnographies as recent as 2004 have assumed sameness among Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico (Bennion), my work challenges depictions of Mexico’s Mennonite populations that collapse diverse expressions of “Mennonite-ness” into a composite stereotype. Informed by the writing of diaspora theorists, I argue that essentialist depictions of Mexican Mennonites, emphasizing conservative religious values and resistance to “worldly” change, frequently obscure the diversity, creativity, and agency within particular churches and communities. By articulating differences in community and worship, and exploring divergent song practices among them, I show that “Mexican Mennonite” is not a static entity, but a stance enacted in various ways, even within a single colony, church congregation, or family.¹⁹⁵

In addition to challenging essentialist portrayals of Mexico’s Mennonites, I propose alternate frameworks for resistance in conserving contexts. By engaging ethnographic examples that challenge binaries of resistance and accommodation, I demonstrate that defiance and devout belief are not mutually exclusive. Finally, by emphasizing process and de-emphasizing rigid boundaries between Mennonite churches, families, and individuals, I show that while adherence to the *oole Ordnunk* is central to

¹⁹⁵ The language of “stance” versus “entity” is borrowed from Rogers Brubaker, who uses the terms to explore the concept of diaspora (2005).

participation in conserving Mennonite communities, it does not occur without the intentional engagement of community members.

Through the course of this dissertation, I recognize diversity and unity in the song practices of Mexican Mennonites. These concepts, however, are not static, but engage different levels of negotiability in their working out. The organization of my chapters emphasizes this layering.

7.2.1 Chapter Summary

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 set a contextual stage for my work in northern Mexico. They offer background into how conserving Mennonites came to settle the colonies, and outline song practices associated with particular Mennonite churches that currently inhabit the region. My analyses of specific musical practices and contexts follow this introduction, and build upon it. Challenging assumptions of sameness, I move from examples of song practice that demonstrate secretive defiance of church protocol (Chapter 4, illicit song in the home), to more public demonstrations (Chapter 5, *Singstunden*), and finally to examples that overtly challenge the ideology of song set up by Old Colony churches (Chapter 6).

Chapter 4 reconfigures ideas about musical defiance and parameters for involvement in religious community and experience. At one level, the playing of forbidden instruments is shown to be an expression of defiance against church doctrine and the leaders by whom adherence is monitored. Interviewees leveled critique via questions about the presence of music and instruments in biblical narratives and their inconsistency with church policy. At the same time, narratives about illicit musicking

among families rarely criticized the church overtly. Instead, secretive disclosures of a gramophone, harmonica, or guitar more often elicited stories of strengthened family relationships through defiant song practice in the home. These stories signal a means through which defiance of church policy (participation in forbidden song practice) may serve not to undermine the church polity, but to build it up.

Challenging frameworks for church experience that depend on binaries of individual and collective, Chapter 4 engages narratives of domestic musicking in conserving Mennonite contexts that demonstrate familial engagement in the living out of church faithfulness. Unlike models of religious experience that posit an individual-collective dialectic, I suggest that in many instances, “family” is a primary cultural group. The network of relations and interactions that it comprises shape an ambiguous musical meaning that is neither inherently subversive nor accommodating. By strengthening families – building blocks of the church community – the church too is reinforced.

Chapter 5 extends the exploration of defiance to less secretive and more public spaces. I explain that independent Bible studies are controversial to some Old Colonists because exegesis is understood to presume and celebrate individual insight over community discipleship. Spanish language comprehension is shown to be equally problematic. Because it invites contact with the region’s Spanish Mexican population, linguistic competence may weaken the separatist community structure of conserving Old Colony churches. Finally, the singing of song repertoires that employ performance styles and languages that differ from those used in conserving church worship (i.e. *lange Wies*) and condoned by leadership are shown to be controversial. Song forms associated with

worldly practice could incite young people to look beyond the conserving church community for worship experiences in later years. I go on to explore how, despite apparent challenges to these church protocols, the overt defiance exercised in *Singstunden* might be alternately construed.

By engaging young people in Bible study and language education, *Singstunden* leaders seek to prepare youth for Christian participation in an increasingly integrated social context. For example, decreasing land stores mean that exclusively agrarian subsistence for members of conserving churches is no longer sustainable, with many finding employment outside the community. By equipping young people with tools that provide confidence in their search for employment and Christian influence that can be taken with them beyond the village, *Singstunden* leaders demonstrate their concern for future generations in the Old Colony church and create a sense of value for, and ownership of, Old Colony community among participants. Their goals are not only about offering alternatives to boredom and unhealthy activities *oppe Gauss*, but are about future prospects for church members in their villages. Further, by engaging young people in activities that are perceived at some level to be controversial, the *Singstunden* are shown to offer a context for “rebellious” socializing that paradoxically strengthens commitment to other Old Colony youth. Here too, musical defiance and devotion are not divorced from one another, but rather signal a process of ongoing negotiation in the perpetuating of Old Colony community.

Chapter 6 takes the concept of musical defiance among conserving Mennonites in another direction; it demonstrates that music’s function among conserving church groups

in northern Mexico is neither consistent, nor easily deciphered. By looking closely at the song practices of an evangelical Mennonite family, the Heide family, I explore the importance of domestic musicking for family members both individually and as a cultural group. Basing my work on Heide narratives, I explore how singing is meaningful not only for its ability to unify participants, but also for the performative significance that family members attribute to it. For some, singing is not only an expression of Christian faith, but also the vehicle of their conversion. It is the possibility of transformation through song that inspires their commitment to sharing the gospel with the people around them.

Because the Heides were born into the Old Colony church, because of their ongoing connection with extended Old Colony family members, and because of their commitment to sharing the evangelical message with members of the Old Colony community in their region, my exploration of the Heides' music making extends beyond the home to include interface between Mennonite groups in northern Mexico. Their musical choices demonstrate that not all forbidden music practice is initiated among conserving church members, nor do all defiant acts of musicking and song strengthen commitment to the Old Colony church. Some song practices are explicitly un-devout when considered in relation to Old Colony *orthopraxis*. The Heides' repertoire, language use, and performance style choices embody both respect and challenge in relation to the church they left behind and the people for whom they now sing. Their negotiation of appropriate song practice and their desire to share the gospel with conserving Mennonite community members underscores the ongoing and process-based status of song practice

in the colonies. Further, it recognizes the conversation between various Mennonite groups implicit in contexts of shared musical experience.

In each of these chapters, the role of the family is important, but not just as an example of “unity in diversity.” The unifying function of song is articulated, but it is differently nuanced. Similarly, defiance is shown to be important in conserving contexts, but not only as a demonstration of agency in resistance. In each case, dynamic processes of engagement demonstrate the ongoing and creative involvement of Mennonite participants.

7.3 Research Questions

I began this dissertation with two questions: “How can analyses of repertoire, performance style, social interaction, performance context, and the assigning of musical meaning inform understandings of Mennonite faith communities?” and “What are the sonic encodings in Mennonite song that facilitate these understandings?”

My emphasis on ethnography and process in exploring these questions has yielded meaningful results. By considering the implications of particular repertoire choices, performance styles, and performance contexts in both conserving and evangelical church communities, I have demonstrated that defiance and accommodation are negotiated in relation to those choices: Whereas Old Colony proscriptions around *Musik* meant that David Peters did not own a gramophone, his father’s repair work for Spanish Mexican customers meant that there were “*immer solche*” (High German; “always such things”) in his home. Whereas the singing of *lange Wies* at the Old Colony

Singstunde trains youth to participate in church worship, Spanish songs challenge the parameters within which that same worship occurs. And whereas the Heide family is unabashed in their evangelical sharing of the gospel through Low German songs of spiritual transformation, they temper their departure from conserving practice through “simple” dress and careful instrument choices.

Because church life, family life, and social activity are implicitly connected in the colonies, performance contexts are also informative. The negotiation of appropriate musics and instruments in particular contexts – “under the covers,” at the *Altenheim*, or at a family gathering – demonstrate not only that song and community practice are connected among Mennonites in northern Mexico, but that their connections are not arbitrarily determined nor rigidly bound. Trust, engagement, and accountability are closely tied to their negotiation.

The individual, familial, and community engagement that is necessary for these negotiations to occur implies coherence with the “non-sovereign diasporic” understanding of Mennonite identity set forth by Chris K. Huebner, wherein identity is not conceived as an entity whose parameters can be named and protected. While intentionality is central to conserving practice, conserving and evangelical Mennonites in the colonies balance family and community relationships with myriad and sometimes conflicting ideas about what constitutes “faithfulness” in Mennonite life. Through these negotiations, “solid and impenetrable” conceptions of Mennonite identity (Huebner 2006, 28) both in- and outside of the colonies are contested, and engaged participants in dynamic community emerge. While the nature of participation may vary depending on

one's particular theological stance or church affiliation, the agency demonstrated by the narratives presented in this dissertation suggest that active involvement – whether overt or clandestine – is significant for many community members as they involve themselves in the church community.

That values around community life, family relationships, and individual expression are wound up in song practice has also been demonstrated through the course of this dissertation. The social and political weight of song practice has further shown that values around music making are encoded in particular song repertoires, performance styles, and performance contexts.

The encoding of music in Mennonite Mexico, however, is not a task that can be completed, interpreted, and thereby definitively understood. “Encoding,” suggests active involvement. Faithfulness and defiance are not irreconcilable in lived experience, but nor are they precisely reconciled. Acts of defiance, of subversion, or of accommodation are not static, but are rather part of the ongoing process that is community life. Stuart Hall's writing on “cultural identity” is useful here:

Cultural identity ... is a matter of “becoming” as well as of “being.” It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (2003, 236)

In the same way, the encoding of particular song repertoires is meaningful insofar as it participates in the ongoing negotiations of musical practice and musical meaning

within Mexico's Mennonite colonies and church communities. Analyses of musical meaning can inform our understandings of Mennonite faith communities, but they cannot predict nor decode a static "meaning."

7.4 Emergent Themes and Issues

7.4.1 *Defiance and Devotion*

Central to my thesis is a re-visioning of how "defiance" and "devotion" are conceived in relation to Mexican Mennonite community practice. On the one hand, I have demonstrated that despite assumptions of cultural continuity and musical sameness in Mexico's Mennonite communities, diversity of belief and practice is evident in the northern colonies. Not only is this diversity expressed along lines of denominational affiliation, it is also expressed among individuals and family members in particular congregations. At the same time, because of community proscriptions around certain musical practices in conserving churches, this diversity has been shown to encompass more than "difference," and to embody defiance as well. In narratives describing this defiance, binaries of compliance and resistance are challenged, as the social significance of defiant practice is shown to "mean" differently than the actions themselves initially suggest.

By recognizing these variations in musical function, conceptions of musical diversity are extended beyond "unity in diversity through song" to encompass creative agency. Here musical proscriptions set out by the *Lehrdienst* do not signal static practice, but rather emphasize how agency is not conditional upon self-determination (as in Fast

2004). By exploring defiant song practice, both in narratives of domestic *Musik* and in the “public” space of the *Singstunde*, I have shown that “devout practice” encompasses more than adherence to particular “rules” of acceptable practice. I have also shown how defiance encompasses more than difference from, or subversive resistance to, church protocol. By re-visioning the basis by which these terms are used, musical agency is made possible. Through song practices that encompass both defiant practice and devout belief, Mennonites in northern Mexico are able to “live inside, with a difference” (Clifford 1994, 308).

7.4.2 Family

Through an emphasis on process over particular action, defiant song practice can function as devout. But this “devoutness” is not only connected to individual and collective experiences of church fellowship. For Mexican Mennonites, it is often negotiated within the context of the family. Chapter 4 demonstrated the importance of family support in practices of illicit domestic musicking. While defiance of church proscriptions was a predominant theme in the narratives relayed in the chapter, the defiant acts that comprised the centerpieces of these narratives were mediated by family members whose support was shown to effect positive associations with them and with related acts. By contrast, in cases where some measure of family support was absent, memories of illicit musicking were accompanied by sadness and even anger.

Instances of domestic defiance also revealed the creativity of conserving families in their defiance of church protocols. Illicit musicking was necessarily secretive, meaning that hiding places for instruments and discreet performance contexts had to be

sought out. Whether this meant keeping a gramophone under the bed or a harmonica in the pocket, conserving church members demonstrated active participation in determining the parameters of their musical practice. Through these acts of “everyday resistance” (Gerstin 2003, 298), conserving Mennonites show how even secret acts of defiance can embody both subversion and accommodation in their manifestation. Indeed, a “dynamic everyday world” (R. Loewen 2001, 105-06) is depicted here.

The example of the Heide family also demonstrates the significance of family as a primary culture group among Mennonites in Mexico. Despite the personal emotions that family members associate with singing particular repertoire, family remains the primary context and reference point when discussing those emotions. Similarly, the personal spirituality emphasized in their evangelical church is bound up in the family’s collective mission of sharing *die Botschaft*.

7.4.3 Sacrality

In Bohlman’s recent writing about music in American religious experience, tensions between individual and collective group experiences are conceived as dialectics: “music and musical practices provide means of imagining communities and constructing the dialectics of selfness and otherness, private and public worship, individual belief and community cohesion” (Bohlman 2006b, 239). These dialectics are frequently played out (Bohlman et al. 2006; Mazo 2006; Summit 2006; Titon 2006), and in light of the myriad narratives of musical defiance I encountered in northern Mexico, I imagined my consideration of “sacred” and “secular” musics fitting a similar framework. In some ways, it did. A conserving Mennonite teenager covertly playing a harmonica was aware

of the challenges to church protocol that his or her actions represented. Further, negotiations between “private” and “public,” between “individual belief” and “community cohesion,” were not overlooked by these *Musik* makers. They recognized the inevitable encounters between these spheres and, as the careful layering of consent outlined in particular narratives demonstrates, actively participated in them. Despite this seeming congruence, however, the narratives of these same *Musik* makers also demonstrate that dialectics of individual and community are insufficient in the context of Mennonite Mexico. As illustrated in Chapter 4, individuals did not navigate these meetings alone; diverse familial webs were also engaged. Because dialectics of individual and community, of private and public, do not account for the dynamic and mediating role of the family, they cannot function as a primary framework for understanding “religious experience” in northern Mexico.

My study also considers sacrality in relation to specific repertoires and performance styles. Among Mennonites in northern Mexico, the use of textual content to determine a repertoire’s sacred function has been shown problematic. Following Kelly Hedges’ description of Old Colony literacy and literary practices, my work has demonstrated the “social embeddedness” of “sacred” song practice in the colonies (1996, 180). While distinction is made between *sindeosche* and *auldeosche* activities, the sacred function of song within communities grounded in *orthopraxis* is not bound by these distinctions.

Further, while careful proscriptions around *Musik* and particular song and language practices demonstrate the social embeddedness of music, they do not preclude

the possibility for change. Through strategic repertoire choices and performance practices, community members (like those involved with *Singstunden*) resist assumptions of acquiescent sameness in their communities.

Sacred musical meaning is connected not only to particular repertoires and performance contexts in Mexico's Mennonite church communities, but to processes of participation, processes of negotiation, and processes of defiance. As the examples of illicit home music, the *Singstunde*, and the Heide family demonstrate, conserving musical proscriptions render some "Christian" song repertoires and practices inappropriate, and therefore potentially subversive. Yet, that very subversiveness contributes to the strength and resilience of the community. In domestic contexts, covert musicking has strengthened family ties; at the *Singstunde*, contentious education nurtures commitment to Old Colony community among youth; in the *Spikja*, the care taken by the Heides in organizing the program, and the engagement of conserving audience members, offers elements of surprise. In each case, essentialist depictions of Mennonite diversity prove inadequate.

7.4.4 Diaspora

The constant negotiation of identity and cultural affiliation is described by Stuart Hall as a process of "being" and "becoming," with cultural identity and meaning never fully completed (2003, 236-37). Similarly, Tölölyan's notion that diaspora is not an "accident of birth" (1996, 30) and Clifford's conception of identity as "politics rather than an inheritance" (1992, 116) reject static, essentialist conceptions of identity and diaspora. The usefulness of diaspora as a framework for entering musical practice in

northern Mexico has been affirmed through the course of this dissertation, primarily for its destabilizing of essentialist stereotypes. By allowing for an ongoing negotiation of cultural identity, the agency of Mexican Mennonite families and communities in determining musical meaning is also afforded.

Ethnographic studies that engage the musical practices of so-called traditional groups frequently account for the effects of external influences in their analysis. Steven Cornelius, for example, suggests a marriage between external pressures, traditional music, and social development in his explication of community stresses in an Ewe village in Southeast Ghana:

The social forces attending urbanization, Westernization, and modernization continue to have significant impact on traditional musics throughout the world ... when social institutions change, the music that served those institutions will be readapted or perhaps even abandoned ... traditional Ewe music genres support specific traditional Ewe lifestyles, and vice versa, those lifestyles support specific music associations. (2003, 258)

On what grounds do we distinguish between the “social forces attending urbanization, Westernization, and modernization,” and community initiatives attending to the day-to-day experiences of individuals for diasporic Mennonite groups in northern Mexico? Or in the words of Stuart Hall, “If identity does not proceed in a straight unbroken line from some fixed origin, how are we to understand its formation?” (2003, 237). External influences are at play in the colonies with the impacts of NAFTA on agriculture and trade and the unfair treatment of seasonal migrant workers in Canada and the U.S.A. contributing to the crises currently facing Mexico’s Mennonites. In their case, however, the primary point of reference from which church decisions are made remains the church itself. It is to the church community that members are held accountable, and

community viability is (ideally) not measured in relation to external forces, but to internal relationships and practices. From this vantage point, the singing of new repertoires by Mexico's Old Colony Mennonites is less about *readapting* or *abandoning* the old, (to use Cornelius' words), than it is about *being* the church.

By developing themes of musical practices that embody both defiant practice and devout belief, my work demonstrates how Mexican Mennonites remain committed to models of community that are non-conformist, while exercising defiance within those same communities. This expanded understanding of community is significant because it recognizes the importance of accountability in community life without negating the vitality initiated by challenges to it. Conserving Mennonites are frequently characterized by their nonconformity with "the world." While this characterization is consistent with conserving ideology, it has in some instances been extended to suggest a definition of community that relies on prescribed roles within its membership (Bennion 2004). It is this essentializing brush that I write against.

Further, by emphasizing the ways in which Mexican Mennonites actively participate in shaping the parameters of their "Mennonite-ness," I have argued that diaspora be conceived as an engaged stance rather than a label based on a shared point of origin. Diaspora enables a critique of essentialism. Engaging the concept of a diasporic stance (Brubaker) enables the recognition of intentionality in community maintenance among Mexican Mennonites. At the same time, it allows for the recognition of dynamic ongoing-ness both in *being*, and *becoming* "Mennonite." With Hall, I contend that this

process is never fully complete, and it is because of this living ambiguity that the concept is meaningful.

Ultimately, the usefulness of diaspora as a concept in understanding Mennonite song practice is not complicated. By returning to the root of the word – the fruitful scattering of seed from the parent body – variations in musical practice and their relationship to belief and life practice are accounted for. Seeds scattered and dispersed in a new climate will yield new fruit. Still, regeneration may take many forms even within the same plot of land, or colony. Here, incongruencies between Mennonite churches in Mexico only serve to reinforce an understanding of Mennonite diaspora as defined by church and not particular geographic location. Despite, or perhaps because of, challenges that emerge both in- and outside of the Mennonite colonies, the seeds continue to grow. In this analogy, defiance strengthens diasporic seedlings. Whether they take the form of illicit musicking at home, public enactments of youthful defiance, or evangelical programs of worship, these varied forms of resistance are part of ongoing vigour and dynamic processes of growth.

7.5 Potential Areas of Further Research

The significance of home music among Mennonites in northern Mexico has been emphasized in this project. I have demonstrated the importance of family as a cultural group, the primacy of the home as a context for enacting belief, and the strength of song practices in both of these areas. The strength of familial consent in song practices that challenge church protocols was also shown to be significant, affecting both individual

and collective spheres. Whereas I emphasized analytics of repertoire choice, performance style, performance contexts, and related ideologies of music, this conversation could be extended to include questions of trust, gender, and possible divergence in generational perspectives. Further, additional consideration of the extensive home music practices of some evangelical Mennonite families in the northern region would add useful breadth to this conversation, serving to further destabilize stereotypes of Mexican Mennonite song.

7.6 Conclusions

Prior to this study, my primary contact with Mexican Mennonites occurred as a child sharing an elementary school classroom with immigrant students in Manitoba. While friendships were formed at this early age, so, too, were differences observed; the “Mexican Mennonites” in my school dressed differently, spoke differently, and often returned to Mexico at a moment’s notice. While years have passed since these impressions of transience for the sake of continuity were established, they were nevertheless formative. In this dissertation, I challenge the assumptions of sameness that formed the basis of these early impressions. Through careful ethnography and musical analysis, I underscore the diversity of Mennonite experience in the northern colonies of Mexico and explore lived expressions of difference among communities, congregations, and families.

This exploration of diversity builds on themes of community building through music, music’s didactic functions in conserving contexts, and its ability to forge

connections among diverse family and church memberships. By considering narratives of musical defiance among members of conserving communities in northern Mexico, I have shown how engagement with community life is about more than adherence to protocols set out by church leadership. In many cases, acts of musical defiance signal meaningful involvement.

The didactic function of “Mennonite song” has been previously articulated. But the didactic function of *Musik* as a challenge to Old Colony “rules” has not. This teaching of defiance occurs not through text alone, but also through process. The playing of instruments in contexts where they are forbidden; the singing of Low German and Spanish repertory that – although Christian in textual content – defies proscriptions set out by the *Lehrdienst*; these acts of defiance spell out a musical ideology that, while opposed to Old Colony leadership, is nevertheless complementary to the functioning of the community as a whole. Here, the *process* of musicking – the vitality that individual, familial, and corporate defiance enables – is more significant, more community building, and arguably more “sacred” than the meaning of the text or the disobedience that it enacts. Community is strengthened by challenges to it. Defiance does not preclude devout practice, but – as the stories that comprise this dissertation demonstrate – in many instances enables it.

Appendix 1 **Data about the Steinreich Bibelschule in 2006** *Daten über die Steinreich Bibelschule*

Daten über die Steinreich Bibelschule

- Im Jahre 1966, auf Steinreich Farm, fing die Schule zum ersten mal in einem Hühnerstall an.
- Als Folge eines Verlangens Gott besser kennen zu lernen, wurde die Schule, mit Hilfe kanadischer Missionare, begonnen.
- Nach einigen Jahren zog die Schule nach Km. 17, aber nachher wurde sie wieder zurück nach Steinreich gebracht.
- In den letzten 9 Jahren hat die Schule ein starkes Wachstum erlebt.
- Heute wird die Steinreich Bibelschule von 4 Konferenzen getragen: CMM, MC, EMMC und die EMC.
- In diesem Winter besuchen 256 Schüler diese Schule. Ungefähr 120 davon wohnen in den Schülerheimen auf dem Schulgelände.
- Die Schüler kommen aus folgenden Ländern und Gegenden:
 - Belize ----- 6 Schüler
 - Bolivien ----- 2 Schüler
 - Kanada ----- 48 Schüler
 - USA ----- 9 Schüler
 - Mexico - Chihuahua 173 Schüler
 - Durango 16 Schüler
 - Zacatecas 2 Schüler
- Der Lehrerstab besteht aus 14 Leherer. Davon sind 8 vollzeitig und 6 teilzeitig angestellt.
- Anderes Personal: 2 Hauselternpaare und 5 Köchinnen.
- Es wird auch Sprachunterricht in der deutschen, spanischen und in der englischen Sprache geboten.

Figure A.1. "Daten über die Steinreich Bibelschule," bulletin insert. Included in church bulletins prepared for use during SBS programs in neighbouring churches, Mexico, 2006.

Daten über die Steinreich Bibelschule: Translation

Data about the Steinreich Bible School

- In 1966, in a henhouse on the Steinreich farm, the school first opened.
- The school was started with the help of Canadian missionaries, with a mandate of learning to know and to better follow God.
- After some years, the school moved to KM. 17, but later returned to Steinreich.
- In the past 9 years, the school has grown significantly.
- Today, the Steinreich Bible School is supported by 4 conferences: CMM, MC, EMMC and the EMC.
- This winter, the school has 256 students. Approximately 120 of them live in residence on campus.
- The students come from the following countries and regions:
 - Belize ----- 6 students
 - Bolivia ----- 2 students
 - Canada ----- 48 students
 - USA ----- 9 students
 - Mexico - Chihuahua 173 students
 - Durango 16 students
 - Zacatecas 2 students
- The teaching staff is comprised of 14 teachers. From these, 8 are full-time and 6 part-time.
- Other staff: 2 house parents and 5 cooks.
- Language instruction is also offered in German, Spanish, and English languages.

Appendix 2
Steinreich Bibelschule Mealtime Questions

Questions for Happy Mealtimes
(February 27 – March 2, 2006)

Monday (27 Feb)

Lunch: What are your family gatherings like and when do they happen? Be specific.

Supper: What sort(s) of singing/music/recitation (Gedicht, Wenschen) happen at your family gatherings? Why do you think this is?

Tuesday (28 Feb)

Lunch: Do you sing with family at the table (e.g. table grace, devotions, etc.)? Please describe.

Supper: Do music and doing chores (e.g. dishes, farming, cleaning etc.) go together? Talk about why or why not (and write down what you think!)

Wednesday (1 Mar)

Lunch: How many Low German songs, sayings and verses can you name (and/or recite)? Please list them!

Supper: Do you and your parents/guardians like the same music? Divide your paper into two columns ("you" on one side and "parents/guardians" on the other), and list your observations!

Thursday (2 Mar)

Lunch: Name three songs that you connect with family. Why?

Supper: How does (making) music connect you with God?

Appendix 3¹⁹⁶
Steinreich Bibelschule Student Questionnaire

MUSIC QUESTIONNAIRE

THANK YOU SO MUCH for sharing your thoughts!

When you have finished the questionnaire, please place it in **Judith Klassen Neufeld's** post box, #90, or give it to her directly. Remember to put your signature and write your post box number on the questionnaire to be eligible for a treat...

Signature section:

By signing this page, I allow the information provided to Judith Klassen Neufeld in this questionnaire to be used for educational purposes or publication (e.g. classroom teaching, conference presentations, journal articles, books, archives, and video or sound recordings). I understand that I may choose how I am named in published references to information provided in this questionnaire. I choose to be identified by (check one box and provide the appropriate name/s):

Mit dem Unterzeichnen dieser Seite stimme ich zu, dass Judith Klassen Neufeld diesen Fragebogen für Bildungs – und Veröffentlichungszwecke (z. B. Klassenunterricht, Vorträge, Fachartikeln, Archive, Bücher, sowohl wie Ton- und Videoaufnahme) brauchen kann. Ich verstehe, dass es mir zur Wahl steht, wie ich bezeichnet, bzw. genannt werden möchte in Bezug auf die Veröffentlichung der Information, die aus diesem Fragebogen stammt.

- ☐ First **and** family names / Vor- **und** Nachname(n)
- ☐ First name only / nur Vorname
- ☐ Last name only / nur Nachname
- ☐ Pseudonym / Deckname

I wish to restrict the use of the information in this questionnaire as follows / Ich begrenze hiermit die Nutzung der Informationen auf folgender Weise:

Name (printed): _____
Name (Druckschrift): _____

Signature: _____
Unterschrift: _____

Date: _____
Datum: _____

Post Box Number: _____

Contact Judith:

Judith Klassen Neufeld, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Box 506, Altona, Manitoba
R0G 0B0
Phone: (204) 324-6800 email: h39jmk@mun.ca

¹⁹⁶ The line spacing of text in Appendixes 3, 4a, and 4b has been altered to reduce page space. Textual content, however, is unchanged.

Singing, Music and being Mennonite: A Questionnaire

[illegible]

1. Where have your **grandparents** lived? For how long? / *Wo haben deine Grosseltern gewohnt? Wie lange?*

2. Where have your **parents** lived? For how long? / *Wo haben deine Eltern gewohnt? Wie lange?*

3. Your **grandparents'** work: / *Beruf (Arbeit) deiner Grosseltern:*

4. Your **parents'** work: / *Beruf (Arbeit) deiner Eltern:*

Migration and/or Travel		
1. Where have you lived/traveled? <i>Wo hast du gewohnt oder gereist?</i> Check all that apply / <i>Zeigen mit</i> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For how long? How often? <i>Wie lange? Wie oft?</i>	For what reason? (e.g. Work, school, etc.) <i>Was war die Ursache?</i> (z.B. Arbeit, Schule, usw.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Mexico		
<input type="checkbox"/> Canada		
<input type="checkbox"/> United States		
<input type="checkbox"/> Bolivia		
<input type="checkbox"/> Belize		
<input type="checkbox"/> Other / <i>Andere</i> (specify:)		

Education and Training		
1. School, educational experience / <i>Schule, Bildung</i> :	Check all that apply / zeigen mit <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Where / <i>Wo</i> ?
	<input type="checkbox"/> Dorf Schule / Elementary	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Secundaria / Junior High	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Preparatoria / High School	
	<input type="checkbox"/> College/University	
	<input type="checkbox"/> On-the-job training / <i>Bildung bei der Arbeit</i>	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Other / <i>Andere</i> : (specify: _____)	
2. Work experience / <i>Arbeits Erfahrungen</i> :	Job / <i>Arbeit</i>	Where / <i>Wo</i> ?

Church / Kirche:		
1. List churches you have been a member of or attended regularly (check where you were baptized <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>) / <i>In welche Kirchen hast du längere Zeit am Gottesdienst Teilgenommen? Wo wurdest du getauft? <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></i>	Denomination / <i>Gemeinde (Conference)</i>	How many years attended / <i>Wie viel Jahre?</i>
1 <input type="checkbox"/>		
2 <input type="checkbox"/>		
3 <input type="checkbox"/>		
4 <input type="checkbox"/>		
2. Parent's church affiliation: / <i>Kirche der Eltern</i> :	3. Grandparent's church affiliation: / <i>Kirche der Grosseltern</i> :	
4. Parent's past church affiliation (if applicable): / <i>Kirche der Eltern (wo sie vorher waren)</i> :	5. Grandparent's past church affiliation (if applicable): / <i>Kirche der Grosseltern (wo sie vorher waren)</i> :	
6. What is a Mennonite? <i>Was bedeutet "Mennonit sein"?</i>		

MUSIC

1. How did you learn to sing? *Wie hast du Singen gelehrt?*

Music in School / *Singen und Musik im Schule*

2. Did you sing in school? If so, what did you sing? What instruments did you use? / *Hast du in der Schule gesungen? Welche Lieder habt ihr gesungen? Welche Instrumenten habt ihr gebraucht?*
3. What is the difference between Lange and "Kurtie Wies"? Can you sing both? / *Was ist der Unterschied zwischen Lange und "Kurtie Wies"? Kannst du die singen?*

Music in your Church / *Singen und Musik im Gottesdienst*

4. What type of singing do you do in church? (e.g. Lange Wies, Kurtie Wies, hymns, Evangeliums Lieder, praise and worship, etc.) / *Was für Gesang habt ihr in eurer Kirche? (z.B. Lange Wies, Kurtie Wies, Lieder aus dem Gesangbuch, Evangeliums Lieder, Lob und Anbetungslieder, usw.)*
5. Do you sing with harmony during worship services? At other times with the congregation? / *Singt ihr im Gottesdienst mit 1, 2, 3 oder 4 Stimmen?*
6. Who leads singing in your church? / *Wer leitet den Gesang in eurer Kirche?*
7. Do you use a hymnal/songbook in your church? If yes, which one(s)? / *Welche Bücher braucht ihr in der Kirche?*
8. Do you sing from overheads in your church? If yes, how often? / *Braucht ihr OVERHEADS in eurer Kirche? Wie oft?*
9. Which of the following instruments are used in your worship services, and how often? / *Welche Instrumente werden im Gottesdienst gebraucht? Wie oft?*

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Piano / <i>Klavier</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Piano | <input type="checkbox"/> Organ / <i>Orgel</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Guitar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bass guitar | <input type="checkbox"/> Drum kit | <input type="checkbox"/> Hand drums | <input type="checkbox"/> Tambourine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accordion / <i>Concertina (Trakjharmonie)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Mandolin | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonica / <i>Mundharmonica (Mulschiara)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Harp / <i>Harfe</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> Flute / <i>Flöte</i> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other(s) / <i>Andere:</i> | | | |

10. Is there a choir or singing group in your church? If yes, what kind? / *Habt ihr einen Chor oder Sing-Gruppe im Gottesdienst? Wenn ja, bitte beschreiben.*
11. Is there ever "special music" during the service (during the offering or as its own part of the worship service)? If yes, what kind? / *Habt ihr SPECIAL MUSIC im Gottesdienst? Wenn ja, bitte beschreiben.*

Music in Your Past Churches

12. What type of singing did you do in past church(es)? (e.g. Lange Wies, Kurte Wies, hymns, Evangeliums Lieder, praise and worship, etc.) / *Was für Gesang hatten sie in der Kirche wo ihr vorher hinfuhrt? (z.B. Lange Wies, Kurte Wies, Lieder aus dem Gesangbuch, Evangeliums Lieder, Lob und Anbetungslieder, usw.)*
13. Did you sing with harmony during worship services? At other times with the congregation? / *Habt ihr im Gottesdienst mit 1, 2, 3 oder 4 Stimmen gesungen?*
14. Who led singing in your past church(es)? / *Wer hat das Gesang geleitet?*
15. Did you use a hymnal/songbook in your past church(es)? If yes, which one(s)? / *Welche Bücher habt ihr gebraucht?*
16. Did you sing from overheads in your church? If yes, how often? / *Habt ihr OVERHEADS in eurer Kirche gebraucht? Wie oft?*
17. Which of the following instruments were used in your worship services, and how often? / *Welche Instrumente wurden im Gottesdienst gebraucht? Wie oft?*
- ☐ Piano / *Klavier* ☐ Electric Piano ☐ Organ / *Orgel* ☐ Guitar
☐ Bass guitar ☐ Drum kit ☐ Hand drums ☐ Tambourine
☐ Accordion / *Ziehharmonica (Trakjharmonie)* ☐ Mandolin
☐ Harmonica / *Mundharmonica (Mulschiara)* ☐ Other(s) / *Andere:*
18. Was there a choir or singing group in your church? If yes, what kind? / *Habt ihr einen Chor oder Sing-Gruppe im Gottesdienst gehabt? Wenn ja, bitte beschreiben.*

19. Was there ever "special music" during the service (during the offering or as its own part of the worship service)? *If yes, what kind? / Habt ihr "SPECIAL MUSIC" im Gottesdienst gehabt? Wenn ja, bitte beschreiben.*

Music At Home

20. Does your family sing or play music together? Please describe. / *Singt deine Familie zusammen, oder spielt ihr zusammen Musik? Bitte beschreiben.*

About Music that you listen to:

21. What sort of music is most common at your home (e.g. CDs, radio, prayer, spontaneous singing together etc.)? / *Welche Musik ist in eurem Heim üblich (z.B. CDs anhören, Radio, Gebet, zusammen singen oder Musik machen usw.)?*
22. Do you have a radio at home? / *Habt ihr ein Radio zu Hause?*
☐ Yes/Ja ☐ No/Nein
23. Did your parents have a radio at home? / *Hatten deine Eltern ein Radio zu Hause?*
☐ Yes/Ja ☐ No/Nein
24. What station(s) are most frequently listened to? / *Was hören sie am meisten zu?*
25. Which musicians do you listen to the most? / *Welche Musik hörst du am meisten?*
26. How did you hear about this music? / *Wie hast du diese Musik kennengelernt?*
27. When do you listen to music? / *Wann hörst du Musik zu?*
28. Do you sing/listen to music while washing the dishes or performing other chores? Why? / *Singst du, oder hörst du Musik zu wann du aufwäscht oder andere Arbeit machst? Warum?*
29. What kind of singing and music do/did your **grandparents** sing/listen to? What kind of singing and music do/did your **parents** sing/listen to? / *Welche Sorte Musik sangen oder horchten deine Grosseltern? Und deiner Eltern?*

30. How is this different from your choices? i.e. What do you think of your parent's music and what do they think of yours? / *Ist es anders als die Musik welche dich interessiert? Was denkst du über die Musik die deine Eltern interessiert und was denken sie über deine?*

Family gatherings / Familienfest:

31. How often does your family gather together? When? / *Wie oft habt ihr Familienzusammenkünfte? Wann?*
32. What happens at your family gatherings / *Was passiert wenn eure Familie zusammen kommt?*
- ☐ Games / *Spiele* ☐ Spazieren
 - ☐ Organized program / *ein Programm*
 - ☐ Memorized Recitation / *Auswendig gelerntes vortragen:*
 - ☐ Wünschen ☐ Bible verses / *Bibel Verse*
 - ☐ Poems / *Gedichte*
 - ☐ Gesangbuch recitation / *Auswendig gelerntes aus dem Gesangbuch*
 - ☐ Solo Singing / *Solo Gesang* ☐ Group singing / *Gruppengesang*
 - ☐ Other / *Andere:*
33. Describe the memory verses or Wünsche – be as specific as possible: / *Bitte beschreibe diese Zeit (auswendig gelerntes vortragen usw.):*
34. Describe the singing: / *Bitte beschreibe das Gesang:*
35. Which books do you use? / *Welche Bücher braucht ihr?*
☐ Check this box if you don't use any books. / *Wir brauchen keine Bücher.*
36. When do you sing? / *Wann singt ihr?*
37. For how long do you sing? / *Wie lange singt ihr?*
38. How do you sing? / *Wie singt ihr?* (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 4 stimmen; Lange Wies; Kurte Wies)?
39. Who (if anyone) leads? / *Wer leitet das Singen?*
40. Does anybody accompany your singing? Who? / *Begleitet jemand euer Gesang? Wer?*

41. Which instruments? / Welche Instrumenten?
☐ Piano / *Klavier* ☐ Electric Piano ☐ Organ / *Orgel* ☐ Guitar ☐ Bass guitar
☐ Drum ☐ Accordion *Trakjharmonie (Ziehharmonica)* ☐ Mandolin
☐ Harmonica / *Mundharmonica (Mulschiara)* ☐ Other / *Andere*:
42. Why do you sing? / *Warum singt ihr?*
43. Do you think presenting verses and/or singing is important at the gathering? Why or why not? / *Denkst du das Singen und Vorträge wichtig sind? Warum oder warum nicht?*
44. Have gatherings changed since you were a child? If yes, how and why? / *Haben deine Familienfest sich verändert seit du klein warst? Wenn Ja, wie und warum?*
45. Describe any other activities that take place at your family gatherings or other details not described elsewhere in this questionnaire: / *Bitte beschreibe was noch auf eueren Familien zusammen kommen passiert oder Dinge die ihr dann tut:*
46. Name three songs that connect you with your family: / *Nenne drei Lieder die dich mit deiner Familie verbinden:*
a.
b.
c.
Why and how do they do this? / *Wie, und warum verbinden sie euch?*
47. Are there songs or musical styles that hold negative memories for you? If yes, please name two. / *Sind da Lieder welche negativen Erinnerungen in dich wachrufen? Wenn ja, bitte nenne zwei.*
a.
b.
48. Why and how do they do this? / *Warum, und wie tun sie das?*
49. Does singing / music connect you with God? How? / *Verbindet dir Musik und Singen dich mit Gott? Wie?*

Appendix 4a
English Consent Form

CONSENT FORM: PART I

I agree to being interviewed and recorded by Judith Klassen Neufeld, and will allow the use of information gathered during the interview to be used for educational purposes or publication (e.g. classroom teaching, conference presentations, journal articles, books, archives, and video or sound recordings).

I understand that I may choose how I am named in published references to information provided in this interview. I choose to be identified by (circle one and provide the appropriate name/s):

First **and** Family names _____
First **or** Family name _____
Pseudonym _____

I wish to restrict use of the materials or information I have provided as follows:

I am aware that I may terminate the interview at any time, or choose not to answer specific questions.

Participant's Name (printed):
Participant's Signature:
Date:
Contact Information:

CONSENT FORM: PART II

I agree to respect the wishes of participants regarding the use of any information they share. I am prepared and willing to answer any questions concerning research procedures or any other aspects of the project. I recognize that any participant is free to terminate the interview at any time, or choose not to answer specific questions.

Judith Klassen Neufeld, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Box 506 Altona, MB,
R0G 0B0.
Phone: (204) 324-6800
email: h39jmk@mun.ca

Signature:
Date / Place / Time:

Appendix 4b

High German Consent Form

EINWILLIGUNGSFORMULAR: ERSTER TEIL

Ich stimme zu, dass Judith Klassen Neufeld mich mit Tonaufnahme für Bildungs- und Veröffentlichungszwecke (z. B. Klassenunterricht, Vorträge, Fachartikeln, Archive, Bücher sowohl wie Ton- und Videoaufnahme) interviewen darf.

Ich verstehe, dass es mir zur Wahl steht, wie ich bezeichnet, bzw. genannt werde in Bezug auf die Veröffentlichung der Information, die aus diesem Interview stammt.

Vor- **und** Nachname(n) _____
Vor- **oder** Nachname _____
Deckname (Pseudonym) _____

Ich begrenze hiermit die Nutzung der Materialien oder Informationen auf folgender Weise:

Mir ist bewusst, dass ich das Interview zu jederzeit abbrechen kann, oder bestimmte Fragen nicht beantworten muss.

Name des Teilnehmers (Druckschrift):
Name der Teilnehmerin (Druckschrift):
Unterschrift des Teilnehmers:
Unterschrift der Teilnehmerin:
Datum:
Kontaktinformation:

EINWILLIGUNGSFORMULAR: ZWEITER TEIL

Ich erkläre mich bereit, die Wünsche der Teilnehmerin, bzw. des Teilnehmers in wie die von ihnen mitgeteilte Information benutzt wird zu respektieren. Weiter bin ich bereit und willens alle Fragen in Bezug auf den Ablauf der Forschung oder andere Aspekte des Projekts zu beantworten. Ich erkenne auch, dass Teilnehmer das Interview zu jeder Zeit abbrechen dürfen oder bestimmte Fragen nicht antworten müssen.

Judith Klassen Neufeld, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Box 506 Altona, MB, R0G 0B0.

Telefon Nummer: (204) 324-6800

email: h39jmk@mun.ca

Unterschrift:

Datum / Ort / Zeit:

Appendix 5

List of Interviews

- Dyck, Franz and Tina Dyck. 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. February 18.
- Fehr, Hilda. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 15.
- Froese, Ben and Tina Froese. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 3.
- Heide, Anna and Trudy Heide. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 13.
- Heide, George, Trudy Heide, Sarah Heide, and Anna Heide. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 1.
- Heide, Johan. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. January 23.
- Heide, Nettie. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 1.
- Heide, Peter and Johan Heide. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. January 25.
- Hiebert, Greta. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 8.
- Loewen, Bernhard and Tina Loewen. 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. March 2.
- Neufeld, Frank and Tina Neufeld (pseudonyms). 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 24.
- Peters, Anna. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. January 25.
- Peters, Annie. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 8.
- Peters, David and Elena Peters. 2006. Interview by author. Swift Current Colony, Mexico. March 9.
- Peters, Jacob. 2006. Interview by author. Swift Current Colony, Mexico. March 18.
- Peters, Johan and Anna Peters. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. February 20.

- Peters, Jake and Ann Peters. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 28.
- Peters, Johan and Tina Peters. 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. January 31.
- Peters, Nancy and Kathy Knelsen. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 6.
- Peters, Trudy. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 21.
- Rempel, Annie and Suzanna Rempel (pseudonyms). 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. February 17.
- Schmitt, Ben and Maria Schmitt. 2006. Interview by author. Swift Current Colony, Mexico. March 18.
- Siemens, Abram (Bram). 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. February 17.
- Siemens, Jack and Mary Siemens. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. January 20.
- Wiebe, John and Susanna Wiebe. 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 1.
- Wiebe, Tina (pseudonym). 2006. Interview by author. Nordkolonie, Mexico. March 13.
- Wolf, Abram and Lisa Wolf. 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. February 15.
- Wolf, Lisa. 2006. Interview by author. Manitoba Colony, Mexico. February 12.

Also Referenced

- Froese, Jacob M. 2001. Interview by author. Winkler, MB. 29 December 2001.
- Ninomiya, Scott Morton. 2004. Interview by author. St. John's, NL. 13 March 2004.

Glossary

High German

Abend Andacht. Evening worship

Alte Kolonie. Old Colony

Altenheim. Care home for the elderly

Älteste (pl. *Ältester*). Elder or bishop

die Botschaft. The (gospel) message

Brüderschaft. Brotherhood

Choralbuch. Chorale Book

Evangeliums Lieder. Gospel songs

Fibel. Primer

Frauen-Gruppe. Women's group

Gassenlieder. Street songs

Geistreiches Gesangbuch. Spiritual Hymnal (name of Old Colony hymnal)

Gelassenheit. Self-surrender

Gesangbuch (pl. *Gesangbücher*). Hymnal

Gesangbuchslieder. Songs from the hymnal

Glaubens Lieder. Belief Songs (name of Kleine Gemeinde hymnal)

Kanadier. Mennonites who migrated to Canada from Russia in the 1870s.

Katechismus. Catechism

Lehrdienst. Religious leaders

Männer-Gruppe. Men's group

Morgan Andacht. Morning worship

Musik. Literally "music," but for many conserving Mennonites *Musik* implies secular song performance or denotes the use of instruments in song, with or without singing.

Nachkirche. Meeting held "after church" in Old Colony churches

Privilegium. Document endorsed by the Mexican government that assured the Mennonites certain privileges in Mexico.

Rollkuchen. Fritters

Singstunde (pl. *Singstunden*). Singing hour

Steinreich Bibelschule. Steinreich Bible School (SBS)

verboten. Forbidden

Vorsänger. "Front singer," chorister, song leader

Vorsteher. Leader, or head of municipal affairs in Mexico's Mennonite colonies. An elected position.

Zentrum. Centre. Abbreviation of *Centro de Rehabilitacion, Luz en mi Camino* (Centre for Rehabilitation, Light on my Way). *Zentrum* refers to a 60-bed facility established in the Manitoba Colony in 2004 to serve Low German-speaking men who struggle with alcohol and drug addictions.

Ziffern. Numbers, ciphers. Visual cues in a system of musical notation that uses numbers, rather than noteheads, to indicate pitch.

Ziffern Weise. "Number" or "cipher melodies." A method of singing using *Ziffern* notation.

zwischen Gesang. In-between singing

Low German

auldeosche. Everyday

be 'sorjen. To take care of, to do the chores

Darp (pl. *Darpa*). Village

Darpschool (pl. *Darpschoole*). Village school

opp Dietsch. “In German.” Colloquial use in northern Mexico implies Low German.

Donnadach. Thursday. Refers to Old Colony church meeting held on Thursday.

Düak (pl. *Däkja*). Kerchief

Elltesta. Elder or bishop

Fäusenja. “Front singer,” chorister, song leader

Faspa. A light meal – usually involving homemade buns, cheese, and preserves – that is served mid-afternoon.

Frintschoft. Family relation

froo. Happy, jovial

Gausseleeda. Street songs

Gowen. Gifts, talents

groote Stow. Large room or parlour

korte Wies (pl. *korte Wiese*). Short way, or short melody. May refer to a song style or to a specific body of melodies. Some Mennonites use the term to reference any syllabic (i.e. non-melismatic) unaccompanied song, other uses imply a direct correlation to *Geistreiches Gesangbuch* repertoire.

Krüselmets. Lace cap

lange Wies (pl. *lange Wiese*). Long way, or long melody. May refer to song style or to a particular body of long melodies associated with the *Geistreiches Gesangbuch*.

Nät Pei. Nut pie

Nüdelsup. Noodle soup

oole Ordunk. Old order

oppe Gauss. On the street

Prädja (pl. *Prädjasch*). Preacher

sindeosche. Sunday-like

schlajcht. Bad

Schlaubbekjse. Overalls

spat'seare. To visit, to converse

Spikja. Granary

Tsoliwies. "Number" or "cipher melodies"

Ütschluss. Ban, ex-communication

Spanish

campo. Field. Term used to identify villages in northern Mexico.

canción ranchera. Mexican country music

Conferencia. Conference. Used colloquially among Mexican Mennonites to refer to CMM (*Conferencia Menonita de México*) churches in the region, with some also applying the moniker to other evangelical church denominations like EMC (Evangelical Mennonite Conference) and EMMC (Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference).

corrido. A ballad song form most frequently associated with peasant farmers in northern Mexico.

Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita, A.C.. Mennonite Museum and Cultural Centre

Other terms

assurance of salvation. Subjective certainty of God's forgiveness and acceptance

gospel message. There are four gospels in the Christian New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), each telling the story of Jesus Christ and his life, death, and

resurrection. The “gospel message,” “the message,” and the “Christian gospel” are all terms used by evangelical Christians, and refer to the salvation, forgiveness, and redemption promised to those who believe that Jesus died for their sins and rose again.

orthodoxy. Correct belief

orthopraxis. Correct practice

praise and worship music. A term used to refer to popular Christian music, especially from the 1980s and 1990s.

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