

RUSSIAN MENNONITES AND NARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY IN
CONTEMPORARY CANADA

IN THE WORLD AND OF IT: RUSSIAN MENNONITES AND NARRATIVES OF
COMMUNITY IN CONTEMPORARY CANADA

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This dissertation explores the shifting conflicts and paradoxes that come to constitute identity, subjectivity, and personhood within Russian Mennonite communities in contemporary Canada. I argue that the central tension within Christianity, the paradox of the incarnation, defines what it means to be Mennonite in this time and place, for it is through attempts to manage this paradox that Mennonite lives are lived, and this tension is generative of both pragmatic action and social transformation.

Using an eclectic, collage-like methodology, this dissertation focuses on sites where the problem of incarnational living is articulated and its effects are visible. By attending to myriad genres and forms of representation including novels, historical narratives, interviews, hymns, and poetry, I explore the contradictions that constitute Mennonite identity. Each chapter articulates a particular tension and shows how it generates action and transformation; how old narratives become unstable in new contexts, or appear in new ways requiring new actions.

The ways in which Mennonites contend with identifying *as* Mennonite reveal how community continues to be enacted, how and when it is deployed to signal affinity, how it is authorized through historical narratives, and how the religious justification for this community is negotiated against, through, and with new modes and discourses concerning community, individuality, and the self. In attending to these questions ethnographically, I show how Mennonite constructions of community are a response to the problem of incarnational living in Christianity, where the past is neither stable nor resolved.

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Thanks must also be given to my Low German instructor Ted Klassen, with whom I spent numerous enjoyable evenings discussing Mennonites and language, even though he taught me Plautdietsch from *jantsied*. *Dank schein* to Ken Plett and Helene Horban for their translation work, and “correcting” the Low German I learned.

Over the course of fieldwork, I was fortunate to make many new friends and strengthen existing ones. Sometimes, however, those friendships were foreshortened, and I wish to acknowledge the loss of two particular voices in this dissertation who succumbed to their illnesses over the course of writing. Two women whose stories feature prominently and fittingly in the final chapter, Sending, invited me into their homes to talk about their experiences with cancer and what being Mennonite meant in and for their lives. Both were in remission when we first met to speak, but both, shortly after, passed away due to a recurrence of cancer. I feel honoured to have gotten to know these insightful women at the ends of their lives. In the last years of writing I also lost my remaining grandparents; through writing and contemplation of Mennonite life, I have been able to consider their lives, the changes they saw, and the choices they made, with a broader eye – my life is richer for it.

Finally, I have been fortunate to have received support and encouragement from friends and family members scattered across the country; I would like to give special mention to my mother, whose frequent refrain “just don’t quit, ok?” was surprisingly motivating, and to Julia, my champion and cheerleader. For these gifts I am truly grateful.

This project is dedicated, with gratitude, to Anna Schmidt and Katie Banman.

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Note Regarding Geographic Terminology

Russian Mennonites in Canada refer to the area where they emigrated from as Russia, their neighbours there as Russians, and themselves as Russian Mennonites. Though it is more accurate to refer to this area as part of the Soviet Union in the post-revolutionary period or as present-day Ukraine, I have chosen to follow the usage of my respondents.

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction to their edited volume succinctly titled *Mennonite Identity*, editors Calvin Redekop and Samuel Steiner (1988) write “[that] Mennonite society has been in a state of identity crisis [is] well known, at least by members of the society, although it has also been attested to by outsiders. The emergence of this volume is itself the most recent development of a reflexive process on the identity crisis” (ii). In some ways, the outcomes of my own project have run parallel to those of Redekop and Steiner’s efforts; this thesis emerged, in part, from “a reflexive process on the identity crisis” that seems, on the surface, to continue nearly thirty years after the publication of *Mennonite Identity*. I certainly did not intend, at the outset, to write about Mennonite identity, yet the topic crept in, through a variety of iterations, to interactions, reactions, and discussions with and about Mennonites, in a variety of contexts. Yet rather than describe this perseveration about identity as an “identity crisis,” I approach it as the outcome of the encounter between a particular iteration of community and modernity.

In Redekop and Steiner’s introduction, the insertion and characterization of the concept of “crisis” foregrounds Mennonites as being in a state of destabilization, or precarity. The concept of crisis raises questions about whether the equilibrium expressed by the familiar Mennonite conception of “being in the world but not of the world” is no

longer commensurable with the contemporary Canadian context, if indeed this conception was ever commensurable with Canadian society in the past. In seeking to respond to these questions, my initial research questions focused on the complexities of theological and martyrological understandings of death in the contemporary medically-informed settings in which the majority of Mennonites in Canada now die. I sought to discover to what extent illness narratives were commensurable with “Mennonite” narratives, if such separate narratives did, in fact, exist and were meaningful. That is, I began with an exploration of a tension between Mennonite values and ways of being and “the world,” or biomedical discourse. This tension plays out in the context of death and dying, where Mennonite values regarding the necessity or “usefulness” of suffering and biomedical discourses of eliding it come, sometimes, to be in tension with each other.

In pursuing these questions, however, my early fieldwork encounters in several health care settings frequently led to questions of what makes something or someone “Mennonite,” or what it means to be Russian Mennonite in Canada today. Through the course of fieldwork, it became clear to me that it is not just the ubiquity of questions surrounding identity, identification, and subjectivity that become paramount in people’s lives, but the high stakes attached to claims to such categories. This led to an exploration of what other tensions come to constitute Mennonite identity and ways of being more broadly, and how those ways may be changing. Following these lines of inquiry, this dissertation explores the shifting conflicts and paradoxes that come to constitute identity, subjectivity, and personhood within Russian Mennonite communities in contemporary Canada. I argue that the central tension within Christianity, the paradox of the incarnation, or how to merge the life of the body with the spirit, is generative of both

pragmatic action and social transformation. It is through attempts to manage this paradox that Mennonite lives are lived, and, as such, defines what it means to be Mennonite in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The ways in which Mennonites contend with identifying *as* Mennonite reveal how community continues to be enacted, how and when it is deployed to signal affinity, how it is authorized through historical narratives, and how the religious justification for this community is negotiated against, through, and with new modes and discourses concerning community, individuality, and the self. In attending to these questions ethnographically, I show how Mennonite constructions of community are a response to the problem of incarnational living in Christianity, where the past is neither stable nor resolved.

Indeed, the history of schism in Mennonite communities is shockingly long and broad, striking in its seeming incoherence; intense traumatic rupture, even psychic violence, takes place within a self-proclaimed pacifist group. Anecdotally, schisms within Mennonite churches have occurred over disagreements about whether either buttons or snaps should be used on clothing, which “modern” technologies should be adopted, issues regarding the material expressions of piety, and allowing women into leadership positions. While some of these issues perhaps appear petty, the meaning accorded to them is hardly trivial: clothing, technology, and piety all signal deep and broad orientations to the world. Indeed, many such disagreements concern the borders of what is considered “worldliness,” with eternal life being the very stakes of where such lines are drawn. Such lines also certainly serve to delineate the boundaries of

“Mennonite” itself, and any recourse to such a marker of identity is contested, fraught, and variable.

The perceived Mennonite perseverance with “identity” that I encountered in “the field,” however, I took to signal an engagement with new discourses (at least, for Mennonites,) about modernity. Or, to put it in the words of Charles Taylor (2007:96), the concern with identity involves “the creation of new forms of experience that had never previously existed but which nonetheless come to seem like the obvious medium in which we live.” My research questions, then, shifted to addressing how this “new” – this modern – medium allows for discourses of identity, and how such discourses may articulate with the enactment of community. Following Rogers Brubaker’s (2002:174) discussion of the variability and contingency of “groupness,” I ask what this claim to Mennonite identity does, and how it is a “perspective *on* the world” rather than a “thing *in* it.”

Tracing Mennonites back to their origins in 16th century Anabaptist movements, we see that these movements coalesced around the idea of a radical communalism. For the early Anabaptists, communalism was an enunciation of their otherness vis à vis the Protestants and Catholics of the Reformation. Communalism involved refiguring of the church as community, outlined as *Gemeinde* with its quality of *Gemeinschaft*. Subsequently, through Mennonite history, community and otherness were forged through the crucibles of martyrdom and migration. My project seeks to trace how Mennonite community is made meaningful in a contemporary Canadian context: I attempt to show how Mennonite constructions of community draw upon the past and notions of “tradition,” as well as negotiating Christian struggles with incarnational living, to

encounter modernity in specifically Mennonite ways, that can be both life-giving and detrimental to specific individuals who identify as Mennonite.

The ways in which Mennonites contend with identifying *as* Mennonite reveal how community continues to be enacted, how and when it is deployed to signal affinity, and how the religious justification for this community is negotiated against, through, and with new modes and discourses concerning community, individuality, and the self. In this way, the dual oppositions – between religion and secularism, and the past and modernity – that, as Fenella Cannell (2010) notes, continue to be “constitutive of many public areas of debate and some important academic arenas” (87) are troubled.

Moreover, by showing how community is constructed as a perspective *on* the world that shapes and forms how lives and relationships are made meaningful, I avoid the often frustrating task of defining “community” as a “thing *in* the world” (Brubaker 2002), or as a “serious conceptual problem” (Fretz and Redekop 1989). Instead, I aim to call attention to how Christian ideas of community encounter modernity and the secular in particular ways, enacting, as Cannell (2010) suggests, “understandings of, interest in, or perhaps total indifference to the secular and the religious” (97).

MENNONITES AND THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHRISTIANITY

The practice of community making for Mennonites in contemporary Canada is contingent on a particular construction of modernity, one that is also a troublesome analytical object. Following Klassen’s (2011:xv) use of modernity in the dual sense of a political and historical project, and a particular era in which the liberal Protestants about

whom she writes situate themselves, I use modernity here as a similarly political and historical “plural concept”. I also use modernity in a way that it has been constituted by Mennonites as “the world,” that has “historical periodization” as Klassen suggests, as well as political dimensions, yet is encountered in specific ways. The dimensions of “worldliness” are those phenomena – ideas, places, words, things – that both entice and threaten Mennonites: the world can either create and strengthen community, or threaten it by its very mention or proximity.

The outlines of Mennonite notions of community are found in the frameworks of the 16th century Anabaptists, who suggested radical reforms – more radical than those of Protestants like Martin Luther – in opposition to the Catholic Church of the time. Their notion of church as community, as *Gemeinde* in German, and subsequent manifestations of that re-conceptualization, were, fundamentally, calls to return to what Anabaptists perceived as the historic reality of the early Christian Church as a model for Christian life. This “radical communalism” was a very particular iteration of Christianity, one that, unfortunately, has gone largely unremarked upon in the anthropological literature, particularly the now burgeoning field of the anthropology of Christianity in which this project is primarily situated.

This thesis, broadly, offers a contribution to the anthropological quest to understand what difference Christianity makes (Cannell 2007), and, further, what difference Anabaptism makes for the anthropological study of Christianity. More specifically, it examines how a particular group of Christians with origins in the Reformation of Catholicism, manage a key paradox of Christianity – the struggle with

incarnational living – and how the responses to this management produce particular affective modes and Mennonite ways of life that have been transformed in a secular age.

In the introduction to her 2006 volume *The Anthropology of Christianity*, Fenella Cannell writes that “fundamental to any understanding of Christianity’s diversity today is the opposition between broadly Protestant and Catholic Christianities” (22). While Anabaptists articulated their particular theology and practices in opposition to both Protestants and Catholics during the 16th century Reformation, Mennonites today, as a result, seem to occupy a curious position as “other” in the field of anthropology of Christianity. As Cannell (2007) writes, Christianity’s proximity to the project of modernity has identified it as a “contributory” factor in the supposed “inevitability of secularization.” Even worse, as Susan Harding’s (1987) and Tanya Luhrmann’s (2012) studies of American evangelical Christians have suggested, the anthropology of Christianity exposes “the problem of studying liberal anthropology’s ‘repugnant social other’” (Cannell 2007:3).

A great number of Mennonites who maintain religious practice today fall closer theologically to mainline Protestants, or so-called “liberal” Christians like those of the United Church in Canada (Klassen 2011). Klassen notes that anthropologists have regarded such Christians not as “repugnant,” but as being almost too “close” to consider as subjects, and further, that the discipline of anthropology and anthropological thinking have been shaped by the traditions of social critique practiced and understood by liberal Protestants. As Klassen writes, “The challenge of recognizing liberal Protestants as anthropological subjects, I suggest, is partly the result of overlapping spatial, intellectual,

and political locations and commitments of liberal Protestants and English-speaking academia, including anthropology” (Klassen 2011: xx).

Most religious Mennonites have been influenced by evangelicalism as well as by “liberal” Protestantism, and can therefore be counted within the rubric of what constitutes an “anthropological subject,” as Cannell and Klassen point out. Yet what is particularly curious about the inattention to Mennonites and Anabaptist groups in the anthropological literature is that some iterations of Anabaptism are, indeed, very visible and very public: the Amish, Hutterites, Holdeman, and Old Order Mennonites occupy particular enclaves in American and Canadian narratives of ethnicity. “Amish country” in Pennsylvania, and “Waterloo County” in southern Ontario have thriving tourism industries centred around the simplicity of the Amish and Old Order way of life, one that, in such narratives, defines itself as “rejecting” modernity.¹ Their ethos, however, is centred around a wariness that technology may threaten the integrity of community and distract from living a fully incarnational life based primarily on the Biblical injunction from Romans 12:2 : “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect”.

The public and outward wariness toward “the modern” expressed by these Anabaptist groups is ample evidence that Mennonites as Christians are not captured by modernity in patterned or even ways. In the Weberian sense, the link between Protestant Christianity and the bringing into being of the very institutions of secular modernity has

¹ There is some anthropological writing on these more visible groups, particularly work by Janzen and Stanton (2010) and Peter Stephenson (1990) on Hutterites, and Johnson-

often been naturalized in academic writing. As Cannell (2007:3) writes, “The prevailing orthodoxy for several decades has been a focus on the seeming inevitability of secularization and of the advance of global modernity, while Christianity has been identified as, above all, a kind of secondary or contributory aspect of such changes.” Yet Old Order Mennonites, for instance, reject the notion of secularization and are choosy about the adoption of “modern” tenets and technologies, precisely because they *are* Christian, thus troubling the assumption of an inevitable movement towards modernity and secularization. Indeed, certain Christianities allow for a “stoppage” of time, something that the Old Orders opted for when they broke from the wider Mennonite church in the 1800s.

While Old Order Mennonites, Hutterites, and the Amish are, indeed, the most visible – most “other” in a pejorative sense – of Anabaptists in modern Canada, my project instead focuses on Russian Mennonites. Relative to other Anabaptist iterations, Russian Mennonites are among those who have enthusiastically embraced many aspects of “the world,” and therefore offers an opportunity to uncover what the concept of the world *does* in Anabaptist and, indeed, Christian thought. There are an incredible number of Mennonite denominations (ways of affiliating with particular theologies), where the majority of schisms that have occurred in Mennonite congregations have been over the boundaries of what is considered worldly and therefore threatening to the integrity of the community. Despite these differences, there is something that links the oft disparate branches of Anabaptists together, an affinity that is rooted in a particularly Anabaptist rendering of Christian community and communion: a rendering particular to this mode of Christianity. Despite the malleability and contingent nature of Anabaptist theology in

articulating what, exactly, “the world” is, Anabaptism as an enactment of community remains viable.

This particularity then, offers a privileged lens through which to understand “what difference Christianity makes”; it is the radical communalism of Anabaptists, and the continued valuation and practice of communalism that distinguishes them from other Christian denominations. This continuous enactment of community articulates with the literature in the anthropology of Christianity in particular ways. One of the key areas of debate in the field concerns Christianity’s demand that converts rupture with their non-Christian past, for instance, and as Engelke (2014:293) suggests, this debate revolves around “the extent to which holding a certain worldview or wanting to be a particular kind of person demands a break with the past.”

For evangelical Christians this is certainly the case; as Harding (1987) has shown, the “rupture” that the act of conversion requires, necessitates a break from “traditional culture.” This notion of discontinuity, however, is not consistent in all Christian narratives, as other authors have demonstrated (see, for example, Humphrey 2014; Haynes 2014). For Mennonites, too, the past, and the construction of identity and group narratives around a martyrological and migratory history, have, in a real sense become continuous, and not ruptured. Indeed, among Mennonites the very foundation of community is indebted to a continual (if uneven) enactment of the past.

Mennonites work and live within the paradoxes of Christianity’s central doctrines: the struggles with incarnational living, the division of spirit and flesh, and the promise of resurrection/new life through Christ’s death. As Fenella Cannell (2007) articulates, most social science writing focuses on the ascetic qualities of Christian lives, those practices

that elevate the spirit above the flesh. My own project attends to this writing, since I pay close attention to the ways in which Mennonites, too, negotiate such practices and paradoxes. In so doing, I focus particularly on the ways that Mennonites encounter the material in constructions of claims to home and land, narratives of family and familial connection, and artistic pursuits. As Cannell suggests further, the encounter between the spirit and flesh in Christianity is often vexing: “Christian doctrine in fact always has this other aspect, in which the flesh is an essential part of redemption... This ambivalence exists not just in theory, but as part of the lived practice and experience of Christians” (7).

This central Christian problematic of incarnational living vexes Mennonites in particular ways as they strive to connect their faith with word and action, and by attending to how individual Mennonites confront, manage, respond to, or reject, we can see how certain practices – technologies even – develop to mitigate or enhance the arising tensions between spirit and flesh. For some Mennonites, one of the more perilous narratives of orthodoxy links notions of kinship to ascetic practices, for instance. In this narrative, the importance of family and familial connections within the project of making Mennonite community requires encountering the ambivalence of spirit and flesh. Kinship structures scaffold the community, yet the transcendent nature of Christianity challenges such structuring: as Cannell (2007) suggests, the presence within Christianity of a set of abstract moral principles understood to be above social obligations creates a form of consciousness separable from social rules. For Mennonites, membership in the *Gemeinde* – the church community – requires yielding to its moral outlines, and, most potently, to its discipline.

The Mennonite practice of shunning, for example, demands the severing of social ties – including those of kinship – in order to preserve the moral purity and boundedness of the community. It is a practice arising out of the bodily metaphor of the gathered church community, the Body of Christ. As all members of this community are members of the Body of Christ, if one has cause to sin, that member is cut off – excommunicated – in order that the wider body remains sinless (Klaassen 1981). The practice is an extreme application of abstract Christian doctrine, and while it is justified as being done out of love, shunning creates intensely violent and traumatic ruptures in a contemporary context.

The commitment to membership in a Mennonite community is framed within the notion of a transcendent ideology, one that, again, is troubled by the contours of the flesh: bodies and bodily actions, and narratives of family. The needs and requirements of the flesh in this type of community are articulated, understood, and lived by Mennonite bodies in specific iterations. The policing of bodies and bodily desires in order to conform to membership requirements causes trauma for some individual Mennonites, and their struggles with both the religious and secular contours of these requirements offer new and vital modes and means of articulation with “community.”

Indeed, what is most specific to Mennonites (and Anabaptist groups generally) is the emphasis on community. While many Christians contend with the problem of incarnational living, the Mennonite response to that problem, radical communalism, is a unique response among Christian groups. The long and varied history of schism amongst Mennonites also works as a productive site of inquiry into the stakes of incarnational living. The study of Russian Mennonites therefore offers particular insights into the core

themes of Christianity, and how they are lived. Attending to the particulars of Christian doctrine in Mennonite lives situates this project as specifically ethnographic, and, in situating it in this way, I offer, broadly, a response to Cannell’s suggestions that “anthropologists must surely contribute to the expansion of the repertoire of ethnographic studies of actual, lived situations ... in which local peoples enact their understandings of, interest in, or perhaps total indifference to the secular and the religious” (Cannell 2010: 97).

HISTORIC PERSPECTIVES

The elasticity of an identity marker such as “Mennonite” is evident in its use as a social category accessed at different times and in different places by those who find it useful and meaningful. The category is, in that sense, intensely mutable, supple, and adaptable. For Mennonites, it is also fraught and contested: within the variety of Mennonite circles there is a debate – sometimes reaching high intensity – about who “speaks” most authoritatively and authentically as Mennonites, and who, conversely remains silent, or whose history is elided. Russian Mennonites have a dissimilar history then that of Swiss Mennonites, for instance, and any claims by Russian Mennonites to say their history, language, or food is “Mennonite” is false: to title a cookbook *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*² (as was done recently), for instance, and to include within its pages

² Beginning as a blog called *Mennonite Girls Can Cook*, the ten “Mennonite girls” published a cookbook by the same name in 2011, that joined the esteemed company of several other cookbooks found extensively throughout Mennonite homes. For example, Doris Janzen Longacre’s *More-With-Less Cookbook* (1952); Edna Staebler’s *Food that Really Schmecks: Mennonite Country Cooking* (1968); *The Mennonite Treasury of Recipes* (1982); Mary Beth Lind and Cathleen Hockman-Wert’s *Simply in Season* (2005).

recipes and theological witticisms from a denomination of Russian Mennonites known as Mennonite Brethren, is to, rightfully, irk Swiss Mennonites whose culinary and migratory history is dissimilar to that of Russian Mennonites. Consider, too, anthropologist James Urry's dilemma as he describes it in the foreword of Margaret Loewen Reimer's (2008:9) guide to Mennonites in Canada:

If there is one thing I have learned in over thirty years of studying Mennonites, it is that only a rash person ventures to generalize on the groups who make up the complex 'Mennonite' world(s). Numerous reviewers of my writings, especially Mennonites, will gently remind readers of the review that my work does not include all Mennonite groups and will often list, in general terms, those I have overlooked or obviously chosen to exclude.

To be precise about whom and with whom I am writing, and to attempt to avoid the pitfalls which Urry identifies, I want first to trace the outlines of early Anabaptism and follow the historical migrations of the group now known as Russian Mennonites to their contemporary location in Canada. My aim in doing so, in focusing the ethnographic boundaries of this project on one specific group of Mennonites, is, in part practical: the push and pull of allegiances to differing Mennonite modes is too broad to capture in one ethnographic account. From the standpoint of social scientific theory, I am interested in Russian Mennonites in Canada on account of their articulation as modern subjects of the Anabaptist notions of *Gemeinde* (incompletely translated most frequently as community) and *Gelassenheit* (translated, again, incompletely as "yieldedness"). Russian Mennonites also have a particular traumatic and migrational history that has formulated the notions, narratives and performances of community in distinct ways. This history of trauma intrudes upon the Russian Mennonite present by becoming entangled in a complex nexus of psychology, religion, and articulations of embodiment.

The martyrological and migrational narratives that have come to inform how community is understood by Mennonites – how it should be lived, and the stakes of living it – constitute a vital history, reproducing and reifying the bounds of such community, and shaping how it is enacted. James Urry (2006), writing primarily from a historical perspective, suggests that Mennonite history has become something of a “self-sustaining folk tradition,” a paradoxical rhetorical strategy of separatist arguments derived from the tragedies of history, and “assimilative arguments” drawn from a yearning to be good citizens. This paradox, best summed up in the phrase “in the world but not of the world,” remains vivid in many Mennonite lives, in ways and means that will become evident in the following pages.

Outlined nearly five hundred years ago during the Protestant Reformation the goal of being “in the world but not of the world” remains mutable, both troubling and grounding in varying degrees, a source of constraint and freedom. The series of Mennonite migrations subsequent to the Reformation, from Germany to Russia and beyond, were meant to preserve a disengagement from citizenship, since Anabaptist theology eschewed military service and civic duties to secular governments as “too worldly”. Historical narratives about these migrations work as a legitimating charter so vital that Mennonites seem, at times, genuinely preoccupied with their own history. As Urry points out, what Mennonites *do* with this history can be a paradoxical strategy to manage the assimilationist and separatist arguments found within it. The past, of course, is not neutral (Antze and Lambek 1996), and my intention throughout this project is to write about history as it has been told to me by the Mennonites with whom I spoke. It is

through their words and telling of the past that they make their Mennonite lives, identities, and subjectivities meaningful in navigating contemporary Canadian society.

There is also, however, something I have come to read as a history by consensus written by the numerous Mennonite historians in academia, and circulated as a story Mennonites tell about themselves. This history is articulated through the textbooks used in Mennonite educational institutions (Snyder 1997; Dyck 1993; Epp 1974) pamphlets published by Mennonite church denominations such as Mennonite Church Canada (“What Makes A Mennonite?” 2013; “Who are the Mennonites?” 2008) Mennonite historical societies for visitors to archives and museums (the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba, and the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba were two I frequented, for instance), museum displays (at the Mennonite Heritage Village, again, or The Mennonite Story in St. Jacobs, Ontario). In this project, I attended most closely to how this story, learned in Mennonite educational institutions or churches, worked as a foundational narrative for contemporary lives: for some Mennonites, this past, with its focus on a certain type of religious piety, martyrdom, and exile is unhelpful and troubling, and so is rejected through silence or dismissal; for others, it is a source of identity and pride, forming a narrative of belonging and community in a story bereft of nationalist discourse or identification.

The consensus history is therefore, of course, a version of events that “works” in everyday Mennonite lives. Throughout this thesis the specifics of stories will be evoked as they become relevant in people’s lives, but I will also provide an outline of the “consensus historical” narrative in order to frame individual stories in the context of the long and geographically winding plot connected to the Russian Mennonites. While the

breadth of Mennonite historical literature is wide, the choice of source material for this contextual history comes from several textbooks on Mennonite history. As I argue, published Mennonite histories are cultural artefacts that work to tell a Mennonite story to Mennonites themselves, and textbooks used in Mennonite educational institutions work precisely in this way. The texts relied upon, then, are those that I was directed to by the Mennonites I spoke to during fieldwork: they were texts used in Mennonite history courses taken, or sit on bookshelves in Mennonite homes, where particular authors and their texts are invoked. In choosing these well-known texts, I seek to illustrate why and how Russian Mennonites came to Canada, and how their migrational, martyrological, and theological legacy has worked in creating a past that shapes present day lives (Snyder 1997; Dyck 1993; Epp 1974).

At various historical moments, Mennonites have relocated geographically to new locales, seeking reprieve from the rigours of citizenship. They desired exemption from military service and the privilege of education within their own communities, governance, and language. Russian Mennonites have their religious and ancestral origins in the Netherlands during the Protestant Reformation and Peasant's Revolt of the 16th century. Mennonite historian Arnold Snyder (1997) contends that present-day histories of Anabaptists frame them either as crazy fanatics of the Reformation who tended to impede the emergence of Protestantism, or, as historians would later portray, left-wing socialist reformers faithfully living out the imitation of Jesus Christ. Snyder argues that, in fact, both perspectives taken together may offer a more nuanced construction of the Anabaptist movement, fraught as it was with a lack of cohesion and unity in a medieval context in the midst of upheaval.

Sociologist Calvin Redekop (1989) maintains that at its outset, Mennonitism or Anabaptism was a religiously motivated utopian movement, promoting revolutionary religious and social change. This movement had its origins in a desire for renewal and transformation that was increasingly present throughout Europe in the sixteenth century. As a result, the particular movement known as Anabaptism was also far from centralized, with groups emerging out of northern Italy, northern and southern Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Both Snyder and Redekop suggest that what made Anabaptists identifiable as a group was the eventual semi-cohesion of their ideals, beliefs and practices. Nonetheless, variability and nuance in the execution, meaning, and authority of these beliefs was found across Europe (and continues throughout the world today).

The Anabaptist movement retained the central ideas of medieval piety, including an ascetic understanding of God's salvation and the Christian life; an idealization of Christ's life as a model for the Christian life; a communal understanding of social organization, the cosmos, and salvation; and a worldview that interpreted life as a struggle between good and evil, with the secular realm understood as being under the power of Satan (Snyder 1997). Emerging from, mirroring and echoing the radical critiques of reformers like Martin Luther, Anabaptist doctrine reframed, extended, and abandoned such critiques, to focus on what the deemed to be specific flaws within the Catholic Church: the debauchery of the clergy, oppressive tithes levied against the poor in support of church institutions, a lack of disciplined living (for both clergy and laity), the use of oaths in swearing allegiance, and the use of force in coercing belief. In addition, and key to Anabaptists protested against the use of military force to achieve national objectives (Redekop 1989; Friedman 1973).

A vision of the true Christian church was articulated by the Anabaptists with reference to the term “*Gemeinde*,” a German word that connotes a district or community in the municipal sense, and holds within it the term “*gemein*” indicating a sense of holding in common. *Gemeinde* in its Anabaptist iteration was therefore an idealized notion of a religious community, yet one with sociological implications in its rendering (Friedman 1955). Breaking from the model of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches of the 16th century, Anabaptists identified the true church as a gathered congregation of believers, who voluntarily entered into membership through baptism; only those who were obedient to Christ could be members, and love was the mark of this true church (Klaassen 1981). As one instructional letter from early Anabaptist leader Ulrich Stadler notes, “There is one communion (*gmain*) of all the faithful in Christ and one (*gmainschaft*) of the holy children called of God” (107).³

These notions were articulated during the Protestant Reformation as an oppositional stance against the position taken by both the Catholic Church and Protestant Christianity that everyone in Europe belonged to the church by virtue of baptism, and each country had an “official faith,” to which all citizens – except Jews and heretics – were adherents (Klassen 1981). The church proposed by the Anabaptists was based on shared ideology, marked by baptism, and intended to function as a community of mutual aid and disciplinary action. The Anabaptist emphasis was also on the church’s visibility: it is seen because the members of such a church live publically obedient lives to Christ (Klaassen 1981; Friedman 1973).

³ The terms *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (community and society) were terms taken up by Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber to describe key elements of social change; an instance of Christian theological terms being taken up in the social sciences (Cahnman and Herberle 1971).

Anabaptists claimed that scripture must be interpreted with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, without the mediation of institutions (including the government, clergy, or secular educational system). Furthermore, they argued, salvation occurs by God's grace through faith, and grace works to transform believers in *this* life, in order that they participate in the salvation process. Humans, as radically sinful beings according to this theology, are in need of redemption. They have, in the Anabaptist view, the capacity to be remade, reborn, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit through free will. It is this free will that allows someone to choose either salvation or perdition. This human will to choose between good and evil was understood to be held "prisoner" in a sinful body; one must therefore be re-born through Christ. Finally, for Anabaptists, salvation was a gift of grace, not payment for meritorious works (Snyder 1997; Friedman 1973).

In this theological framework, the baptism of infants as practiced by the Catholic Church was rejected since infants do not possess the capacity to make personal faith decisions, nor do they possess the capacity for transformation and regeneration that such decisions entail. The Anabaptist practice of adult baptism was therefore symbolically bound within this framework, one that necessitates a unity between an inner spiritual life and an outer life of discipleship and community marked through baptism. The related concept of *Gelassenheit* ("yieldedness") impelled believers to respond to God's call both inwardly to the Spirit of God, and outwardly to the community. This concept meant an explicit yielding to the disciplinary action of such a community, and yielding to the hostility of the world, often through acceptance of a martyr's death. Snyder (1997:63) explains that just as the act of adult baptism committed one to membership in the church, it "signified the inner yieldedness to Christ... that the believer was now yielding to the

Body of Christ on earth, the church. It signified a willingness to suffer all for Christ and the brother and sister. Baptism meant moving from ‘the world’ to ‘the Body of Christ’” (63).

For the individual, baptism therefore also meant a commitment to the discipline of the community. Disciplinary authority was given to the church through a particular reading of scripture. The Ban (excommunication) was seen as the ultimate act of church discipline for wayward members whose inner spirituality was not unified with outward discipleship; excommunication was therefore fundamental to both salvation and church reform. As is evident, theological concepts were intentionally embedded within bodily metaphors. The re-birth of baptism entails a new membership in Christ’s body, the community of the church. Yet the bodily metaphor is particularly apt in matters of discipline, since excommunicated members are figuratively cut off from the body social. Writing on the purpose of church discipline in 1541, Menno Simons, the vocal and well-published leader after whom the Mennonites are named, explains using visceral language that “we do not want to expel any, but rather to receive; not to amputate, but rather to heal; not to discard, but rather to win back...” (Klaassen 1981). In a more graphic description, he conjures the image of a sinful and susceptible human and ecclesiastic body that makes discipline necessary, “lest we corrupt our flesh which is inclined to evil by the contagion” (Klaassen 1981).

Membership in the Body of Christ also committed one to allegiance to that Body in economic, social, and political matters. One’s conduct in such matters was interpreted as an outward “sign” of such a commitment. Such signs included mutual aid, a democratizing stance with respect to social hierarchies, and a rejection of coercive force.

The Anabaptist desire for renewal and revolutionary social change cultivated tensions between the “church” and the “world,” constructed categories that figure prominently in the Mennonite ethos throughout the centuries. The “world” at the time of the Reformation was certainly threatened by the radical reform proposed by the Anabaptists. In response to this threat, authorities began a long history of persecuting Anabaptists which, some might argue, led to the celebration of martyrdom within the tradition. The leaders of the earliest Anabaptist movements were young men who rarely lived past their 30s, often meeting their end through torture. For example, the four men involved in the first re-baptism in 1525 in Zurich, Switzerland, were killed soon afterwards.

As the movement challenged both state and church authority, it was immediately received with opposition and intense persecution. Pushed from urban centres to rural enclaves and beyond, the Anabaptist diaspora was transformed into a community preoccupied with survival rather than a utopian vision. At the same time (perhaps ironically) persecution and the need for survival provided the community with a sense of cohesion that led to the quest for a geographical territory that the community could occupy through migration. As Redekop (1989:26) explains, “thus it is that the ‘religious persecution’ which creates the sense of cohesion also results in migration; in turn, migration tends to seal the formation of an ethnic group as the relationship of the group with the new host society becomes one of unfamiliar and strange environments.”

For Anabaptists, religious persecution and martyrdom was essentialized in the form of a book published in 1660 in the Netherlands by Thieleman J. van Braght descriptively titled *The Bloody Theatre or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenceless Christians who baptized only upon the confession of faith and who suffered and died for the*

testimony of Jesus, their Saviour, from the time of Christ to the year AD 1660. This book contains stories and illustrations of Christian martyrs, with a significant emphasis on Anabaptist martyrs meeting particularly torturous and cruel ends. While copies of the *Martyrs Mirror* are often found in Amish and Old Order Mennonite homes today, for the majority of Mennonites the book retains a largely symbolic potency, a form of testimony to suffering that has shaped Mennonitism through the centuries (Dyck 1993).

The history of migration in response to religious persecution and external demands on Mennonites to adopt national “citizenship” continued into the 20th century, as has a history of schism. The followers of Menno Simons, calling themselves Mennonites, were centred in the Netherlands and northern Germany. Persecution compelled this particular group to seek religious freedom and military exemption, finding them in the Vistula River delta in present-day Poland. In 1786, however, a newly crowned King of Prussia demanded fees from the settler Mennonites in exchange for continued military exemption. Aware of the invitation to Europeans extended by Catherine the Great of Russia to settle Russian land, these Prussian Mennonites packed up and headed south in 1789 to form self-governing and economically independent colonies in southern Ukraine, where they were given the privileges of military exemption and German-only education. However, these privileges were again threatened in 1870 by a “Russification plan” intent on creating a unified Russian “citizenship” (Dyck 1993).

The “Russification plan” proved to be too much for some Mennonites, and a significant group left the Ukraine for the great plains of North America. This migration was a response to yet another government invitation – this time from Canada and the US – to settle agricultural land. Russian Mennonites were assisted by Swiss Mennonites

already in Canada who had emigrated to the Americas in the 16th century. Specifically, the Canadian government wanted industrious European settlers to develop the western prairies, newly “cleared” of their indigenous populations by the Canadian government. Those Mennonites who transplanted their Russian villages onto the flat grasslands of Manitoba displaced the aboriginal and Métis inhabitants to the fringes of fertile land along with the roaming herds of bison (Dyck 1993).

Alarmed at the loss of thousands of industrious farmers, the Russian government granted four-year forestry service as an alternative to military service for those men of recruitment age to the Mennonites who remained. World War I and the Russian Revolution, however, devastated the Mennonite colonies during a time of social upheaval they could not avoid. Prior to those events, the extreme prosperity of the Mennonite colonies had led Mennonites to construct large estates, the running of which was facilitated by exploiting the labour of their poorer Russian and Ukrainian neighbours.

During the Revolution, one of these labourers, Nestor Mahkno, formed an anarchist army intent on ridding Ukraine of any institution seeking to govern and suppress the peasantry. Engaging with both the Russian Red and White armies, Mahkno also targeted the wealthy and prosperous Mennonite colonies which had come to represent the wealthy (and exploitative) ruling elite. (Here, there is a certain irony that Mennonites originated in the Anabaptist movement of peasant reform, only to become the oppressors). Thousands of Mennonites were killed, raped, and tortured in random attacks by Mahkno’s army, resulting in the rather radical decision by Mennonite leaders to forego pacifism and form an armed defense unit trained by German soldiers. However, many Mennonites were sceptical about such military action and chose to leave

the Ukraine rather than fight, creating another wave of emigration to the prairies of North America. By 1930, however, Russia had closed its borders (Dyck 1993).

The years between the two World Wars were difficult for those Mennonites remaining in Russia. Famine and illness killed thousands, and the infrastructure of their colonies – theological training, education and healthcare – had crumbled in the aftermath of Mahkno’s attacks. Communism under Stalin sought to further dismantle structures of power and privilege, and Mennonite communities were targeted, particularly since they were German-speaking. Leaders and teachers (adult men) within the communities were forcibly removed to concentration camps in Siberia. During World War II, Russian armies raped and tortured women, and left homes and communities without food or supplies (Epp 2008; 2000).

When the German army retreated from Russia at the end of the war, thousands of Mennonites went with it – of these, however, two thirds were forcibly returned to Russia, either to be killed or sent to concentration camps. The remaining third were mostly women and children, some of whom made their way clandestinely to Berlin where they received assistance from the Mennonite Central Committee based in North America. Many of these Mennonites were finally able to leave Europe for Paraguay (the only country at that time accepting “German” immigrants). Some, including my own mother and her family, eventually came via Paraguay to Canada (Dyck 1993).

MENNONITE STUDIES, THE FIELD, AND METHODS

Since this is an anthropological project, I have relied upon the standard methodology of cultural anthropology, ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation. The long history of this methodology is well documented in the anthropological literature (see, for example, Bernard 2005; DeWalt and DeWalt 2002; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Spradley 1980; Radcliffe-Brown 1958; Spencer 1954; Malinowski 1922). Participant-observation ethnographic fieldwork involves living in the community being studied and interacting on a daily basis with research participants, as well as carrying out more formal interviews. This method allows for a multiplicity of information gathering techniques involving various forms of observation, from the unobtrusive to full participation in events and community life. Such participation allows the actors and interlocutors to indicate what they consider valuable, meaningful, and challenging in their own lives, and how their reality is constructed and understood.

Further, this project is situated broadly within the strand of cultural anthropology known as interpretive anthropology, and, as such, recognizes the necessity of situating the anthropologist within the process of knowledge production. This approach developed as a result of the “crisis of representation” in the 1980s that moved ethnography away from the objective description of cultural forms, and reflexively placed importance on the subjectivity of the anthropologist in the production of ethnography (Rosaldo 1989; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus 1986; Tyler 1986; Geertz 1973). As Clifford Geertz (1988) posited, ethnography should be considered “fiction” in the original sense of the word as something made, fashioned or produced. As the research instrument, the

anthropologist is necessarily situated in the process through which knowledge is acquired.

The interpretive turn in ethnography also echoed the postmodern challenge to “master narratives” that supposed a coherent, individual self or community that claims to be representative or objective. In order to evoke the nature of social experience as incoherent, and, in the Mennonite experience, attend to the tensions and paradoxes of life, ethnographic method and, subsequently, writing, must imitate reality rather than describe it (Tyler 1986). In this project, I therefore use an eclectic or pastiche methodology (Murchison 2010; Danforth 1989; Marcus 1986), drawing upon multiple sources to create a collage-like portrayal of the social contexts that I encountered. Such a method offers a means to uncover how Mennonites understand the problems of incarnational living, its tensions and contradictions, conflicts and paradoxes, by attending to the myriad genres and forms of representation these problems take. An eclectic approach looks at the sites where understandings of incarnational living becomes articulated and lived; where Mennonite responses to paradoxes that arise are evident, and the destabilization of those responses are seen; and the effects of all these processes become visible.

The sites of visibility are numerous. I pay attention, for instance, to cultural artefacts (some that have become authoritative, some that have been sidelined), including texts of church doctrine and theology, histories, biographies and autobiographies, hymns, poetry, plays, and museum and art exhibits. These artefacts participate in the process of making sense of what it means to be Mennonite; as they were referenced and encountered in the interviews and conversations that took place during fieldwork, their clear vivacity in Mennonite lives is evident, and they coordinate, too, with the cultural expectations and

evaluations *of* a Mennonite audience as they are produced *for* a mostly Mennonite audience.

Further, I approach these cultural artefacts both anthropologically and ethnographically by interpreting them in a larger context of meaning-making practices. These artefacts reveal important processes, practices, relationships, and values through their production, circulation, articulation, and representation, while the contexts in which they are found are also contingent. Changing social conditions since World War II, for instance, have shifted Mennonite understandings of identity and subjectivity in Canada to a significant degree (see, for example, Loewen 2006). The creation of openings to the world in formerly bounded communities, and the shift to a more exterior orientation, have made notions of “public” and “private” vis-à-vis these communities apparent in new ways. The burgeoning field of literature coming out of Russian Mennonite communities (notably from Manitoba) is dramatic, and offers a mode of engaging with the notions of voice, Mennonite identity, and the world as “public,” in fascinating ways.

As a result, I have incorporated literary analysis of Mennonite works of fiction as part of my methodology, attending to how story is constructed in these novels in specifically “Mennonite” ways, and to how the authors position themselves in relation to Mennonite communities. As both writers of public stories about Mennonites and so-called “Mennonite themes,” and as Mennonites themselves, these authors are producing narratives that generate particular affects, and means to subjectivity. I therefore examine the Mennonite work of literature itself as a complex artefact or cultural production that both reproduces historic narratives, and creates new narratives and orientations to modernity.

The proliferation of Mennonite literature is also informative in that it seems to have flourished as the means through which Russian Mennonites are voicing trauma, conflict, and inner states. Mennonite authors of literature and poetry often construct stories around a community that is messy and conflict ridden: one that is figuratively wounded. Moreover, in contemporary literary studies, there is a shift away from the central toward the peripheral that clears a space for a so-called “minority literature,” one that is said to negotiate the world between experiences and cultures. This positive re-evaluation of the peripheral with respect to the central or dominant culture has also worked to produce the category of “ethnic” that many Mennonites now claim as their own. Minority or ethnic literature in Canada arose out of the national project of multiculturalism and the celebration of cultural difference that began in the 1970s (Zacharias 2013).

These literary texts, therefore, have worked to create the notion of community and its meanings that Mennonites are now considering. My interlocutors referred to these artistic representations to articulate a condemnation or affirmation of the content of the novels and, by extension, the moral qualities of the authors themselves. These comments were illustrative of the ways Mennonites engage with publicity, authenticity, and self-expression; in short, with the products of modernity.

In a similar way, other artistic pursuits such as films, documentaries, and multimedia projects, have worked within the Mennonite ethos to create community, and reproduce the narratives that scaffold it. Many of these sources, created often for a Mennonite audience, tell the stories of migration, of traumas and persecution, and their effects and affects. Throughout this dissertation, I will be drawing on these sources both

to exemplify the means of community formation that Mennonites pursue, and also as artefacts for analysis; that is, I will deploy them as both primary and secondary source material. There are sources, such as hymn texts, and the writings and pictures of *The Martyrs Mirror*, for instance, that I take as primary source material: texts that simultaneously reify and produce community. In line with Clifford Geertz' (1973) notion of models of, and models for, I take these sources as both models for how to live in community, and models of what that requires for individual Mennonite actors.

Likewise, the construction of continuity with the past in these works signals a particular engagement with modernity that resists its supposed forward momentum, and counters the suggestion that Christianity necessitates a break with tradition. As the Mennonite case suggests, it is not Christianity, but rather a *particular* Christianity that demands of its converts a radical break with the past (Harding 1987). Further, as the Anabaptist movement began with a purposeful rupture from the established Catholic Church, the importance of “rupture” within Christianity is particularly evident within new Christian movements, in contexts where there has been recent conversion, rather than in more established types of Christianity.

While the past is vital to Mennonite ethos, it is also is not uniformly invoked by Mennonites to constitute a sense of “groupness.” Rather, particular types of events that have been repeated in different historical periods, like persecution, martyrdom, and forced migration, are given precedent in authorizing community. The recurrence of these archetypal events connect past and present, shaping which experiences are made valuable in the present, and signalling a particular engagement with modernity that troubles some individuals and revitalizes others. Drawing upon historical narratives reifies the notion of

“groupness” at the same time that migrations between Mennonite groups constantly reignite divisions about who lives most “authentically,” and notions of persecution and trauma from the past are drawn into the present.

What these materials point to most potently is the symbolic significance of Mennonite history in creating meaningful experiences of community. Through the ubiquitous references to the past in Mennonite literary and artistic pursuits, these works orient their audience in order to live present-day lives. My task becomes interdisciplinary in its attention to the forms and modes of literature and academic writing that have become authoritative in Mennonite lives, and ethnographic in its focus on how Mennonites both constitute and practice community, and live the paradox of the incarnation.

Further, I rely on Mennonite studies as a field of inquiry primarily to contribute to the anthropology of Christianity by introducing this scholarship to an anthropological audience, and to critically analyze it from the perspective of an anthropologist of Christianity. In so doing, I take the work of Mennonite scholars not as unproblematic “background” literature, but as a vital discourse *on* Mennonite identity and as a cultural artefact in and of itself. To critically analyze it, then, I unpack how this identity is expressed by Mennonite academics, and how such expression contributes to the ways that community is both understood and lived in articulation with modernity. As I demonstrate, the work of scholars concerned with history and theology becomes authoritative in producing narratives and constructs of community that are then enacted.

The enactment of these narratives is evident in a variety of ways, and of particular note in the writing of this ethnography is the articulation of authority and challenges to

authority in particular ways of speaking. Certain terms used frequently in discussions with Mennonites such as the world, community, church, authenticity, for example, are understood to be important and authoritative concepts, yet open to challenge and critique: they are not monolithic in Mennonite discourse. They are said, in speech, often using the gesture of scare quotes, rolled eyes, or otherwise qualified. In order to capture this gesture towards the mutability or problematic nature of these concepts in Mennonite lives, I utilize scare quotes and capitalization liberally throughout my writing to signal the simultaneous recognition of the centrality of these concepts within Mennonite life alongside their inability to capture the dynamic nature of this life.

As part of an eclectic methodology, I also attend carefully to the material of ethnographic observation: interviews, conversations, and participant observation in a variety of settings. For this project, the “field” of research has involved a rich interplay of geographies, spaces, and bodies. Mapping out my field in concrete, geographical terms would show that I spent the months between June 2013 and September 2014 in southern Manitoba and southern Ontario, both locales with high densities of Mennonites. In the spring of 2014 I was also able to travel with my mother to Paraguay back to the Mennonite colonies where she was born. Yet the geographical boundaries and spaces of Mennonite communities are as unfixed and contingent as the very idea of “Mennonite community” itself. As Fretz and Redekop (1989) note regarding the ineffable nature of the definition of Mennonite, it coheres around ideology and religion, transmitted through narratives of persecution, abjection, peculiarity, and martyrdom, and lived through the material world: dress, architecture, speech, and kinship patterns. Yet, as these authors observe, “this ethnic dimension has always transcended spatial, i.e., local, community

boundaries and [Mennonites] can be characterized better as a people which knows no boundaries or nationality” (175).

The character of Mennonite community, then, made it difficult to follow the pattern of methodologies and field sites most often experienced by other anthropologists working with Christian groups. That is, I did not engage in fieldwork in one particular congregation (see, for example, Coleman 2015; Luhrmann 2012), nor in one specific region with a convert population (Harris 2006, for example). While I began my fieldwork according to my original research plan through initial conversations with Mennonite health care practitioners and Mennonites with chronic or terminal illnesses, these conversations alerted me to questions that extended beyond the issue of bodies experiencing illness, and I began to speak about theology, community, and the struggles of incarnational living with chaplains and pastors.

I attended numerous church services in different denominations, and went to a funeral service. I spoke with some people in formal interview settings – offices, workspaces – and with others in their homes, over coffee or drinks, at parties and family gatherings. I spoke with Mennonites in care homes, hospitals, and educational institutions, and museums. I attended public workshops, conferences on “Mennonite issues,” presentations by both scholarly and informal historians, book launches, exhibition openings at museums and art galleries and readings by writers and poets. These events were notably all held in Mennonite museums or archives, or educational institutions. That is, these spaces reflect the liminality of religious and secular space: they are the product of particular modernist narratives that ascribe value to education, the

arts, and the preservation of material heritage, while at the same time being grounded within religious orthopraxy.

Particular to my ethnographic approach, too, is that I identify as Russian Mennonite. Given this positionality, I came to understand myself as never having really “entered” or “left” the field. My body – one I take to be a Mennonite body – moves in and between these Mennonite spaces and communities and other spaces that I inhabit on a daily basis. As I engage in this process of movement across boundaries, I am constantly attending to the ways and means whereby the margins interface with the worlds they encounter. Sometimes the interaction is smooth, whereas other times it is fractious and conflicting. My own movement, then, has been immensely instructive in alerting me to new phenomena, and new orientations. Indeed, as some of the experience of tension and contradiction are embodied and therefore affective, I have been able to access these particular experiences and can speak to such responses as one with direct knowledge.

Moreover, my boundary crossing has informed the way that the stories, narratives, and impressions I have been given by other Mennonites have coalesced and crystallized. The site of my fieldwork was not fixed or geographically delimited, and, as such, “the field” works metaphorically in parallel to the concept of “the world” and movements through it for the Mennonites in the following pages. The Mennonites I encountered were full participants in contemporary Canadian culture, which is to say they were all comfortably middle-class, educated, consumers of late capitalism. This is my own “default” position as well, and my movement in and between the communities I inhabit daily offered ample time and space for reflection on how, when, and where Mennonite encounters cohere. For instance, because kinship relations and their performance are

dense sites where tensions and their management play out, my own position with these webs of kinship provided me with unique insights.

My own story, therefore, is situated within the narrative as a form of autoethnography and “near” ethnography (Reed-Danahay 2009, 1997; Ellis 2004; see also Narayan 1993, 1989; Behar 1996; Myerhoff 1978). Situating myself as a Mennonite ethnographer and writing as such has been immensely generative, allowing me to witness how the stories of other Mennonites parallel, diverge, and encounter each other’s narratives. The sharing of experience by individuals within and, at times, outside of the boundaries of this particular community, figures in conceptualizing the relationship between the individual and community, especially in how the concept of the modern self encounters contemporary iterations and negotiations of “radical communalism.”

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEXT

The idealized Anabaptist vision of church as community was intended to communicate Christian values. It required of its members a “truer” sense of Christian witness than either the Protestant or Catholic Churches of the Reformation. Anabaptist requirements were enacted and made possible through membership in community. For Mennonites, this vision is life-giving and affirming at times, tragic and traumatic at others, a source of joy and sorrow. Moreover, it contains in its physicality and symbolism the historical narratives and future imaginaries of Mennonite life.

The structure of the Mennonite ritual of worship is intended to actualize, acknowledge, and enact the incarnational: for Mennonites, it is the drawing in of the divine to an earthly space, and a production of orthodoxy. The weekly Mennonite church service is divided into five parts – Gathering, Praising, Hearing the Word, Confessing, and Sending – which are performed within the church building on Sunday mornings. The service both calls attention to the necessity of bringing together the community of faith in a shared space and common practice, and signals that lives continue to be structured by divine authority. The ritual of the church service acknowledges the communal in Gathering. In Praising, the community praises God for the love that makes such a community possible, and acknowledges the divine as the authority for gathering. Hearing the Word reifies the Bible as the source of God’s authority on earth and for the church. Confessing recognizes the sinful nature of humanity that falls short of the demands of the communal and incarnational living. Finally, Sending marks the movement of the congregation back into the world, with a renewed commitment to living faithful Christian lives.

I have taken the five parts of the church service as a model for the organization of this dissertation, and each chapter documents the articulation of particular tensions or contradictions, and both the past and present ways that Mennonites respond to or attempt to manage these contradictions. These five ritual components provide a lens for understanding how Mennonite lives are structured as they encounter the modern and construct meaningful community. In the church service, each component is designed to aid Mennonites in responding to the problem of incarnational living, each providing an opening to a broader discussion of key tensions and ways that Mennonites have

responded to them. The church service represents the moment when community constitutes itself tangibly and materially; the members perform ritual acts together before being “sent” back into the world. The acknowledgement and affirmation of movement in and out of the ritual space of worship that is present in the structure of the service parallels the movements of Mennonites in and out of sacred and secular worlds of meaning, authority, and discipline.

In *Part 1: Gathering*, I trace the “gathering” of migrations of Mennonites to Canada, examining the relationship between an Anabaptist theology that articulated a particular notion of church vis à vis the Catholic church, and the exigencies of gathering as a community in contemporary Canada. Through these acts of gathering, Mennonites contend with the tensions of displacement versus emplacement, of understanding where and what “home” is and entails, the relationship to land and settlement that emplacement necessitates, how the journeys and narratives of Mennonite migrants enliven these tensions, and how precarious belonging in nations and states forges identity. Narratives of migration and trauma have produced Mennonite communities that move beyond the religious frameworks of Anabaptism, to articulate with other means of community making: political, geographical, and national. While migration has gathered Mennonites together in Canada from diverse locales, social changes have reconstituted the nature of these gatherings. In the last fifty years, Mennonite communities have undergone tremendous change, and I begin to account for how the “openings” of such communities contend with “worldly” borders.

Part 2: Praising further traces the role of historical narratives and figures in producing affective and disciplinary regimes that police membership in community.

While in the church service praising reifies and glorifies divine authority, I expand the meaning of “praising” to look at the way Mennonites engage in authorizing community. I discuss the role of historical migratory narratives and how they have been used to authorize community making and God’s presence in them. The narratives that are produced through historical analysis create Mennonite identity itself, and, in the process, make coherent the contradictions of Christian life. In new contexts, however, these narratives of praise turn towards a type of self-praise: a strategy, I argue, that works as a response to the tension of displacement versus emplacement, producing, as a result, affective and disciplinary regimes that police membership in community.

Tropes of self-praise such as “farming is in our blood” and the description of Mennonites as “the quiet in the land” produce certain subjectivities in relation to land and concepts of home that trouble the theological imperative of “heaven-as-home.” These narratives and tropes and figures are further shaped by a theology that positions humanity as subject to a divine authority that offers deliverance and salvation through martyrdom and suffering (Redekop and Redekop 2001). In practice this positioning has led to a paradox: on the one hand, Mennonite narratives produce a pacifist and persecuted identity, yet they themselves engage in implicitly psychologically and structurally violent practices within their own communities, toward the land that they have settled, and toward those “others” who also lay claim to it.

In *Part 3: The Word*, I examine how “authentic” narratives are produced and authorized by attending to the primacy of the Bible, and the authorization of certain acts of speech. These acts – and who enacts them – enable and produce certain structures and institutions of power. I discuss the ways that the primacy of the Word – in various

iterations – pulls lives, shapes discourses, and pushes against that Word. This produces sites of tension, and I explore the process of authorization – the ways certain Mennonite responses to the problem of incarnational living become authority. This, too, has particular effects, and I explore how the silencing of certain voices, certain acts of speech, and ways of speaking are erased in favour of those that are authorized. While Mennonites claim an ideology of pacifism and non-violence, the reality is often its opposite, where the exigencies of authorization are violent. Responses to this tension, too, are generative of Mennonite practices – some new, some old – where speech acts are deployed either to reify power structures to manage a certain form of community or escape from them.

In *Part 4: Confession*, I examine the idea of Confession not just as a confessional act to alleviate the guilt associated with perceived sin or the failure to live according to God’s will, but in a broader sense as a metaphor for how the Mennonite community has “failed” certain individuals to the extent that the community itself becomes injurious. In this chapter, I link confession with new psychological discourses. I argue that confession works as a “technology” meant to respond to living the incarnation, where the failure to adequately model a Christ-like life creates a deep shame, mitigated through the acts of repentance and seeking forgiveness that confession entails. This shame, however, increasingly turns to the psychological – another type of confession – for its mitigation. This turn to the psychological, as I suggest in this chapter, is a response to the tension of incarnational living in a new form for a new context, one that has come to constitute Mennonite identity, subjectivity, and personhood in this time-and-place.

The traumas of the injurious community and the violence enacted therein, along with historical persecution, have come to be understood by some Mennonites as producing certain “disorderly” affects, ones that are increasingly understood in psychologized modes. In Part 4, I discuss the psychological turn that the Mennonite ethos has taken, now privileging mental health diagnoses and treatments for current conditions that may be the result of historical traumas, over Anabaptist theological concepts of discipline and martyrdom.

Finally, in *Part 5 – Sending*, I examine the injunction of “sending back into the world” at the close of the church service as a metaphor for the movement of Mennonites into the “world.” In this chapter I explore how Mennonites understand death in a Christian framework, and how this “reunification,” now taking place in a secular and medical age, causes particular anxieties. These anxieties result from a fundamental paradox in Christian life: the necessity of the flesh for the salvation of the spirit. The tension between the spirit and the flesh is generative, too, and is articulated most significantly in how the boundaries of the world (and where to place oneself in relation to it) are understood, engaged with, and acted upon. As Mennonites are becoming more “at home” in the world and engaged as citizens, they fall under new forms of discipline and new authorities. The use of biomedical discourses, as well as biological perspectives on psychiatry, reframes theological and martyrological views of suffering, illness, and death, requiring new ways of configuring subjectivities. These new configurations, these “new forms of experience,” as Taylor (2007) terms them, enable understandings of community to shift in order to incorporate ideas of the self and modernity.

The ways in which Mennonites contend with identifying *as* Mennonite reveal how community continues to be enacted, how and when it is deployed to signal affinity, and how the religious justification for this community is negotiated against, through, and with new modes and discourses concerning community, individuality, and the self. In attending to these questions ethnographically, I show how Mennonite constructions of community draw upon the past and notions of “tradition,” as well as negotiating Christian struggles with incarnational living, to encounter modernity in specifically Mennonite ways.

CHAPTER ONE

GATHERING

INTRODUCTION

The structure of the Mennonite ritual of worship is intended to actualize, acknowledge, and enact the incarnational: for Mennonites, it is the drawing in of the divine to an earthly space and a production of orthodoxy, both calling attention to the necessity of bringing together the community of faith in a shared space and common practice, and signalling that lives continue to be structured by divine authority. The opening of the service is performed to acknowledge the communal space in which such practices take place: frequently, this assembly begins with a hymn whose words iterate the theology of the church, or a prayer that invites the presence of God into the midst of the gathered congregation.

The following verse is from a Gathering Hymn, the first from the Mennonite Church conference hymnal, outlining the nature of the Anabaptist gathering:

What is this place where we are meeting?
Only a house, the earth its floor.
Walls and a roof sheltering people,
Windows for light, an open door.
Yet it becomes a body that lives
When we are gathered here,
And know our God is near.

(Hymnal: A Worship Book 1992; 1)

Taking the notion of gathering in this assemblage into wider perspective, in this first chapter, I trace the “gathering” of migrations of Mennonites to Canada, examining the relationship between an Anabaptist theology that articulated a particular notion of church vis à vis the Catholic church, and the exigencies of gathering as a community in contemporary Canada. Through these acts of gathering, Mennonites contend with the tensions of displacement versus emplacement, of understanding where and what “home” is and entails, the relationship to land and settlement that emplacement necessitates, how the journeys and narratives of Mennonite migrants enliven this tension, and how precarious belonging in nations and states forges identity. Using exemplary stories of individual Mennonites moving across the globe, I illustrate how narratives of migration turn towards the exilic and traumatic, remembered and deployed to authorize certain modes of gathering through their telling.

Coming together at the outset of a church service is a religious act of producing and affirming this mode of gathering as one constituted by a People of God, concurrently locating the space and place of such a gathering as outside of an “everyday” world. As such, the act of gathering interacts with the time and space of modernity, and movements through such constituted worlds. Gathering encompasses the historically imagined and real spaces of such movements, the contingencies of moving material bodies through spaces, and marking certain of these movements with value. In doing so, certain spaces and places of migration and gathering become “Mennonite” through acts of community-making. Such endeavours become authorized as community by historical narratives that use the migratory past to shape contemporary ideas of church and religious identity.

In the last fifty years, Mennonite communities have undergone tremendous change, and in this chapter I begin to account for how the “openings” of such communities contend with the creation of “worldly” borders. In the Mennonite “regions” of southern Manitoba and southern Ontario where fieldwork took place, social changes have reconstituted the nature of the Mennonite gatherings. While the movement beyond physical communities has occurred to such an extent that the church building itself is seen by many to be the only “Mennonite” space left, the constituted community also emerges as one that has moved beyond the religious frameworks of Anabaptism, articulating with other means of community making: political, geographical, and national.

These changes have not occurred without discomfort. The forging of community as a response to incarnational living creates tensions through the Mennonite history of gathering, and I ask in this chapter how it is that an Anabaptist theology that outlines a particular version of church-as-community gets enacted or rejected by attending to the tension of displacement and emplacement, and the responses to that tension. That is, how does the tension that arises from it become generative, and its effects evident in Mennonite lives? I examine how the concepts of the church and community are reconfigured to account for change by looking at sites where other means and modes of “gathering” evidence tension and potential conflict, yet remain committed to life-giving community-making: museums, archives, educational institutions, and artistic spaces.

I discuss how gathering is authorized in this changing landscape: who can coalesce in and around what spaces, and on what basis their presence is authorized. I examine what the effects of such gatherings might be, what they indicate about how place and community are related and how Mennonite notions of heaven-as-home are re-

oriented by attending to the tensions between the impulse toward insularity and separatism and the pressure to become model or “good” citizens; the ideology of pacifism and the reality of violence in the authorization of gatherings and community; and the continued relevance of discourses of suffering and martyrdom, vital for those earlier migrant Mennonites coming to Canada, for those now “emplaced,” those settled Mennonites now living in Canada.

As Angelika Bammer (1994; xii – xiii) argues, displacement becomes the “defining feature” of both modernism and postmodernism, that “what is displaced – dispersed, deferred, repressed, pushed aside – is, significantly, still there: Displaced but not replaced, it remains a source of trouble, the shifting ground of signification that makes meanings tremble.” For Mennonites, their displacement in a physical sense – where and how they gather – creates versions of community that manage the tension between being displaced and coming to feel and “be” at home. What is “displaced,” and what comes to feel “emplaced” and how that is articulated, creates affective and meaningful understandings of what “the world” might be, and whether continuing to construct “community” around enacting a migratory history remains effective and meaningful.

THE CHURCH AS GATHERING PLACE

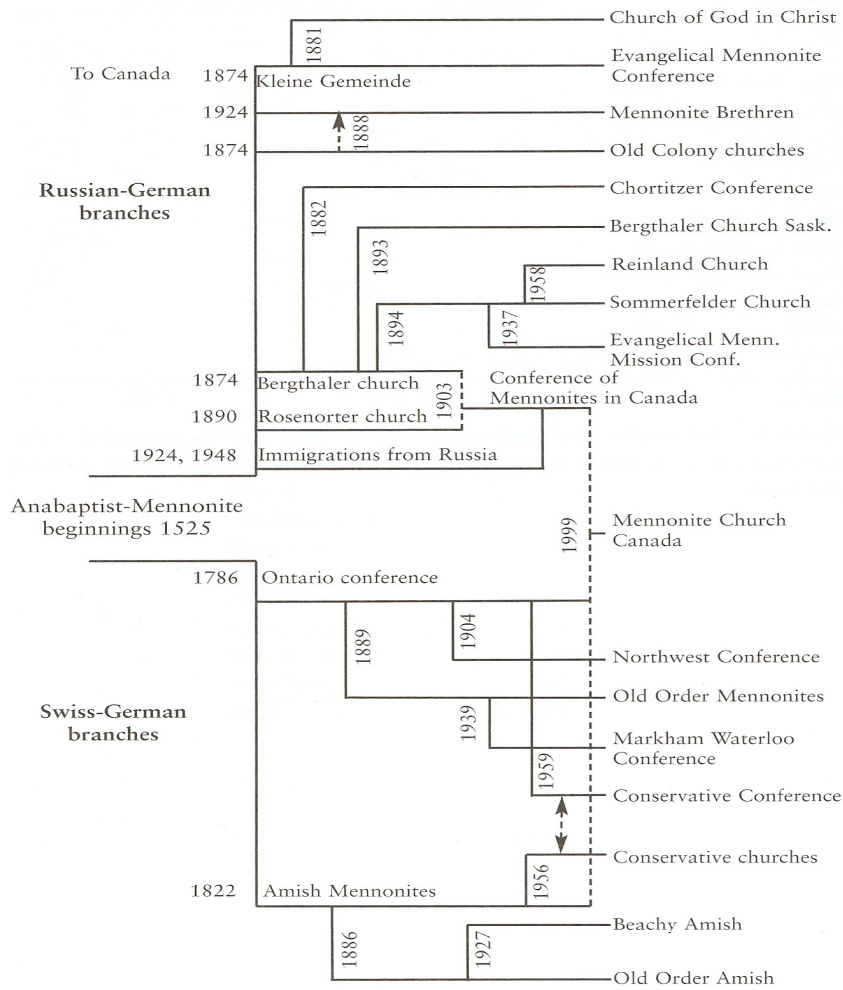


Figure 1.1 “Canadian Mennonite Family Tree” (Loewen Reimer 2008).

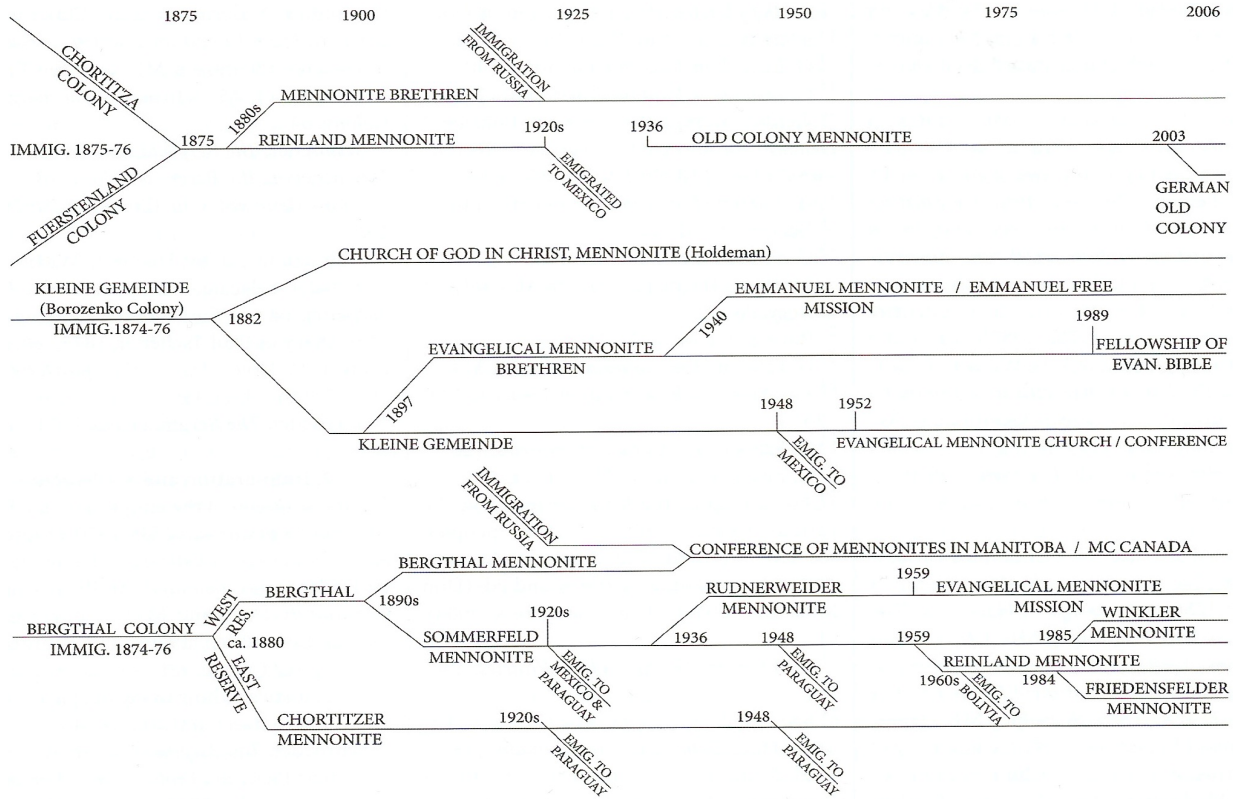


Figure 1.2 “Record of Divisions Among Mennonite Groups in Manitoba” (Friesen 2007)

The designs and divisions so neatly rendered in the schematic drawings shown above, simplified to lines of signification, demonstrate the various iterations of the Mennonite church. These schemas organize the ways Mennonites identify themselves as affiliates or members of certain congregations, variants of Anabaptist theology that have multiplied and coalesced through time. Indeed, division and schism have characterized the life of the Mennonite Church. The material means and modes of articulating the subtle to significant differences among Mennonite groups locate churches as both sites of healing and deep hurt, identity and dissociation, fracture and wholeness. The space that the church/es inhabit(s), then, is both real and imaginary, metaphoric and tangible. As

one anecdote that was shared with me goes, there was once a Mennonite man marooned on an island, and when discovered by rescuers, he gave a tour of the island to his discoverers: the first building he showed them was his house, the second he had built was his church. “What’s that third building over there?” the man was asked. “That’s the church I split from,” the man replied.

In the village plans of those Mennonites who travelled from Prussia and onward, the church building occupied a central location on the main street. Now more likely situated in urban suburbs or larger towns, it has been observed that these churches in contemporary Canada may be marked as the only truly Mennonite space left. For those who track declining church membership numbers, this sequestering of the church from the community signals the end of Mennonites in their entirety: to assimilate church attendance with community in this manner reifies an identity discourse that equates Mennonites with church and religious identity more broadly. This discourse therefore, implies that to be a “non-religious” Mennonite (i.e. one who does not attend church) is not, actually, to be Mennonite. This, of course, is a simple, if powerful, conception of Mennonite identification, and one that is grounded in the “origin story” of Anabaptism and its relationship to the Catholic Church of the Reformation.

Many early Anabaptist leaders had previously strong roots in Catholicism (Klaassen 1981) and the changes they proposed to the space and ethos of the church were radical at the time of the Reformation. The Catholic Church was a powerful political institution; national citizenship was connected to membership in this institution (Klaassen 1981). Following the Protestant vision of the church, the early Anabaptists wrote of the “true church” as being found wherever the Word of God (the Bible) is preached, and the

sacraments (communion) administered according to that Word. For Anabaptists particularly, the church became seen as a gathered assembly of believers (Snyder 1997; Dyck 1993). Membership in such an assembly was obtained through baptism and confession of faith, and the visibility of this church, further, should result not from power, gaudiness, or showiness, but from love. This love was to be shown through the daily living of members' lives in obedience to Jesus Christ's life, through the expression of a community of mutual aid, and, to varying degrees, through self-denial – including, for some, the surrender of private property (Klaassen 1981).

While Anabaptist movements began across Europe in the midst of a period of intense social change, there were places and times in which there were coalescences. In February of 1527, a group of Swiss Anabaptists met in Schleitheim, drawing up seven articles of faith that would serve to bind the disparate movements together (Dyck 1993). The revolt of the peasantry occurring during this time was a form of social, economic, and political redress against powerful institutions. Anabaptism focused its moral concerns against these institutions as imbrications of larger religious reforms occurring across Europe. Martin Luther, not sympathetic to concerns of the peasantry, held no grassroots appeal – but Anabaptism did (Snyder 1997).

Such appeal is evident in the theological importance of community, an insistence on the scriptural basis for social responsibility and the democratizing principle of “The Priesthood of all Believers.” Echoing (and editing) Luther's reforms, Anabaptists formulated their theology on several bases, maintaining the Bible as foundational. For these early Anabaptists scripture had to be interpreted with the assistance of the Holy

Spirit, without the mediation of institutions (including the government, clergy, or education) (Snyder 1997).

The concept of “church” thus shifted in the Anabaptist view to a biblical interpretation that reified the notion of a spiritual church, an assembly of voluntarily baptized “believers.” The physical spaces associated with such assemblies arose out of this worldview, and, architecturally, reflected the rejection of power, gaudiness, and showiness, that characterized the Catholic churches. This Anabaptist “true church” as metaphor could therefore be said to be found wherever the Word of God (the bible) is preached. The “Meetinghouses” of clandestine Mennonite groups in 16th and 17th century Europe were often covert; when Mennonites began in subsequent years in earnest to build places to gather freely, they were completely unadorned (Friesen 2007).

Within these spaces, too, the actions and affects of the gathered assembly signalled a rejection of “showiness”: the presence of the Holy Spirit, or the invocation of God in the assembly created no dramatic change in states or modes of being. This absence of elaboration in both material culture and ritual continues to characterize present-day Mennonite churches, though to varying degrees of “simplicity.” With the exception of those churches influenced by Christian evangelicalism, there is no speaking in tongues, no alteration of perception, and little of the dramatic and dynamic spiritual expression of other Christian denominations (See, for example, Luhrmann 2012; Csordas 1997). The interior space of the church itself is without icons, without decoration. There is nothing to mark it as a sacred space; no objects within are imbued with mystical properties, divine power, or transcendent value.

For Mennonites, the church is the gathered body of believers, imbued with the Holy Spirit. The gathering together makes the ‘thing’ itself – a perspective suitable especially for times and places that did not allow for church buildings to be visible. Mennonites who lived (peacefully) in Poland along the Vistula River for over two hundred years between the 1530s and 1770s, were reluctantly granted citizenship, and were not permitted to construct church buildings; meetings were held instead in homes or barns (Friesen 2007). This was the case later in communist Russia as well, where displays of religion were forbidden, and Sunday morning meetings were held clandestinely in people’s homes.



*1.3 Old Colony Meeting House, Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach Manitoba.
(Author)*

While the Mennonites in Russia were meeting in houses, those in Manitoba were building churches as soon as they could (Friesen 2007). When they were living in row villages, the church was built at the mid-way point along the main street, looking indistinguishable from the houses around it. There is a replica of a church from the 1920s at the Heritage Museum in Steinbach, a low white-sided building with a steeply gabled roof. Women would enter the church from one side, men from the other; they would sit on their designated sides, in rows of wooden benches. At the front is a pulpit and a bench where the preacher and song leaders would sit. Huge support beams held up an attic filled with grain as a system of welfare: donations from the farmers with the highest yields were distributed to those whose yields were low. The church's presence in the middle of the village denoted its centrality in life, its architecture reflecting the values and virtues of the community: "only a house" as the hymn at the opening of the chapter suggests, until the presence of God, invited in by the gathered, transforms it into a living body.

With the exception of the meeting houses of more conservative groups, contemporary Mennonite churches are no longer constructed in this manner, nor do they feature segregated seating arrangements. Some Mennonite congregations, particularly new groups who moved to urban centres, found church spaces by buying them from other denominations. These churches have the distinct architectural forms of the mainstream denominations like the Anglicans or Roman Catholics: stained-glass windows, high, cathedral-like interiors, and rigid wooden pews. There are also modern mega-churches, with plush pews and lush carpeting. They have gymnasiums and dining halls, rented out during the week for music exams and recitals, elections, and other community gatherings.

Other than (perhaps) a bare cross located somewhere at the front of the sanctuary, there is no overt symbolism to mark the space as Mennonite or particularly Christian.

Wherever contemporary Mennonites meet, on Sunday mornings, those who gather are invited to enter the space as one “out of time and place.” They are encouraged to leave behind the godless weekdays of routine and tedium, to come together and invoke the presence of God. This deliberate conjuration is a fascinating reintroduction of the sacred. It conjures church space as liminal; out of place and time, with “place” and “time” located in the weekly routines of school and job for the modern neo-liberal subject.

GATHERING IN CANADA: MIGRATIONS AND MOVEMENTS

I began my fieldwork in the summer of 2013 by driving from southern Ontario to Manitoba, the place where I grew up in a Russian Mennonite family and community. Miriam Toews, a novelist also hailing from a Mennonite community in southern Manitoba, uses the road trip motif with some frequency in her writing; the image of a static interior environment moving through space offers the potential to explore the nature of relationships, through its concurrent movement and stasis. It seems to me also a very Mennonite motif, providing insight into how the movements and settlements of Mennonites have worked to shape relations to place, space, and voice: the “static” Mennonite community moving/migrating en masse geographically across the globe.

My own road trip led me north, over the top of Lake Superior and then due west. This route takes one straight through the rocky and imposing landscape of the Canadian

Shield. After a thousand kilometers of winding road through rocks and trees, there is a moment, on the third day, and just over the border between Ontario and Manitoba, when the trees abruptly end, and you seem to have been flung into wide open space with wheat, canola, and barley fields stretching infinitely on, under the wide dome of the sky.

Though I had driven this stretch of the trans-Canada highway between Manitoba and Ontario numerous times before, this iteration of the journey felt different; when you no longer have stands of pines racing past to mark your car's progression, the opening up of space and the flattening of topography makes time move suddenly (and maddeningly) slowly. Yet I do not mean, here, to invoke some quaint Mennonite caricature, akin to a tourist drive to Amish country to view (and, by proximity, absorb) the tranquility of a simple people living outside of time. Russian Mennonites in Manitoba enjoy relatively fabulous wealth, sometimes ostentatiously so, and their "landscapes" do not offer a rendition of a Simple Life on display for others to absorb.

Just past the trees in a westward direction is the highway that, when you turn south, leads to Steinbach, the administrative centre of the south-eastern corner of the province, a small city with a current population of about 10,000. The area was settled primarily by Mennonites who migrated from Russia in two large groups in the 1870s and the 1920s. It was, as a geographical entity, "gifted" upon these farmers from the government, choosing not to recognize the land claims of the indigenous and Metis who called it home. The area around Steinbach was – and continues to be – delineated as a Mennonite area, dotted with growing communities whose primary economic engine is farming. With its history of insular immigrant settlement, one whose roots, particularly, lie in the desire for religious freedom, the area is now known locally and anecdotally as

the Bible Belt of Manitoba. Socially, politically, and economically, the area tends to skew conservative; Steinbach, the buckle of this belt, is perhaps particularly so.

It was grassland in the 1870s when the first Mennonites arrived, the new province of Manitoba appearing as a vital western gateway, viewed as a strategic commodity by the United States to the south and the French and English governments in eastern Canada. Attempts by the Métis under Louis Riel to form a government had been stymied, and the indigenous farmers of the area were moved to reserves after signing land treaties. Concurrently, delegates from both the Canadian and American governments were abroad, attempting to entice European agriculturalists with “free” (or “cheap”) land (Friesen 2007).

Meanwhile, there were Mennonites in the colonies of southern Russia in what is now present-day Ukraine considering plans to emigrate. After having established a “Mennonite commonwealth” in Russia at the invitation of Catherine the Great beginning in the late 18th century, many Mennonites were dismayed to find that the 1870s brought changes to the supposed “eternal” *privilegium* they had been promised. It had been agreed upon by the Russian government and Mennonite settlers from Prussia that this commonwealth to be established was set apart, a “cultural island” in which there would be self-governance, the creation of Mennonite schools and welfare institutions, a self-regulated economy with little interference, and no restrictions on practicing religion (Epp 1974).

By the 1870s, Mennonites who were both apprehensive about the possibility of national conscription by the Russian government and looking for land began contemplating an exodus. The Russian Czar, fearful of the loss of “his best

agriculturalists,” (Epp 1974; 185) offered them exemption from combat through alternative service. Though most stayed in Russia hoping to renegotiate the terms of their settlements there, many left after word came from American and Canadian delegates that Mennonite farmers would be desired in the western territories of North America. Those that chose Canada were swayed by the government promises (again) of exemption from military service and free land in the new Province of Manitoba, but most enticing was the promise of large blocks or tracts of land that would ensure the continuation of a geographical colony model, and, subsequently the a sense of community cohesion that such a delineation of land would provide (Friesen 2007).

A small plaque now stands at the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers to mark the spot where the first Mennonite immigrants disembarked from the steamboat that carried them the last leg of their journey from Russia to Manitoba. The land offered to them by the Canadian government was in two large sections, one on the east side of the Red River, and subsequently one on the west side, known descriptively as the East and West Reserves. The geographical space of these “reserves” meant there was an actual boundedness to Mennonite communities, along with the possibility of recreating the geographical colony pattern they had utilized in Russia. The “reserve” was also, of course, deeply symbolic, and the borders – the margins – were a rich terrain of interaction with other worlds. In Manitoba, the East Reserve, with Steinbach as its major centre, came to be bordered by French settlers who farmed along the rivers, and Ukrainian settlers to the south and east as the Mennonites settled.

The land around Steinbach, and around that corner of the province of Manitoba in general, is flat, and the sky a wondrous, living dome. The Mennonites diligently carved

out fields from the flat prairie in neat square miles that look like a glorious study in geometry from the air. My Mennonite paternal grandfather, a turkey farmer and bus driver, was especially fond of straight lines, and could drive a combine in a perfect diagonal across a square mile field without the help of the GPS systems now currently used in agri-business. My Mennonite maternal grandparents would drive to my parents' rural Manitoban property from their home in Kitchener, Ontario nearly every summer during my childhood, and my grandmother was always enamoured of the prairies and their neat and clean lines. She was transported back to her own childhood in the Mennonite colonies of the Russian steppes by the similar landscape of flat prairie, magpies, and sky, the effect and affect of landscape inscribed in her memory.

These grandparents had made a far more recent exodus from Russia to Canada, eventually coming to reside in the Waterloo region of Ontario, another high-density Mennonite area. My mother and her siblings arrived as immigrants from Germany, feeling burdened with the pejorative acronym “DPs” – displaced persons – following the Second World War. The migration of the Mennonites who remained in Russia through this war is therefore still comparatively current: there are many still alive who can recount this narrative, and who have written “autobiographies.” Their stories were immortalized through film by the Mennonite Central Committee workers who facilitated the emigration of thousands of Mennonites from Europe. While my grandmother died before I was old enough to be able to appreciate her story of migration, her sister, my great-aunt Kaethe, was willing to tell me her own parallel one. Now in her late 80s and living in suburban Kitchener, she remains a lucid and engaging storyteller, and over

numerous lunches, weaved her narrative for me from childhood and youth in Russia to adulthood in Paraguay and Canada.

With little prompting, Kaethe told me about Russia. She started dramatically with the statement “I can still see my brother’s face,” describing the day that her father was taken away by the Communists. He was one of many Mennonite community leaders and teachers, fathers, sons, and brothers, who were forcibly removed from their homes most often at night. Kaethe’s father David was seized during a daytime raid, however, after authorities broke into their house and loaded him with other teachers and pastors onto a wagon to be taken to a forced labour camp in Siberia. David’s oldest son, Nicolaus, who was twelve at the time, ran after the wagon along the dusty road, until David convinced the driver to stop and let him say goodbye to his son. They stopped, and David turned his son back towards his mother and sisters, his tears mingled with dust to form a muddy mask. The family, bereft of a husband and father and stable income, moved about the Russian Mennonite colonies, relying, like many families, on assistance and employment from others.

The front lines of conflict between German and Russian soldiers moved through the colonies, and when the war ended and the German army began their retreat westward, the Mennonites, identifying themselves as “ethnically” German, went with them. Many young men, including my maternal grandfather, and several of my great-uncles joined the German army. Wishing to fight the Communists, they opted to disregard their pacifist theology for a chance at revenge for the loss of their fathers and community leaders during the Russian revolution. Ironically, there were concurrently Mennonite men in

Canada who voluntarily enlisted to join the Allies, invoking the duties of citizenship to their “home” country in the defense against the German assault.

Over lunch, when I expressed my surprise that Mennonites had joined the German army, Kaethe responded, “We didn’t know any better! They took away our teachers. We couldn’t go to church!” There was also a moral valence in her descriptions of the soldiers that passed through her village: the German men were always clean and neat, proper, polite, and handsomely attired. They were gentlemanly, and on one occasion stopped an attempted rape by Russian soldiers. The Mennonites who were left on the colonies went with these German soldiers back to Germany by foot and wagon. Having an ambiguous citizenship, they could, if caught by Russian soldiers, be sent – as Russian citizens – to work camps in Siberia, where thousands had already died.

The clandestine journeys of these Mennonites included many harrowing escapes, bombings, and double-crossings. Their end point was Germany, and many, including my grandmother and her family, found themselves gathered in the basement of a bombed-out house in the American zone of the newly divided Berlin. Germany, too, was divided, with the city of Berlin surrounded by the Russian zone. Discovered by American soldiers, this huddled mass of people was to be “returned” to the Russians, until an American general intervened, and requested the help of a Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker stationed in the Netherlands. Since the Mennonites were adamant that they did not want to be turned over to the Russian authorities, the general agreed that if they could find a way out of the European continent, he would facilitate their departure. The Queen of Holland, pleased with MCCs assistance in Holland during the war, offered

them a ship to carry them to Paraguay, the only country willing to accept refugees of German descent.

The major obstacle, however, was getting these hundreds of Mennonites out of the city and onto the train that would take them north to the awaiting ship: they were immobilized in Russian East Germany, and under the control of their allies, the Americans. In a nail-biting climax, this group was secreted aboard a train, only to be stopped by Russian guards at the border going into West Germany. Before the guard who was moving along the train cars, throwing the doors open to inspect the contents, reached the huddling group of Mennonites, a well-timed phone call from a Russian general commanded the train over the border and into Germany. With a few hours to spare before the ship left port, this group boarded and left the continent bound for the jungles and desert of central South America.

Both the Mennonite Central Committee and the refugees desired most to be taken to join established communities in Canada, but Canadian borders were closed to immigrants, and particularly Germans. Paraguay, whose population had been decimated during a fruitless civil war, was welcoming of any interested immigrants. The approximately 2300 Mennonites who arrived in Buenos Aires en route to Paraguay stayed in a refugee camp for three months, awaiting the boat that would take them up the Paraguay River to their appointed land – tracts of dense jungle or semi-desert in the northwest of the country.



1.4 My maternal grandfather, Kornelius Pauls, receiving baptism in the Paraguay River, Asuncion, Paraguay circa 1948, while awaiting transportation to the new colony of Volendam in eastern Paraguay. Photographer unknown.

My maternal grandfather, himself a grandiloquent storyteller, says each family received a few cooking utensils and a machete before disembarking from the boat, and “making a life,” as he put it, out of the jungle. His story is dramaturgically masculine, and evokes a triumphalism, a mastery over the physical hardships of the pioneer life. It is a story of the sheer power required to provide for a young family from the land. He spoke of the value of each *thing* earned and bought: their first horse, cattle, durable materials for housing. When I asked him why he later left Paraguay despite his narrative of success, he replied that his wife – my grandmother – was crying every day, frustrated and tired. Trying to find employment and educational opportunities for his children, the family returned to Germany where he secured a position in a factory and learned a skilled

trade, until they could, with assistance from relatives, join their family (including my great aunt Kaethe, the storyteller) in Kitchener, Ontario.

MAKING COMMUNITY / MARKING SPACE AND PLACE

As evinced by the stories of how Mennonites came to be living in Canada, understandings of history and the narrative of memory work performatively to constitute a “Mennonite” identity that can be traced through nearly five hundred years of wandering, and indeed, it is this wandering, the exilic trope, that becomes the richest terrain for excavations of how community is forged: how “groupness” is sustained. There is a sense that these wanderings took place in a mythic space and time, and thus become sort of foundational narratives for both a discourse about identity in the present, and the subjective: Mennonites find themselves subject to their “historical selves.”

One of the more overt references to mythology in Mennonite historical narratives is the recourse to framing the stories of escape and exile as a re-telling of the Old Testament experience of the Israelites. While there are deep and abiding similarities between the social and communal contexts of Mennonites and Jews, here the invocation of an Old Testament frame is less about a kinship to contemporary Jews than about the biblical mythology of a Chosen People. This parallel works both to rationalize persecution and judgment upon persecutors (which I will discuss later), and as a way of accounting for a sort of “placelessness,” the exilic and nomadic wanderings that take up so much room in the Mennonite imaginary.

While there are numerous personal accounts of how Mennonites arrived in Canada following World War II, there is a more official record, produced by the Mennonite Central Committee: a film with footage shot by Peter Dyck and Elfrieda Dyck, the MCC workers who orchestrated the mass migration of Mennonites out of Europe. Narrated by Peter Dyck, the film begins with a scene showing him telling the story of the migration to a Mennonite church group in the 1980s. The second part of the film is further broken down into three sections, each of which traces the journey of a specific group of Mennonite refugees. One group (that included my grandparents and what was left of their families) ended up in Paraguay; a later group of migrants rounded up from across Germany ended up in Canada; and a group of Prussian Mennonites gathered in a refugee camp in Denmark. Each of these sections is structured as a silent film with commentary by Peter Dyck. The sections of the film follow the refugees through a bombed-out Berlin, on the ships, in South America, throughout Germany, and in refugee camps in various European locales.

While the footage is silent, the voice-over commentary becomes a sort of testimony, a narrative that locates the figures moving about onscreen in a specific context and in specific stories. The figures on the screen become actors in the narrated drama. Unable to be read outside of what is being told *about* them, they are inserted into the story as they walk briskly by the camera, glance at it briefly, or pose awkwardly. This narrative, then, becomes the official story. The film's editing, and Peter Dyck's narration specifically, both produce and reproduce the allegory of the Israelites.

The three sections of the second part of the film are each named, and the first is perhaps most overtly biblical in its appellation: The Berlin Exodus. Here Dyck

introduces his central theme, a phrase, a talisman even, reiterated by the refugees themselves: “Gott kann” in German, or “God can” in English. “With God all things are possible,” Dyck explains, evoking at once a belief in the miraculous intervention of God in this Mennonite exodus, and the biblical basis for such belief that lends it authority. He comments further, as the refugees are “miraculously” boarding the ship that will take them to Paraguay, that “these refugees were miraculously delivered from the Russian zone in Germany.” The key terms “exodus” and “deliverance,” again conjure quite deliberately the biblical exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, after which they wandered for forty years. These “Chosen Ones,” the Elect of God, were beleaguered too, but their faith in a miraculous God led them from enslavement in Egypt (or Russia, in this Mennonite narrative). For the Mennonites, as with the Israelites, Dyck says “the determination is strong, and the faith in God is there.”

Indeed, “Exodus” and “Trek” mark the very events of being, the “substantive grounds for claims to corporateness and continuity” (Antze and Lambek 1996; xxi). In such a rendering, the notion of place in relation to land, shifts modalities of meaning, and here, I think, is where the Israelite story diverges from the Mennonite one. Antze and Lambek, in their discussion about memory, suggest that an individual’s memory – that object taken to epitomize individuality itself – draws upon collective idioms to organize a narrative. And vice versa: nationalist narratives draw upon individualist discourses to construct a history of the nation. Mennonites, however, do not have a nation, nor do they, like the Israelites, have a Promised Land. Instead for Mennonites, the group itself – in essence, an imagined community – becomes the corporate project.

Citizenship and loyalty to particular nations was always a difficult concept for Mennonites, as evidenced by their tendency to up and leave when the country they were living in changed the rules regarding their privileges and exemptions from duties such as serving in the state army. With a multi-lingual repertoire, many Mennonites caught in dire situations in locales across Europe during and after World War II were able to negotiate themselves out of trouble by claiming (through language) Russian, German, and occasionally Dutch ethnicity.⁴

Here, Dyck shifts the thread of the story, and does not share details about whether or not MCC was able to “prove” the Dutch ethnicity of the refugees, though presumably it was successful. Perhaps the Dutch connection was made through recourse to historical narrative, the “Mennonite story,” that wound its way back hundreds of years to the Origin of Anabaptism, and a Dutch priest, Menno Simons. This was the strategy of several “stragglers” who wandered around Germany after the end of the war, and found themselves at the Dutch border. Dutch officials, confused, called the Mennonite Central Committee, and Peter Dyck showed up at the border crossing with his video camera to document three sisters, their possessions in makeshift bags strung over their shoulders, asking to enter the country. “We’ve come home” they pleaded, and with some consideration, they were, along with others who arrived at the border, granted a

⁴ Peter Dyck, too, in his narration of the Berlin Exodus, explains that part of the funding for transporting thousands of Mennonite refugees to North and South America came from the United Nations International Refugee Organization (IRO), appealed to by the Mennonite Central Committee. This organization was formed in 1946 to deal with the significant refugee population in post-war Europe. Problematically for the Mennonites, this organization concluded that “persons of German ethnic origin” were not the “concern” of the IRO. If, however, these Mennonites could prove they were of Dutch ethnicity, the IRO would assist in financing their relocation.

specialized “pass” – appropriately titled a “Mennopass” – that permitted them refuge in Holland.

While the wandering itself forges community particularly when it confronts borders, Mennonites in contemporary Canada no longer wander – they’ve, once again, sought to forge a home. What, then, might this new stagnancy mean for the formation of community, of place-making, when the history of migration due to perceived persecution, is no longer immediate? In part, the materiality of the communities themselves, reproduced over and over again, signals a means and mode of mitigating the struggle for “home.”

While there is no recourse for Mennonites to a national citizenship, the sense of “belonging” to community can be seen to lie in the very structures of the community itself, its geographies, its archaeology, its physical frameworks. I suggest that, along with the notion of orientation proposed by Sara Ahmed (2010; 2006), the processes of boundary maintenance among Mennonites can be seen to parallel an *orientation* that anthropologist Janice Boddy (1988) terms “interiority.” Conducting fieldwork in Hofriyat, Sudan, she describes a symbolic orientation, an inward focus concerned with limiting physical and social openings. This interiority becomes an organizing paradigm for the orientation of the village, aesthetic standards, and social relations sustained by a history of invasion and colonization.

Bolstered by scripture, this concept would certainly be applicable to Mennonites: the frameworks of architecture, landscape, the reproduction of village spaces, of homes, across time and space structure orientations. While “place” may shift spatially, historically there was a necessity for reproduction of such spaces that worked as markers

of continuity as much as narrative and the imaginary. That Mennonites moved *en masse*, and could utilize large areas of land, offered an opportunity to border their lives emphatically.⁵

The large-scale Mennonite colonies of Prussia, Russia, Canada, Paraguay, Bolivia, Mexico, and Belize were divided into villages with a specific orientation: one long main street, with tracts of rectangularly shaped land leading away. These “row villages” were an adaptation of the northern European village type in which the Mennonites had lived; the organization of space worked to organize religious and political life (Friesen 2007). Facing the street were individual family homes, with property behind the house. There was a communal pasture presided over by a herder, and cultivated land surrounding the village divided into long, narrow strips; the crops to be planted were chosen as a community, and farm equipment was bought by the village (Friesen 2007). There was a mayor and assistants who formed the village council to take care of infrastructure and welfare. These were the public domains of village life, which did not include women: only male heads of households could vote on the affairs of the village, could run for various community offices. Here, “public” and “private” lives can

⁵ The increasing urbanization and professionalism of Mennonites in the second half of the twentieth century has led some scholars to evaluate negatively the “new” Mennonite identity in light of the 16th century Anabaptist vision. This negative evaluation reflects a tendency to associate Mennonites with the “land.” Calvin Redekop (1985) frames this relationship as a romance, and foregrounds the Mennonite love of agriculture as a problematic “feeling” in relation to a theology positing one’s true home as heaven. Yet “land” carries with it tremendous symbolic weight in the Mennonite imagination: it is the site of labour (in a Calvinist sense), the cultural enclave of segregation, and the gift/privilege of political engagement (Driedger 1988). Despite the Anabaptist theology of radical discipleship that engaged directly with institutions of corrupt power, Mennonites were forced into isolated communities and enclaves, thus transforming Anabaptism through a blossoming “romance” with the rural.

be read into these spaces, where men presided over public spaces, and women were relegated to private space, a social organization that remains in many contemporary “conservative” Mennonite groups who maintain bounded communities.

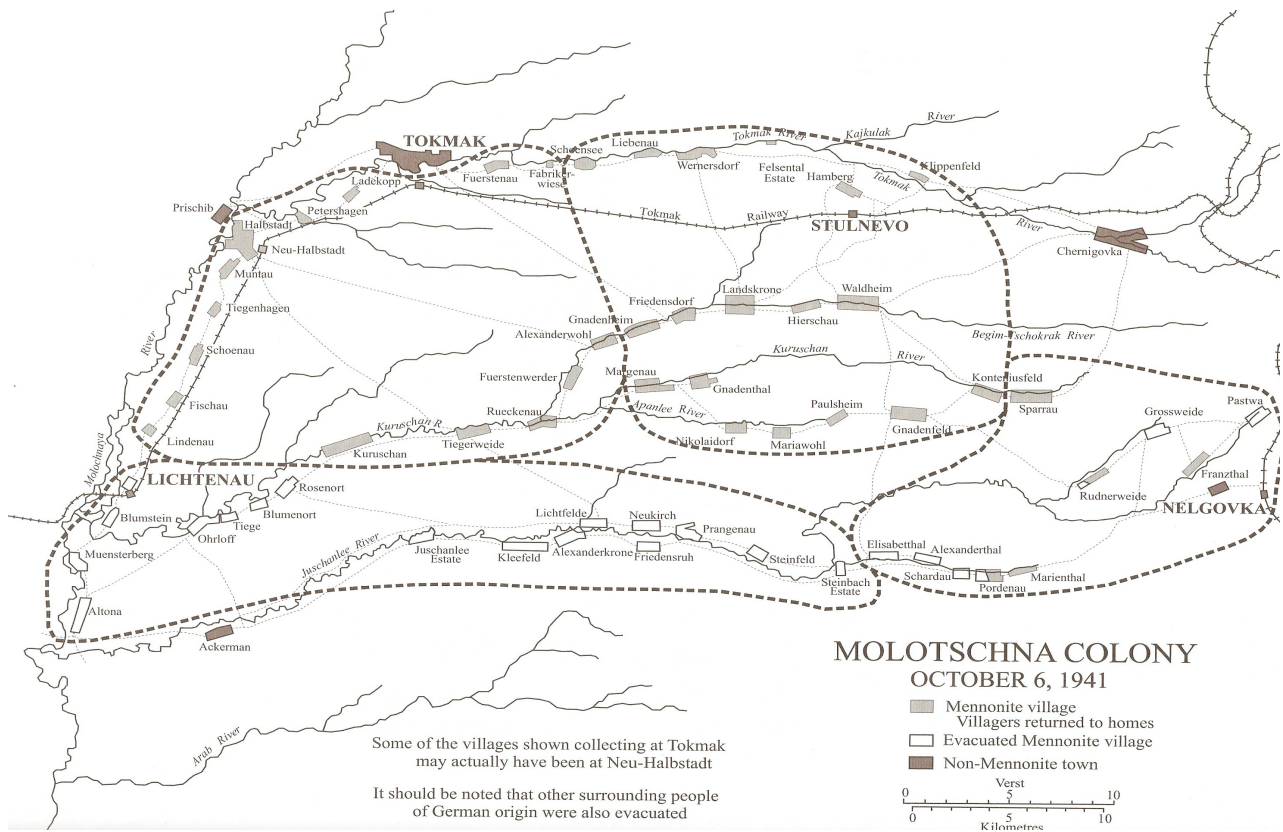


Figure 1.5 Map of Molotschna Colony as drawn in 1941 (Huebert 2003)



Figure 1.6 *The Village Plan of Franzthal in the Molotschna Colony (Huebert 2003)*

The space of such dwellings, enduring over centuries and geographies, was highly practical, particularly in the freezing climates of Russia and the Canadian prairies. The uniformity of the village also signalled a deep communalism. The type of everyday spaces in which people lived, were, for the most part, identical. While there are no more icons of Mennonite architecture left in rural Manitoba, the frameworks remain. The landscape, viewed from the air, is as gridded and precise as the Mennonites who fashioned it in the 1870s. Some villages remain, but have grown beyond their initial main streets, pushing out from the sharp black slashes that represent them on maps. And it is precisely through the act of mapping that the Mennonite imaginary of space, of orientation to the physical world, is rendered into symbol.

AUTHORIZED GATHERINGS***MEMORY AND PRACTICE***

These stories of migration, of which my family's are exemplary, run, current-like, through Russian Mennonite ethos and affect. Themes of disruption and exile impinge upon Mennonite consciousness, generating an understanding of existence as nomadic or diasporic. While the notions of migration, exile, and escape from contexts of persecution permeate many aspects of Mennonite life, I wish here to connect such stories of exile and wandering with the act of narrating itself. This narration requires memory and the work that it does, recognizing, with Paul Antze and Michael Lambek (1996) that "memories are never simply records of the past" (vii).

Russian Mennonites are deeply invested in their past, evidenced by, among other things, the sheer number of historians, histories of and about Mennonite individuals or communities, biographies of family members, and genealogies. What is more, the work of historians is granted particular authority in producing the narratives that create Mennonite identity discourses and community cohesion. While I discuss this dimension of authorization in later chapters, for now I suggest, along with Antze and Lambek (1996), that an invocation of memory is a connection to a discourse of identity, and therefore that "who people are is closely linked to what they think about memory, what they remember, and what they can claim to remember" (xxi). The performative aspects of

memory provide the substance of claims about the continuity of the self, and its relation to community.

In a Mennonite church I attended during my fieldwork, such a discourse of identity developed around a “crisis” of ritual and social change associated with contemporary models of parenting. Played out amongst the leadership and congregants, this performative discourse addressed the necessity of continuity with “tradition” and Anabaptist theology. One of the “issues” facing some more liberal Mennonite churches involves the ritual of communion. For Anabaptists, the original reading of the rite meant that only those baptized as adults were to participate in the “Lord’s Supper.” The Anabaptist rejection of the Roman Mass as a sacrament with all its doctrine and drama was sufficient to have the Anabaptists branded as heretics in the 16th century (Klaassen 1981).

Rather than understanding the wine and bread of communion as the sacred elements of the body and blood of Christ, Anabaptists suggested the presence of Christ is in the body of believers (that is, the church). As a result, participation in the ritual of communion was reconfigured as a remembrance of Christ’s love which was expressed through his death, through which the oneness and unity of the church was brought about. The Lord’s Supper was therefore a celebration of this unity, as Walter Klaassen writes: “Even as Christ had given himself for them without reservation, so participation in the Supper signified a readiness on the part of all to give spiritual and material aid without grudging, and even life itself, for the sisters and brothers” (1981; 191).

As the theology of the Lord’s Supper became one that focused on unity and sacrifice, it was imbricated with baptism; this ritual was undertaken as an adult, as a

voluntary act of following Jesus Christ, upon which church membership was conferred. Again, this perspective referred to a theology that emphasized the “Christian life” as a communal one, and that all Christians were members of the body of Christ. To be baptized, according to this understanding, meant acceptance of the process of discipline, and of mutual aid (Klaassen 1981). The rite of adult baptism, then, meant both church membership and its concomitant obligations to the logistics of church operations, and the opportunity to participate in communion or The Lord’s Supper.

More recently, this participation has proven to be a contentious issue in the church to varying degrees: there are fewer baptisms, and there are fewer young adults in many Mennonite churches. Among more theological considerations, this poses challenges for membership and its concomitant accountability and participation in wider denominational and conference bureaucracy. For instance, the tithing required of church members pays for, among other things, conference-wide initiatives like summer camps, educational institutions, and educational resources; the lack of funding for such institutions creates crisis. For this reason, some churches have opted for more of a “member-at-large” model to widen the scope of participation, along with a reassessment of the requirement that enforces the no-communion-until-membership stipulation.

In one of the more liberal conference churches I attended, there is a push from young parents for the greater involvement of children in the church service. For some parents, one specific way is to allow their children to partake of communion. This development also comes as part of a change in how the ritual of communion is performed, prompted by sensitivity on the part of some church leaders to be more inclusive in general. In most congregations there are many attendees who, for a variety

of reasons, have not been baptized, and are therefore not church members. If, for instance, the logistics of distributing the bread and wine – the components of communion – include forming lines at the front of the sanctuary (as in Catholic churches), those who are not baptized church members are conspicuously left alone sitting in their seats as everyone around them walks to the front of the church. For adults, this can be a traumatic scenario, a “coming out” by omission, and one that leads many unbaptized people to note the Sundays when communion is on the church schedule, and avoid attending.

Refusing communion to the unbaptized also faintly conjures the spectre of excommunication. The rites and rituals of church membership have become burdensome to many, and the exigencies of contemporary Canadian life have made baptism too onerous for some Mennonite adults: the desire for mobility in career or educational choice, for instance, makes membership in one geographically-located church undesirable. Sensitive to this fact, some churches have made changes to the distribution of bread and wine: if baskets and trays can be passed along rows (self-serve style), the taking or leaving of the elements is made more discreet. In this way, some parents of young children, eschewing the need for a membership card to partake in this ritual, give their children the bread and wine (or the grape juice option) as it is passed along. Sometimes, the efforts at inclusion go so far as to include a “children’s option”: grapes and crackers.

Though this practice is not considered sacrilegious in any sense for Anabaptists, it has nevertheless become a contentious issue in some churches. I came to see that some people felt saddened by what they perceived as a “wearing away” of certain rituals. In

the past, first communion was meant to be a joyous occasion, and had nothing to do with the exclusion of children (though originally the rite was meant to signal a divide between childhood and adulthood). Some older members of the congregations also lament the noise level of the church service, and observe that children are now “allowed to be” far louder than children should be in an austere and pious church setting.

This issue, then, becomes the crux of the conflict: those young(ish) parents who desire their children to take part in communion want them to be literally *active* participants in church in the way that they themselves had not been. Many Mennonite churches in the past held in high regard a certain affect of reverent worship: a silent stillness in itchy church clothes on rigid wooden benches. I can certainly recall feeling as a child the total boredom of being quiet and still in church, when the flow of time seemed to halt dramatically. Some parents maintain that this tedium, framed sometimes as oppression, is something children should not have to endure, lest they come to detest church and refuse to attend as adults. Paradoxically, these parents are participating in church despite their own experience of an “oppressive” upbringing in a silent and still congregation.

For now, these parents want their children to participate vocally in the service, to be both seen and heard. What then to do about communion? My reading of this development is perhaps more sociologically than theologically oriented. The issue centres around a perceived discomfiting change, having as much to do with contemporary modes of parenting and ideas about children’s relations to adults, as with theological orientations to sacred ritual. Contemporary attitudes involve a revisioning of “church” with both an eye to the past (the discomforts of oppressive affective orientations to

behaviour) and the future (“I want my children to enjoy going to church and stay there because *they* want to”). In the scenario I witnessed, at church membership meetings (only accessible to those who are baptized members), it was decided that “expert” leadership and direction was necessary, and the experts summoned were Mennonite theologians and historians.

The purpose here was to devise a way to move forward with an eye to the past, taking into account what early Anabaptists wrote about the rites and rituals of church membership, and historically what Mennonites have done in similar circumstances. I found this recourse quite curious, considering, in my estimation, that such an “issue” does not have an historical precedent, but is a thoroughly contemporary phenomenon. This “eye to the past,” however, is a vital index of a Mennonite orientation, working as narrative, ritual, and social context for the cultural shaping of memory, and identity itself.

As Antze and Lambek (1996) suggest, memory is shaped culturally, and the memories of the individual draw upon the idioms and mechanisms of the collective, particularly in discourses that use memory to create a corporate identity. For the specific case of the Russian Mennonites, this collective aspect of memory necessitates a looking back to founding stories of community and the rejection of the world, authorized biblically, and narrated through history. This recourse to the past is often strongest at times of perceived crisis in irruptions of social change, so that coping strategies for uncomfortable shifts in such a social milieu involve looking to the past, to the origins of Anabaptism, for ways to move forward.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

“Moving forward” as such has meant, for many Mennonites, a distancing from the church itself. The life of the Mennonite church as a gathered body has required of its members an accountability to a life reflective of its witness to Christ. That is, the methods of authorizing gathering – who can gather, who is living a life of witness – were outlined by the early Anabaptists. Again, with an eye to the past, that theological legacy has had an uneven record of application for contemporary Mennonites who struggle with the means, modes, and affective responses of disciplinary action. “Church discipline” and its effects and affects (mostly deleterious) seems to be the fertile ground upon which much Mennonite literature is currently built – for better or worse.

The frameworks of discipline, in any case, are enacted to maintain the church as the Anabaptist vision originally intended: a gathering of the body of Christ. In practice and through the disciplinary options enacted to police the boundaries of such a body, of course, such ideology becomes messy, outlined with methodologies that can too harshly – and destructively – create insiders and outsiders. A friend named Helen, for instance, described the Mennonite church with brevity when she sardonically said to me over coffee, “Gotta keep it clean, ya know?” Her comment was followed by a sharp and small shake of her head indicating a deep and abiding frustration. I found Helen’s recourse to cleanliness a fascinating framework for understanding the conversations about church that ultimately followed any discussion about Mennonites, with Mennonites.

Helen was a wonderful conversationalist, warm and thoughtful, wise and generous; her reflections on Mennonites were always reverential and respectful, and her

parallel criticisms keen and wise. Through her narratives, she described her formative experiences with the church and Mennonite identity: as a woman in her 80s, Helen had spent much of her life raising children, and, later, caring for a sick husband. She was a “housewife,” a self-described “good Mennonite woman, you know?” After the death of her husband, Helen went to school to become a chaplain – a bold move for a sixty something year old – but one that was intensely transformative for someone who would, twenty years later, refer to her past self as “simple.”

While school was transformative, her experiences as a female chaplain in a conservative Mennonite town in the 1980s, were positively influential. Her employment as a chaplain meant she was witness to a significant number of deaths, and was oftentimes mired in the complex relationship between church leaders (pastors, deacons, ministers) and the congregants whom they visited. At the time, these were men of considerable age, who wielded power and divine authority with confidence and a sense of the inevitability and given-ness of this power, using their voices and bodies to take up space. As they entered a patient’s room, they carried their bible in their hand, holding it close against their hearts. As Helen explained, here the “Word of God” worked both as a symbol of divine authority in plain sight, and as a practice of distancing: “You can’t hug someone unless you put that bible away first.” In her line of work, Helen was more interested in making connections with patients through the senses than doing rigorous and cerebral theological work. After having talked with many chaplains, I sense that this is not a gendered approach to spiritual care, but rather a difference in training and education; chaplains, often working with a spiritually diverse clientele often adopt a “flexible” approach to spiritual care.

Helen's experience as a chaplain, however, was very gendered: she suffered tremendous hurt – often overtly so – because she was a woman at a time when most women were not supposed to be “publicly” involved in spiritual care. So, as she told me, when the family of a patient she had cared for asked her to lead a funeral service, her services were declined by the male leaders of the church to which the deceased patient belonged. There were other stories, as well, but too specific to disclose here. Suffice it to say, her comment about attempts to keep church “clean,” followed a series of instances in which she felt herself to be ostracized, to be excluded from positions of power (at the front of the church, or in a more challenging way, behind the pulpit). She related her own struggles to the stories she heard from dying patients, who needed, in some form, to divest themselves of their own dissatisfactions – or worse – with the church.

Helen's reference to cleanliness evoked a power structure which sought to maintain itself through exclusionary practices, aided and abetted through theological justification. Its recourse to “clean” lent this metaphor a moral valence. As in Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966), the symbolic practices of classification speak to social boundaries and ways of organizing society, and, in the Mennonite case, can be seen as a response to the tension of living the incarnation. There are several confluences here that speak to Mennonite ways of “keeping clean,” and situate Helen's metaphor in wider significations that evidence attempts at salvation through particular authorized modes of comportment and behaviour. Those modes that fall outside of such behaviours (or bodily forms) risk the “contamination” of the community, and must be purged. The idea this invokes will be discussed in further detail in later chapters, but serves here as an example of a resulting tension between the individual and community: while salvation is

intended, theologically, to require the community, any failure is the fault of the individual, and “discipline” is meted out according to the individual.

Douglas suggests that “dirt is matter out of place” and it seems that women in positions of power in the Mennonite church can also be categorized as “matter out of place” as occupying classificatory spaces where they do not belong. The impetus of the church to be “clean,” referenced in Helen’s comment, is based on biblical references, specifically from the New Testament letters to the early Christian churches. These biblical references were used by Anabaptists of the Reformation to revise and reframe the perceived corruption of the Catholic Church, restoring it to a “truer,” originary biblical version (Klaassen 1981). Peter Riedeman, an early Anabaptist theologian, writes in 1542, for instance, that “we confess also that God has, through Christ, chosen, accepted and sought a people for himself, not having spot, blemish, wrinkle, or any such thing, but pure and holy, as he, himself, is holy” (in Klaassen 1981; 111). Having established the biblical foundation for the true church, an assembly “built and gathered by the Holy Spirit,” Riedeman continues: “Since, then, the church is an assembly of the children of God, as it is written, ‘Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be your father, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.’” While such passages were used by the early Anabaptists to frame their re-interpretation of the Christian Church, Helen’s suggestion to “keep it clean” points to a tendency of contemporary Mennonites to use “cleanliness” to draw “worldly lines” in a disciplinary manner – often to maintain structures of power.

In theological terms, cleanliness was a metaphor for sin and its effects and affects. In an Anabaptist vision of church as the gathered body of Christ, sin also became

embodied; in a deeply communal sense, each person became representative of a body part, necessary for the “functioning” of the whole – in the church, as in the community at large. The confluence of the biblical discourse about sin as that which is unclean and polluting, and the metaphorical conjuring of the church as body found its most potent expression in the practice of church discipline. The practice of excommunication/shunning has not necessarily aged well; in contemporary contexts, it is either foregone completely, or construed as rather barbaric – particularly from “outsiders” offering opinions on what they see happening in the Amish or Old Order communities, for example⁶.

The vast majority of Mennonite churches no longer consent to excommunicate a church member as a punitive measure, as the practice simply holds no power in a context where subjectivities and identities can be forged outside the church. It does still linger in the margins, however: a historical spectre that haunts, quite literally, the ethos of the Church. As with many practices, excommunication cannot be extricated from the structures of power in which it was produced, and, as a result, it became a rather blunt instrument wielded with uneven results. Many of the chaplains I spoke with, both Mennonite and non-denominational who worked with aging Mennonites in nursing homes or hospitals had stories about excommunication, shaming, and shunning, practiced to maintain church discipline and order, to “keep it clean.”

The social life of “church discipline,” then, has a rich genealogy. The early Anabaptists created this method of discipline as both a reactionary one, and one which

⁶ Mennonite writer Patrick Friesen wrote a particularly poignant critique about the effects and affective responses to the practice of excommunication in his poetry collection *The Shunning* in 1980. It was later turned into a play.

was enacted out of love and mutual respect for the terms of membership in the body of Christ. Concurrently, these early Anabaptists were regarded as members of the Catholic church, but heretical, and therefore subject to disciplinary action from Catholic/state authorities. Such action to rid the wider Christian church of intransigent heretics was significant: torture, exile, imprisonment, and death. The Anabaptist position constructed the distinction between the church and world, between the church and the government, within this milieu. Physical violence was of the world, and “the sword” (the instrument of the punitive state and war) was of the government. Therefore church discipline should not be violent (that is, physically so,) nor punitive, but rather redemptive. This formulation of a distinction between the church and the world opened a space for new subjective experience: to be shunned from the church removed one from citizenship in the kingdom of God and forced one into the kingdom of Satan (Klaassen 1981).

The motivation for the structural phenomenon of discipline was the integrity of the church, membership in which included an acceptance of discipline: the Christian life was one that was chosen. Menno Simons wrote a clear outline of the practice of excommunication, lending it authority through its Biblical basis:

But do not have anything to do, as the holy Paul has taught and commanded, and do not eat, with people who being of age and driven by the Spirit were baptized into the body of Jesus Christ with us, that is, the church, but afterwards, whether through false doctrine or a vain and carnal life, reject and separate themselves from the body and fellowship of Christ, no matter whether it be father or mother, sister or brother, man or wife, son or daughter, no matter who he be, for God’s Word applies to all alike and there is no respect of persons with God. We say, avoid him if he rejects the admonition of his brethren, done in sighing, tears, and a spirit of compassion and of great love.

Here, the social construction of family ties are rearranged, reformatted in the vision of a church, which, as the bible suggests, includes all members of the body of Christ as

brothers and sisters. It is out of these “familial” bonds of love that discipline should and does occur: because church members are loved as family should be loved, the act of discipline is an act of love.

Acting in accordance with the “true nature” of a “Christian brother,” writes Menno Simons, a person will act as one who values the soul – the salvation – of all. As he writes, “For we do not want to expel any, but rather to receive; not to amputate, but rather to heal; not to discard, but rather to win back; not to grieve, but rather to comfort; not to condemn, but rather to save” (219). Here, the allusions and recourse to bodily metaphors are clear, amplified by biblical authority, and indexing a grounding trope. Further on, Simons continues this argument by foregrounding the dangers of allowing the sinful brother or sister to remain, again with recourse to bodily metaphors, and the contagious and polluting nature of bad behaviour:

But those whom we cannot raise up and repentingly revive by admonition, tears, warning, rebuke, or by any other Christian services and godly means, these we should put forth from us, not without great sadness and anguish of soul, sincerely lamenting the fall and condemnation of such a straying brother; lest we also be deceived and led astray by such false doctrine which eats as does a cancer; and lest we corrupt our flesh which is inclined to evil by the contagion (220).

As Walter Klaassen notes, there is recognition by these Anabaptists that while they reject the physical violence of “the sword,” the practices of church discipline cause deep wounding, a “trauma of exclusion” (Klaassen 1981; 212). This is a trauma in the original sense, a wound or shock to the body, a separation of the flesh. Menno Simons addresses the optics of this practice, but nevertheless justifies its necessity when he writes “...the ban is a great work of love, notwithstanding it is looked upon by the foolish as an act of

hatred.” (220) Pilgram Marpeck, another early Anabaptist writer, seems rather more cautious, perhaps more empathetic, when he writes of the trauma of excommunication:

The other members of the body of Christ experience great pain and suffering for at stake is a member of the body of Christ the Lord... The other members of the body of Christ will not be able to do this without great pain and tribulation. If the member is honourable and useful to the body, the tribulation is so much greater. It cannot possibly happen easily or simply. The natural body cannot lose a member without pain. Nor does it immediately cut it off, even if it is failing and weak; rather it uses all kinds of medicines. (225)

Both Simons and Marpeck write of the complexities of the practice of discipline, of its perception by others as a despicable act, and the emotional toll of separation. Such complexities remain in contemporary settings: the Amish and Hutterites, two Anabaptist groups who continue to practice these forms of church discipline, are much maligned for their practice of shunning. And, while many contemporary Mennonites understand its ideology as based in a construction of “love,” most regard it as a deeply violent process.

The most egregious examples of such violence that I became privy to involved stories of excommunication enacted in less than “loving” circumstances, and can be understood, as Magdalene Redekop (1993) describes, under conditions where exogamous or externally directed violence turns endogamous or internally directed. This type of turning inward can be especially potent in a communally-oriented framework. Dynamics and extrusions of power can have significant results, particularly when the Bible is given authority, and can be read and interpreted by everyone and not only with imagined expertise. When certain interpretations win out and are endorsed and justified by “tradition” and “history,” certain narratives become modalities of understanding the world. Mennonites, too, have a tendency towards deference to authority; something I will discuss in greater depth in subsequent chapters, but which features in many stories of

excommunication. These confluences have opened spaces for patriarchal systems of power that have been produced and reproduced.

I will tread with caution here: though many people I talked with discussed and identified patriarchy as *a*, if not *the*, source of strife in the Mennonite church throughout its history, to read patriarchy into the past is a fraught endeavour. Patriarchy is, however, another historical narrative that deeply shapes Mennonite subjectivity, and there is no doubt that Mennonite notions of gender cannot be extricated from Mennonite constructions of power. Again, while I discuss the affective intersections of power and patriarchy in greater depth in later chapters, for now, I invoke it to contextualize a church leadership that utilized shunning as a form of discipline in uneven ways.

Church “issues,” including those of discipline, were enacted by what was often referred to as the Brotherhood, male members of the church (that is, baptized). My father recalls attending such “Brotherhood meetings” as a teenager; “adult” baptism for many Mennonites happens around age 16, not coincidentally at the same time as one can get a driver’s licence, both marks of adulthood and responsibility. For my father, as with many other young Mennonites, baptism was not something profoundly life-changing, but something almost inevitable. He grew up attending a relatively evangelical Mennonite church, where it was frequently the case that individuals younger than 16 could chose to be baptized. The repercussions of this more significantly impacted boys, for, upon baptism, they became included in the Brotherhood, the informal leadership that could enact church discipline. As my father recalled with incredulity, “These were 14 year old boys... what do they know?”

That church discipline is enacted (sometimes) by fourteen year old boys against (sometimes) grown men and women, has, indeed, infuriated and deeply wounded many Mennonites. The process, too, was rather dramatic: those who were to be excommunicated or disciplined would stand alone in front of the Brotherhood to ask forgiveness and receive the terms of their punishment. An example of such a tableau was relayed to me by John, a man now in his 70s who I had the privilege of getting to know over the course of fieldwork. John was narrating his story of divorce in the Mennonite church, an act that led to the revoking of his membership (on the disciplinary scale, this is less than excommunication, but still an act of church “cleansing”). John explained to me that he was asked to appear at a Brotherhood meeting, in which they were, as a group, to discuss divorce in the church.

As contextual background, in the Mennonite church, divorce has been for the majority of its existence considered anathema to right relationships, and in conflict with the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. This, of course, is a simplification of the breadth of discussions on marriage that are currently taking place in Mennonite churches and conferences. For the purposes of our conversation, however, John was recalling his experience in a rural, conservative, congregation in the 1980s. In his narrative, John explained that he found himself at the margins, not being allowed to speak yet having to listen to pronouncements about *his* divorce, and, ultimately, his position within the church. He was asked to leave the Brotherhood, and did so, but continues after thirty years to hold the pain and trauma of that moment, a deep resentment against those men and “The Church” for institutionalizing such hierarchical power.

In another instance, a chaplain in Steinbach described the “deep wounds” he encountered with patients that had lived through a “purge” in the 1970s, in the Holdeman Church, or Church of God in Christ, Mennonite.⁷ Many times in the history of the Mennonite Church there have been calls for renewal and reform; often this results in schism (as evidenced by the numerous schematics that depict the relationships among denominations in Mennonite history texts). In the 1970s in the Holdeman Church, there was a movement aimed at restoring the church to its intended origins, after leadership felt too many congregants were “straying,” and invited some ministers from outside the community to aid in this revival.⁸

Mennonite novelists, too, have articulated more traumatic outcomes of this practice, some bodily, some psychic. In his novel *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* Armin Wiebe (1984) writes, for instance, of the immediacy and the tension that exists in “belonging” and negotiating subjectivity in Mennonite communities. Writing about the fictional village of Gutenthal in southern Manitoba, Wiebe’s narrator Yasch Siemens, speaks English with Low German syntax, and deliberates on his partner Oata’s desire to

⁷ This was a group originally connected to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, “converted” by a more pietist Mennonite sect with missionary zeal, shortly after their arrival in Manitoba and Kansas in the 1870s. Emphasis in this church is on achieving an ideal and pure church “without spot or wrinkle” in line with the apostle Paul’s (interpreted) vision. As such, there is an emphasis on conversion, baptism, excommunication and avoidance, and nonconformity to the world in dress (Dyck 1993). Initially, this last point meant that men should wear beards, but contemporary Holdeman men blend in with mainstream society quite well, with contemporary clothes, clean shaven faces, and cell phones. Holdeman women, on the other hand, have a very distinct way of dressing: their long hair tucked under a head covering, and long, well-covering dresses.

⁸ The supposed return to order meant a sort of mass excommunication, that some recall as a purge. This was an event that caused major upheaval, and the basis on which excommunications were performed became, to those who were shunned, rather flimsy. I was told that one minister, for instance, was excommunicated for something called “excessive joy.”

“be a part of something” – the church – while he himself is coming to terms with what he sees as the hypocrisy of it:

I don't know why she wants to be so much in the church when the church never did much for her futtachi [father] and the people in choir practice laughed her away because she couldn't sing in the right gear. But I guess it's like me and the baseball team; you want something to be a part of, and in a place like Gutenthal you don't have much choice of freedom there at all. Girls don't much play baseball here around so it's the church only for somebody like Oata. I mean, something Oata must know about what to people happens when they can't be part of things, because that's why her muttachi [mother] in the mental home is. Only with me it's not the same. With the ball team I was part of something, but now I feel like I'm from the ball cut off. (124)

Here Wiebe raises critical issues that happen in the process of shunning, one of them being the tension arising from belonging and subjectivity, something that becomes psychically damaging, as referenced by Oata's mother being in “the mental home.” The separation of excommunication and shunning is a process entered into by both the community and the individual. It is, however, never total, never complete, and the act of cutting off is often unevenly accomplished. As was shared with me by a chaplain friend, some Holdeman women who have been excommunicated, for instance, continue to dress as Holdeman women should, marking themselves as righteous through an outward performance of correct behaviour.

One of the most difficult negotiations, however, lies in the networks of social relations that constitute the Mennonite community. Shunning is not merely a banishment from the gathered body of believers, but a reorientation of family relationships. It is the “cutting off” as Wiebe writes, that is the most painful – the most violent – negotiation, one drawn from the description of Pilgram Marpeck in the 16th century as the tribulation of cutting off a part of the body. The conflation of familial and kinship bonds, Christian

theology, and bodily metaphors given biblical authority, lend the results of excommunicative practice a particular potency.

The importance of family, genealogy, and kinship ties lies in the everyday performance and affective resonance of these social relations; the metaphor of shunning as “cutting off” a part of the body is also situated within the realm of the flesh and evokes the potential of the sensation of that pain and its necessity. While situating the metaphor in such materiality gives it immediacy, it is concurrently an abstraction given authority by its biblical origins. These vacillations between the spirit and the flesh are Christian legacies, where its transcendent nature of challenges earthly and fleshy ties to kinship and family; a set of abstract moral principles understood to be above social obligations creates a form of consciousness separable from social rules (Cannell 2007). For Mennonites, a paradox unfolds where kinship structures – blood ties – scaffold a community that is simultaneously constructed as otherworldly.

In practice, the realities of shunning are immensely difficult to uphold. Avoidance of brothers and sisters, sons, daughters, or parents is often a processual undertaking, constantly negotiated, and, at numerous points, undermined and resisted. Eating with someone that has been excommunicated, for instance, is an act to be avoided; it is situated both within the metaphorical realm of cleanliness and pollution, and within the virtue discourse of hospitality and grace. The reformulation of communion as the “Lord’s Supper” orients this rite as a meal, where the bread and wine, literally as food, nourishes the body, and the body of believers, the church. The scattered grapes and wheat come from far and wide to be gathered into one loaf and cup, signalling both unity and sacrifice, an exercise of the ‘rule of Christ’ not as sacrament, but as an ethical and

moral act (Klaassen 1981). One cannot, therefore, participate in this ritual if in conflict with another; before communion, relationships must be restored, made right.

Eating together, therefore, is an ethical act, an everyday enacting and affirming of right social relations. To be cut off from the gathering in this way is an act of tribulation. Its “everydayness,” however, makes it a site of negotiation: some specific rules apply for the logistics of excommunication, and I was told that “not eating” together meant not sitting at the same table. In this instance, it came down to measuring the distance between what “same table” would imply: a few inches. One family, therefore, wanting an excommunicated brother (and his partner and children) to continue to join them for Sunday lunches, seated him at a small table at the end of the large one separated by an inch of open space. They then covered both tables with one continuous tablecloth.

It is often, then, in navigating the desire and necessity of being “part of something,” as Wiebe writes, a lack of alternatives to such a state, and the shift in performing relationships, where what, exactly, that *something* – that groupness – becomes formulated and policed. These stories of excommunication that I mention here are all, however, in the past in the Mennonite communities in which I participated. Shunning no longer carries its power to rebuke and discipline because Mennonites have transitioned thoroughly into a space where the boundaries between the world and home have shifted to offer the possibility of a new subjectivity, an ability to identify and live outside community. Mennonites are now afforded the opportunity to “have much choice of freedom” as Wiebe writes.

HOME AND WORLD

In recalling his own past as a newly baptized member of the Brotherhood of his home church, my father was witness to a process of church discipline that was messy and problematic. He also grew to witness this process in decline as church leaders either came to acknowledge its traumatic and hurtful outcomes, or its increasing ineffectiveness as a deterrent to sinful behaviour. This increasing failure to “deter” such behaviour signalled both shifts in the punitive nature of excommunication, and in the constitution of “sinful” behaviour itself. These shifts articulate differently aligned perceptions of where the world is situated; after all, “the world” encompassed the sinful, the realm of Satan, and the fallen, evil nature of humanity in Christian theology (Cannell 2007).

When boundary lines of worldliness are redrawn, as they have been many times over in Mennonite history and experience, the nexus of “sameness” or “groupness” in Brubaker’s iteration is also redrawn. If, for instance, excommunication no longer “works” since other communities exist to which Mennonites may adhere, how does one construct what “Mennonite” is? In these circumstances, what constitutes a gathering or how it is undertaken and/or performed places the impetus for coherence on different modes, one of which, strongly, is identity discourse. In other words, it becomes, as Angelika Bammer (1994) suggests, a question of how “home” and “cultural identity” become a site of struggle over place.

For Mennonites, this struggle over place encounters the theological in its articulation of struggle between being “in the world but not of the world” to use the

Anabaptist phrase. In practice, this ideological trope frequently becomes an attempt to reckon with the struggles of living incarnationally or transcendentally, that is, reckoning with the tension between flesh and spirit in Mennonite and larger Christian theology. In Mennonite orthopraxy most distinctly, this tension is expressed in the material categorization of the world, and the twin kingdoms of God and Satan. Mennonites draw very literal and material boundaries between, around, and within the Christian categories of home and world; the variants of dress among many Anabaptist groups (Amish and Old Orders mostly publicly), and the disputes and schisms arising because of them, makes this materiality quite evident.

Looking at the history of social change in Canadian Mennonite communities in the last fifty years, the joys and struggles of claiming a “place” within a wider, Canadian context become evident. Historian Royden Loewen (2006) describes a time of great social change across North America following World War II, finding in Mennonite communities a reinvention and reformulation of teachings and practices for new social situations.⁹ In framing these changes, Mennonite sociologist Leo Driedger (1988) suggests that social transformation takes place in conflict, and while attempts may be made to *limit* the porosity of worldly boundaries, conflict about who remains in and out of the bounded units of Mennonite communities inevitably arises. Driedger argues that the results of such conflict, then, reinscribe the bounds of the world.

⁹ Leo Driedger (1993) locates these changes, particularly among Russian Mennonites, along a trajectory from martyrs to “muppies,” or “Mennonite urban professionals,” but remains sceptical about this change from “serious” martyrs dying for their faith to status quo urbanites in suits. While painting such a transition in rather broad strokes, Driedger’s questions focus on the feasibility of an “Anabaptist vision” in a contemporary and capitalist milieu – one into which many Mennonites have seemingly willingly assimilated.

Mennonite theologian David Schroeder, for instance, writes about his own experience in Canada during the Second World War, as he, like most Mennonite men, sought Conscientious Objector (CO) status in order to avoid conscription and uphold their pacifist ideology. In recalling the process, Schroeder writes of how judges determined the legitimacy of one's claim to CO status by posing to each of them a series of questions in order to confirm their claim of religious pacifism. Schroeder describes the difficulties of articulating the particulars and nuances of their theology in a practical context, noting that "we were not prepared to respond to the apparent inconsistencies of our position when the judge wanted to know how we reconciled accepting a police force but not the army or how we reconciled having been in a fight at one time but not fighting in the army" (Schroeder 2007; 183).

Framing this experience more sociologically, he suggests that the experience of growing up in a Mennonite community with closed borders did not provide these men with opportunities to articulate their theology. Rather, Schroeder suggests, it was only through an interaction with "difference" that such a theological indoctrination like the concept of pacifism could be articulated. Using Schroeder's argument, then, the question of Mennonite identity and its concomitant tensions in constructing the "world," can be seen to arise out of an articulation of difference mediated at the margins, through an experience of difference.

The migratory movements of history, its itinerancy, have been authorized to give credence to the gatherings in Canada, to recreate closed communities, and carefully police its boundaries. Movements out or away become a different matter, complicated by notions of home and world, of space and place. The "collective memory" of continuous

migratory events works to formulate an enduring Russian Mennonite identity that focuses not on Nation as home or nationality as identity, but heaven as home. Here, drawing upon theological conceits, Mennonites have transformed the global “wandering,” their movements and exiles and escapes, into an authorized and mythologized narrative that is simultaneously troubled and affirmed by the relationship to the spaces that Mennonites have moved into and onto. The morality of movement – migration as virtuous, movements into the world as fraught – finds its justification in the paradox of being in the world but not of it, of struggling for place in the midst of contradiction.

With new movements to cities, and the dissolution of mapped boundaries and communities, the constructed community of church shifts, too, becoming *the* Mennonite place in the present, and holding a rather precarious position as such. When the church becomes the only Mennonite space, a re-sanctified space, the negotiation of a Mennonite identity outside of it becomes more significant and the stakes of identity itself are reimagined. Who can be a Mennonite outside of the space? How does the making of Church as Mennonite Place come to index identity at all? How is “togetherness” and “community” performed in this new orientation?

Returning to the hymn verse from the outset of the chapter, the question posed at the start is provocative. Situated as the first verse in the first hymn in the book suggests, too, an ongoing process of querying where, exactly, we position ourselves:

What is this place where we are meeting?
Only a house, the earth its floor.
Walls and a roof sheltering people,
Windows for light, an open door.

Yet it becomes a body that lives
When we are gathered here,
And know our God is near.

(Hymnal: A Worship Book 1992; 1)

Struggles over space, over what “this place where we are meeting” might be and entail, are questions to be asked repeatedly. What it means to gather, what place and space might look like, become questions about world and home, part of the predilection towards the “internal contradictions” (Brandt 2007; 113) of Mennonite practice and thought: the role of the gathered body – the community – in incarnational living.

Foregrounding the tension in this struggle for place by looking at the role of historical narrative in the construction of Mennonite identity, anthropologist and historian James Urry (2006) suggests that the creation of a Mennonite history works as a paradoxical rhetorical strategy of separatist arguments derived from the tragedies of history, and “assimilative arguments” drawn from a yearning to be good citizens. I concur with his observations, and would state, further, that this paradox is also entangled within the dominant Christian problem of incarnational living. The struggle to locate “the world” and the tension between ideological constructions and the exigencies of *being* in the world can be seen, in this framework, as a response to this larger Christian problematic.

In other words, a migratory and persecutory history reveals the tension that has suggested Mennonites “succeed” when they remain insular, yet make attempts to assimilate to the point of remaining “good” citizens, best described by poet and essayist Di Brandt (2007;109): “really, we don’t scare anyone, we keep to ourselves, please, don’t think about hounding us out of our homes again or burning us at stakes, leave us alone.”

More potently, perhaps, the narrative of a persecutory and migratory history also disregards the importance – however paradoxical – of creating “Mennonite space,” places to feel at home, in this world. How well this “works,” that is, how constructing a sense of community around an enacted martyrological and migratory history, continues to be effective in mitigating instability, is an ongoing question. As I show in the next chapter, narratives about separation versus assimilation figure strongly in the construction and continuation of Mennonite struggles over the formation of community, particularly how influential the gaze of “others” becomes in Mennonite self-identification.

CHAPTER TWO

PRAISING

INTRODUCTION

In Mennonite churches, praising God is a vital outpouring of thanks and deference, of awe and reverence to a divine figure whose presence is woven into and around narratives of theology and history. Praising evokes a type of fatalism, a way of acknowledging the working of divine will and power in lives lived as subjects to it. Yet beyond the more familiar Christian trope of praising the benevolence of “God’s will” in the life of the community, the notion of a divine guiding presence frames historical narratives and contemporary struggles with identity. The narratives that are produced through historical analysis create Mennonite identity itself, and, in the process, make coherent the contradictions of Christian life.

In this chapter, I discuss the role of historical migratory narratives and how they have been used to authorize community making and God’s presence within Mennonite life and action. In new contexts, however, these narratives of praise turn towards a type of self-praise: a strategy, I argue, that responds to a tension discussed in the previous chapter, displacement versus emplacement, that produce affective and disciplinary regimes that police membership in community. As I suggest in this chapter, this tension creates new responses through the construction of narratives of “self-praise” that generate

a means of identification in relation to a history of migration and martyrdom and in relation to the “public.” This public, or outside gaze, comes to communicate that despite the need to be separate from the world, part of Mennonite self-identification is produced in relation to the world.

The church service uses praising to reify and glorify divine authority in Christian lives. In line with the Durkheimian premise that equates god with society, I expand the meaning of “praising” to look at the way Mennonites engage in authorizing community, and the values that enable community membership. I show how particular tropes of self-praise such as “farming is in our blood” and the description of Mennonites as “the quiet in the land” frame the production of certain subjectivities in relation to land and concepts of home that trouble the theological imperative of “heaven-as-home.” For Mennonites, claims to land are based on the theological premise that salvation occurs through “working” the land and having dominion over it, manipulating landscapes in particular ways.

Further, in utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the chronotope (1981), I suggest that both “God” and “Mennonites” become characters in a narrative that shifts frames of both time and space. The geographies of migration, their multiplicity, and the pattern of locating divine providence in providing cultural stability and resilience in the face of perceived precarity, have fostered and authorized the creation of a particular self-narrative. As Clifford Geertz (1966) might describe it, this is a story Mennonites tell to themselves about themselves. It is about an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991)¹⁰

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson’s arguments on imagined communities and nationalism have been

that “generates a sense of homogeneity, consistency, and order from unruly, heterogeneous experience; the construction of an identity that is to some degree single, centred, bounded, and located in a regular, directed, temporal trajectory” (Antze and Lambek 1996; xx).

The emergence of a particular history – the accounts of Mennonite historians – works as both the narrative itself, and produces this “narrative story” Mennonites tell about themselves in order to make coherent particular paradoxes and contradictions. Such stories draw on the past in particular ways and means, and in so doing, shape present lives, as well as imagined futures and teleological desires. The narrative is further shaped by a theology that positions humanity as subject to a divine authority that offers deliverance and salvation through martyrdom and suffering (Redekop and Redekop 2001). In practice this positioning has led to a paradox: on the one hand, Mennonite narratives produce a pacifist and persecuted identity, yet they themselves engage in implicitly psychologically and structurally violent practices within their own communities, toward the land that they have settled, and toward those “others” who also lay claim to it.

These internal contradictions are mitigated in contemporary Mennonite life in ways that incorporate a postmodern character, yet remain tethered to narratives of land, displacement, authority, and subjectivity. As I discuss, the displacement of indigenous peoples in North America and the Soviet Union/Ukraine from the areas which Mennonites came to occupy (Heinrichs 2013), as well as the use of what some see as

influential for Mennonite academics wrestling with “identity crises” and the role of community in the Mennonite ethos. See, for example, Robert Zacharias (2013), Janis Thiessen (2013), and Robyn Sneath (2004).

intensive and problematic agricultural practices (see, for example, Brandt 2007) have come to be seen as troubling for some Mennonites who view this from a modern lens as colonialist and violent (Klassen 2011). The responses to this “repositioning” come, increasingly, from Mennonite artists, who are working publicly at creating new narratives that address these problematic claims using old mythologies. These become attempts to make coherent the meaningful and praiseworthy – if paradoxical and troubling – the radical origins of Anabaptism, with a future in flux.

MIGRANT NARRATIVES

As a group of people theologically committed to the erasure of the self over the community (the body of Christ), Mennonites fashion the community in ways amenable to narration, and vice versa. Centrally, it becomes narratives of migration that inform ideas of identity; the narrative organizes itself around the essential subject of the community. Mennonite poet and writer Di Brandt (2007) examines the role historians have played in the emergence of such narratives, by looking back at the rise of the Anabaptist movement itself. Her own subsequent observations note the “valorization” of a particular character over her assessment of the more radical “originary Anabaptists”:

Mennonite oral histories have largely sanitized their profile and marginalized their radical edges, their reputation for Luddite protests, staged revolutions, apocalyptic visions and, according to some, polygamous orgies, in order to valorize a more sober profile of humble serious hardworking folk (109).

This “more sober profile” tied to a rural, peasant character, is a productive one, but can, at times, remain in tension with theological recourses to the Anabaptist origin story, drawing explicitly on a constructed ideal of the “Anabaptist vision” filtered through an

equally constructed, and at times romanticized history, of a “self-sustaining folk tradition” (Urry 2006).

The stories of gathering into Canadian communities from the previous chapter, run, current-like, through the Russian Mennonite ethos and affect. Themes of disruption and exile impinge upon Mennonite consciousness, generating an understanding of existence as nomadic or diasporic. The Mennonite narrative draws on the mythological story of the wandering Israelites to provide authoritative legitimation through parallel for the wandering and exile of Mennonites over and through numerous geographies, spaces, and places. In this rendering, horrific experiences are seen as divinely sanctioned through biblical precedent. In such a rendering, suffering enables Mennonites to reimagine a religious life and theology that justifies subjugation to God’s will, and renders “God’s leading” out of such troubled spaces and places as worthy of praise. Thus, God’s deliverance out of danger is a reward for lives lived faithfully according to religious doctrine, as the biblical Hebrews did in the stories of their exile from Egypt. The Mennonite narrative becomes one of a Chosen People.

This narrative draws its authority from its status as a representation and reproduction of the past, a narrative used in the present to account for the relationship between time, space, and personhood. In line with the arguments of Ochs and Capps (2001) and Good (1994), this narrative can be accessed as a resource in bringing experience to awareness, of mediating a subjective involvement in the world and of

providing a “representation” of experience in which events are given meaningful and coherent order (Good 1994), sense of constancy and recognisability (Myerhoff 1978).¹¹

Particular musical modes and expression offer a symbolic, and, to draw upon Bahktin again, chronotopic performance of Mennonite narratives that allows Mennonites to participate in the past, and imagine a particular future. Singing hymns both reaffirms through lyrics a theological and religious orientation, and the affective response of making it *musical* lends it historical and sensual import. Certain hymns, too, as enactments of theology, have a particular potency because of their usage in certain contexts: they acquire a near mythological character. One such hymn “Nun danket alle Gott,” has a folkloric resonance, a power emanating from its words, and its historic usage by Russian Mennonites. In this hymn in particular, the text relishes in the temporal; every verse alludes to elements of divine presence, blessing, and love, that, comfortingly, have always been, are, and will be “evermore”:

Nun danket alle Gott
Mit Herzen, Mund und Händen
Der große Dinge tut
An uns und allen Enden!
Der uns von Mutterleib
Und Kindesbeinen an
Unzählig viel zu gut
Bis hieher hat getan

Now thank we all our God
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom this world rejoices,
Who, from our mother’s arms
Has bless’d us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

Der ewig reiche Gott
Woll’ uns bei unserm Leben

Oh may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us.

¹¹ In echoing the argument that narrative provides cohesion and constancy, Cheryl Mattingly (1998) observes that narratives are apt at attending to disruptions, emerging out of a “breach” of the commonplace. In Mennonite lives, the migratory history, the escapes and beginnings, become such a framework. This is echoed in arguments from Mennonite scholars in history and sociology that look at how identity is forged by using the tragedies of persecution to looking back through history to find an essence of “Mennonitism” in the midst of suffering (Werner 2005; Sawatzky 1978).

Ein immer fröhlich Herz
 Und edlen Frieden geben
 Und uns in seiner Gnad'
 Erhalten fort und fort
 Unds unds aus aller Not
 Erlösen hier und dort

With ever joyful hearts
 And blessed peace to cheer us
 And keep us safe in grace,
 And guide us when perplexed
 And free us from all ills
 In this world and the next.

Lob, Her und Preis sei Gott,
 Dem Vater und dem Sohne
 Und dem, der beiden gleich
 In höchsten Himmelsthronen
 Den Dreieinigen Gott;
 Als der anfänglich war
 Und ist und bleiben wird
 Jetztund und immerdar

All praise and thanks to God
 The Father now be given
 The Son, and him who reigns
 With them in highest heaven -
 The one eternal God,
 Whom earth and heav'n adore
 For thus it was, is now,
 And shall be evermore.

(Gesangbuch der Mennoniten Brudergemeinde 1955: 49; Hymnal: A Worship Book 1992:

86)

Outlining an affect of praise and thanks to a divine figure who has blessed, protected, and guided “us,” this particular hymn has, to some extent, taken on a mythical quality for many Russian Mennonites. It acquires this quality through its imbrication with two foundational migrant narratives for Russian Mennonites: the 1920s migration and the post-World War II migration. As previously discussed, following the First World War and the fall of the Russian Provisional Government during the Revolution, the competing Red and White armies moved through the Mennonite colonies, destroying food and livestock. The anarchist army began targeting these colonies, murdering many, and contributing to the spread of infectious diseases like typhus and cholera. After the victory of Lenin’s Red Army, many Mennonites were dispossessed, and their remaining possessions given over to the collectivization of the Soviet national project. They also suffered along with their Ukrainian neighbours through the intense famine of 1919-1920, prompting them to consider migration. They were granted the right to do so by the

government, and thousands got out of the Soviet Union before the borders were closed by 1929 (Friesen 2007).

In a 1984 docu-drama entitled *...And When They Shall Ask*, Mennonites who emigrated out of the Soviet Union during the 1920s are interviewed, along with a re-creation of the dramatic exit. In the film, Mennonites describe their experience being loaded up into box cars for the overnight journey from Moscow to Latvia, and bidding farewell to loved ones that remained in the Soviet Union. The train ride, they describe, was nerve-wracking, considering the Soviet government could “change their mind,” and reject their applications for emigration. The border crossing into Latvia from Russia was marked by a wooden structure – the Red Gate – that was enmeshed in deep symbolism for those on this migratory journey, signalling freedom and safety.

On one trip, Mennonite passengers recalled seeing the gate in the distance, only to have the train stop a few hundred metres from the gate; they were boarded by Russian officers intending to inspect for false exit papers or military deserters. Instead, most passengers were robbed of their few possessions and money. As the train began to move again and pass through the border, the narrators describe a feeling of “release from prison,” yet something tangibly bittersweet: an unknown future, and leaving family and loved ones behind. Into this space, they began to sing *Nun Danket Alle Gott*.

Nearly thirty years later, a group of migrant Mennonites were stowed on a train that was stopped at a border crossing in post-World War II Germany (Dyck and Dyck 1991). Berlin had been divided into sections, and Mennonites fleeing Russian soldiers found themselves gathered in the American zone after redistribution. There was a ship waiting for them at the northern German port of Bremerhaven, willing to take them to

South America, and a train available to take them there. As Germany, too, was divided by the victorious allies, the train would have to pass through the Russian zone on its way north to the port, a problematic venture that could have led to the train – filled with, as the Russians saw it, Russian citizens – being re-routed to Siberia.

Last minute negotiations between the American and Russian governments that many Mennonites consider “miraculous” – an index of the mythological and divine character of the narrative and history – allowed the train through to German territory, and on to new lives in new lands. As the tension in the train cars broke when the train began moving across the border, the occupants began to sing *Nun Danket Alle Gott*, expressing their gratitude for the miracle that God had performed on their behalf. Surely they were blessed by God to have received divine intervention, as did the Israelites did in crossing the Red Sea and evading the Egyptians and return to slavery in Egypt.

To sing this hymn at such a time was a deeply communal act, reifying a divine subjectivity, unifying the community, and instigating a type of mythological narrative. This hymn is still sung today in those Mennonite churches that have maintained the hymn-singing tradition. While now increasingly sung in English, the melody is familiar. By giving life to the history of the hymn through singing it, the past is musically evoked, and the narrative of a Chosen People is reproduced. It is not merely through words, however, but through the affective response of *music*, something which is accessed more sensually, in a more embodied register and mode, that the past becomes enacted in the present.

While sung occasionally in some Mennonite churches, “Nun danket alle Gott,” has also been sung in a more folk music genre at Mennonite summer camps,

accompanied by a jaunty guitar rather than a sedate piano. In my recollection, it was always introduced as a “very important hymn,” that had historical significance, and had been sung by Mennonites as they fled Russia and persecution. The invocation of and introduction to this history allowed this song to have an affective quality. To “embody” the hymn through communal singing means that it takes on a particular tone, a sombre and intentional quality that works to resignify the song – and the story it comes to stand for – as vital to the performance of Mennonite identity and subjectivity.

To hear how Mennonite migrants “spontaneously burst into song” as they moved across geographical borders shifts the borders of time where the past is lived out in the present in a bodily mode. In a phenomenological frame, meaning is created through experience; as Good (1994) and Ochs and Capps (2001) argue, narrative becomes a resource that brings experience – and therefore, meaning – to awareness. Further, Ochs and Capps suggest that narratives mediate subjective involvement in the world, and provide a “representation” of experience in which events are given meaningful and coherent order (Good 1994). The narrative of singing for Mennonites becomes experientially meaningful through its performance, and, importantly, through such a performance, this mode reifies a subjection to the authority of God.

Singing “Nun danket alle Gott,” is both a performance of the past and an attenuation of the relationship between time, space, and subjectivity. In this register, the mimetic performance of this song affirms that it was God who has done “wondrous things” in such miraculous “escapes” out of Russia, and it is an acknowledgment that this happens to those who are blessed. It is a further acknowledgement of the element of time, one that places the past, present, and future of such a Chosen People in the hands of

God. The hymn communicates the message that Mennonite lives are fashioned through subjugation to God – and that God, who is “timeless” and outside the realm of humanity, must be praised: “For thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.”

CHARACTEROLOGICAL FIGURES

There is another sense in which the historical imagination is put to use for Mennonites. Arising out of the collective narratives are particular characters or figures drawn and formed out of a repeating migrational epic of escape and reprieve. Such characters work chronotopically: as Bakhtin explains, such figures are a sketch of personhood in time and place. They are “characterological figures” or social types identified by typical qualities, forms of agency or action, and perspectives. Rather than individuals, however, the deep sense of Mennonite communalism necessitates these figures to be articulated more as broad qualities of the community. They are derived from self-narratives, and historical narratives that presume characteristics which “others” read onto Mennonites. In other words, Mennonites achieve a reification of their own self-narrative through “assuming” the perspective of another. These figures – the industrious, hard-working pioneer, and the “quiet in the land” – become, problematically for negotiating subjectivity, entangled with yet not wholly disengaged from the troubling paradoxes of materiality.

“THE QUIET IN THE LAND”

The self-description “The Quiet in the Land” is a curious one, a collective figure whose origins are vague, yet who continues to have tremendous vitality as a formative character. Mennonite writer Julia Kasdorf (2001), for instance, suggests the phrase “probably comes from” the bible, Psalm 35:20: “For they do not speak peace, but they conceive deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land.” Being “the quiet” is both a state and an aspiration, borne out of a persecutory history and an interiority of mind. This perspective reflects a narration of histories as insular, and a people that understands itself as being without citizenship or nationality, whose identity is predicated upon a theology of disengagement from the world.

More dramatically, the state of being “the quiet in the land” was literally narrated in a 1984 docu-drama that both “dramatized” the Mennonite escape from what was then the Soviet Union in the 1920s, and included interviews with Canadian immigrants who had lived there. As the narrator describes, the Mennonite story has been “a battle for survival that has lasted nearly five centuries.” This “battle” – a dissonant word choice considering a significant portion of the film insists upon Mennonite pacifism – has resulted in a form of insularity; or, as one interviewee describes it, a mistrust of outsiders. This mistrust, subsequently, results in a particular means of engagement, which involves the injunction that “you don’t show yourself to them as you are...”

This disengagement from, and mistrust of, “others” generates an orientation of insularity tied to the desire to remain separate, to live quietly and unobtrusively in rural (less public) spaces, to be quietly on the land. A more public – and deliberate – statement, in a pamphlet written by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada for

guests at their public archives, describes this mode as the answer to the question “Who are the Mennonites?” “Mennonites kept to themselves and sought to be the ‘quiet in the land.’ They wanted to practice their religious beliefs and social customs with as little interference as possible, but were not very active in the communities around them.”

Then, the pamphlet continues, “In Canada today there is no open persecution of Mennonites because of their religion... Mennonites in Canada continue to hold a broad spectrum of views on peace. Issues range from emphases on being the ‘Quiet in the Land,’ to evangelism and social justice.” A variation on this description can be found in the pamphlets available in contexts where a “public” Mennonite presence necessitates an answer to “Who are the Mennonites?” Church conference offices, museums, and tourist centres all offer such variants, but this particular description is fascinating for its use of “The Quiet in the Land” as both a historical characteristic, and a “lifestyle” that is accessed by contemporary Mennonites.

Despite an ideology of isolation from worldly politics and nationalism, it is imperative to consider have transformation of the many nation-states to which the Mennonites migrated, both to landscapes and as citizens and subjects of the state. Returning to the pamphlet from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, it notes that there is no longer open persecution of Mennonites in Canada because of their religion: “In fact, Mennonites can be found in most career paths: from childcare workers and teachers to police officers, lawyers and judges, from farmers and craftspeople to successful business people and computer programmers.” Leaving aside, for now, the rich possibilities for discussion about the vocational descriptions of the author, I think that this statement provides yet another variation on the trope, another way of offering a self-

description of Mennonites as “harmless,” “quiet,” and most potently for contemporary Mennonites, easily integrated into new worlds.

In addition to the introduction of the element of time, and the claim that this figure is both historical and contemporary, there is an irony in the very publication for “public” consumption of descriptions of Mennonites as “The Quiet in the Land,” since the characterization itself came from a desire to *not* interact, as it were, with the public. The publication of such pamphlets is therefore indexical of an opening up of Mennonite boundaries. I suspect also that “The Quiet in the Land” as a collective figure is only possible through this act of opening, that, while Mennonites see others as describing them as “quiet,” it is a self-constructed narrative, one that reifies an isolationist orientation both for the community itself, and for “others.”

The figure of “The Quiet in the Land” is a constructed story for outsiders that renders these strange mistrusting migrants into a palatable and innocuous rural curiosity, wanting nothing more than to be left alone, and to authorize the narrative of “true self” that the community desires. Two Mennonites voice this desire to be ignored by outsiders, in my opinion, most succinctly: writer Di Brandt (2007:109) suggests that “really, we don’t scare anyone, we keep to ourselves, please, don’t think about hounding us out of our homes again or burning us at stakes, leave us alone.” Likewise, one of my Mennonite friends succinctly distilled the Mennonite ethos down to, “Guys: don’t make a fucking *peep*.”

Despite being the quiet in the *land*, Mennonites have integrated themselves also into diverse lands and landscapes, and shaped them through their agricultural labour. Paradoxically, the landscapes produced by such labours are affectively tied to salvation

for both Mennonites and, increasingly, the nations in which they find themselves. Di Brandt, who grew up in southern Manitoba, reflects upon her years growing up on the prairie, while commenting on the narratives that shape community self-understanding and identity:

While on the one hand we Mennonites practised a kind of indigenosity, a sense of ethnicity that puts high stakes on embodied physicality, ancestral loyalty, wild-minded communal interdependence, separatism from the rest of the world, and an intimate relationship to land, we adhered rigorously, on the other hand, to a post-exilic narrative identity that insists we can put it all in a suitcase and take it with us, to any other similar landscape, that ‘homeland’ in this sense is a transplantable metaphor rather than a literal place. This contradiction can be explained in part by our pacifism, which supersedes our sense of land attachment, but within the culture our migratory history is understood in poetic and mythical terms, as a re-enactment of the Hebrews’ forty years of wandering in the desert, followed later by centuries of wandering all over the earth (Brandt 2007; 126).

Here Brandt evocatively elaborates on the entanglements that frame many contemporary Mennonite lives in Canada: the potent narratives that shape identity, and the tensions that arise in enacting these narratives in material worlds. These worlds are enriched by and infused with mythologies and figures in addition to the “quiet in the land” – the pioneer, the martyr, and the exiled chosen people – that are invoked in myriad circumstances to justify and authorize the labour on certain landscapes as salvational and necessary for the reproduction of the narratives themselves.

Yet while Mennonites frame themselves along certain narrative and chronotopic lines, their movements and engagements are impactful, and suffuse other national narratives. In the case of Canadian Mennonites, these other narratives include settler and colonial narratives in both Manitoba – where Russian Mennonites first settled in Canada – and Ontario, where Swiss Mennonites and Amish moved from Pennsylvania beginning in the late 1700s (Steiner 2015).

As previously discussed, when the first Mennonites arrived on the grasslands of the Canadian west in the 1870s, they were granted self-governance, the establishment of Mennonite schools and welfare institutions, a self-regulated economy with little interference, and no restrictions on practicing religion in the new province of Manitoba (Friesen 2007). The participation in the process of salvation, and the drive toward self-reliance was indexed in and through labour, development, and production of the colonies where Mennonites settled. Their modes of industry ran parallel to the models of development implicit in many national projects, and their dedication to labour – their means to salvation – meant that they offered themselves as a favourable migrant and settler group. In her thesis tracing the colonial heritage of Mennonite quilting practices in Ontario, Mennonite artist Julia Gingrich (2014:8) writes,

Although Mennonite groups throughout their history have had a strained relationship with modern and historical nation-states (having migrated due to religious persecution and conflicting beliefs with centralized power structures), their particular identities as farmers of European ancestry provided a favourable community of bodies to the ongoing colonial assemblage of what would become, and is now, Canada.

More pointed is an example provided by Di Brandt in her essay *This land that I love, this wide, wide prairie*, where she reprints an impassioned speech given by Governor General Lord Dufferin during a visit to the Mennonite settlements of southern Manitoba, two years following their arrival in 1874:

Fellow citizens of the Dominion, and fellow subjects of Her Majesty: I have come here today in the name of the Queen of England to bid you welcome to Canadian soil... You have left your own land in obedience to a conscientious scruple... You have come to a land where you will find the people with whom you associate engaged indeed in a great struggle, and contending with foes whom it requires their best energies to encounter, but those foes are not your fellow men, nor will you be called upon in the struggle to stain your hands with human blood – a task which is so abhorrent to your religious feelings. The war to which we invite you as

recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination, and reward our attack by placing their treasures at our disposal. It is a war of ambition, for we intend to annex territory after territory – but neither blazing villages nor devastated fields will mark our ruthless attack; our battalions will march across the illimitable plains which stretch before us; the rolling prairie will blossom in our wake, and corn and peace and plenty will spring where we have trod (2007:5).

As Brandt articulates, the Mennonite response to this highly militaristic pronouncement was not recorded by historians, but present-day Mennonites might hope the response was tepid at best. Brandt's essay describes a great irony in Mennonite farming communities that is embedded within the Governor General's pronouncement: that despite a "conscientious scruple" to avoid the spilling of *human* blood, the practice of fighting and subduing foes is portrayed as morally benign when the "foe" is recast as a wild landscape.

Along with the labour itself, the act of "pioneering" or "settling" requires wilderness, an untamed landscape, for its own vitality. The completion of the process of transforming a landscape and the shift toward sustainability over development marks the end of "pioneering". The repetition of these acts to multiple landscapes over the course of the migratory history of the Mennonites has entrenched the pioneering figure solidly into the imaginary, reproduced now through oral histories, written historical accounts, and memorials. If it were not for the pioneering narrative and memorialization of such figures, these pioneers would be rendered invisible by the very landscapes they have produced; there is nothing remaining of the "wild" landscapes these original Mennonites settled into for they themselves have deleted them.

Most prominently visible are the memorial cemeteries in a variety of places, now labelled "Pioneer Cemetery," and featuring a plaque describing the "first Mennonite

settlers” to the area, and the hardships they endured to produce the landscape that now surrounds their burial grounds. In Steinbach, Manitoba, there is also a Pioneer Cemetery with the graves and markers of the earliest pioneers to the East Reserve in the 1870s.¹² North up the highway is the Mennonite Heritage Village, a museum that features wonderfully restored buildings preserved from the early Mennonite pioneer villages. The Heritage Village is also the setting for Pioneer Days, a weekend in late summer when, according to the promotional material, you can “relive our Mennonite past” with a “variety of pioneer activities!” As an employee of the museum when I was in my 20s, and a summer employee of the Parks Department previously, I can attest that these were very popular days indeed – the activities, including blacksmithing, threshing, preserving fruits and vegetables, and a variety of others showcasing the autumn preparations of farming homesteads for winter, were augmented by period costumes, hayrides, and food (that, of course, included ‘Pioneer’ brand farmer sausage).

This type of fall fair scenario is not unique to Steinbach, since it falls neatly into the nostalgic settler/pioneer recreation event popular in many small towns across Canada. Pioneer Days, I would suggest, is not particularly *Mennonite* in that regard, yet the act of “reliving” the past with “pioneer activities” reifies a particular agricultural narrative that holds special potency for Mennonites. Part of the interest in, and curiosity about,

¹² This is a phenomenon also encountered elsewhere. When Mennonites moved to the Chaco region of Paraguay from Canada in the 1930s, for example, they encountered a difficult “wilderness” referred to as “the Green Hell” for its scorching climate, and unyielding scrubby, thorny, vegetation. Considered “unproductive” land, the Chaco region now supports Mennonites who have grown wealthy and prosperous through their agricultural endeavours there. In the major city, Filadelfia, a Mennonite Museum stands next to a Pioneer Park memorializing the work and life these early settlers endured to produce such wealth. In eastern Paraguay, Mennonite colonies like Friesland and Volendam, too, have central park areas, with commemorative structures for the memorialization of Mennonite Pioneers.

“pioneer activities” stems from the desire to witness first-hand the difficulties involved in sustaining a community in “simpler times.” These “simpler times” refer to a period without the aid of technology, and without the capitalist systems that sustain current modern lifeways.¹³

While the Marxist implications of the use of these technologies seem to have been left unquestioned in the implementation of these museum projects, the figure of the pioneer in this type of memorialization becomes a public figure as well, and, as it does

¹³ At the museum on permanent display is a building known as a *semilin*, a partially excavated dwelling made up of layers of sod dug up from the earth. It is a model of the first houses the Mennonites in Manitoba built. The *semilin* kept families warm underground in the harsh winters. Ducking down to enter, most visitors are shocked at its small size, and marvel at how families numbering over ten people could possibly live in such spartan circumstances. Thousands of miles to the south of Steinbach in another outdoor Mennonite museum is a model of another early pioneer dwelling, built by Mennonite immigrants to Paraguay. It is also tiny, makeshift, and raw, fashioned out of material immediately available to the migrants, who needed permanent dwellings. The reconstruction of these pioneer houses, however, in both Canada and Paraguay signals the necessity to reproduce the past in material ways. It is not just any past, either, but the physical remnants of the most difficult period of settling: these early houses become an index of pioneering through their crudeness and simplicity. Their mere anachronistic presence in the now highly developed contexts of Manitoba and Paraguay makes these dwellings an index of progress. As such, they mark both the passage of time, and progress, reminding those in the present of the past and returning them to “relive” the past. Of course the “quaint” festivities surrounding Pioneer Days do not, in reality, require a reliving of the past, but merely the evocation of it to reproduce the Pioneer narrative. Yet while progress is marked through the presence of *semilins* or the early Paraguayan houses, what is omitted in this Mennonite narrative, but (occasionally hinted at in oral stories) is the somewhat ironic borrowing of techniques and technologies from former non-Mennonite neighbours in the Soviet Union. These “peasant” technologies were drawn upon to “pioneer” in the green hell of the Chaco – the oppressive heat and vegetation of Eastern Paraguay – as well as the freezing cold of the Canadian prairie. Formerly in the Soviet Union, Mennonites’ aptitude for a certain model of industrious development led to enormous wealth in relation to their “peasant” Russian neighbours. However, in their migrations to new and challenging landscapes, Mennonites had to adapt their structures to a less ostentatious mode, and they drew upon the building styles of the often-derided lower class. The *semilin* or sod house was of Ukrainian design, and worked well in the frigid steppes, while the early Paraguayan dwellings were simple log houses with thatched roofs, also of Ukrainian style.

so, becomes absorbed and reproduced in a public, national narrative. In the Canadian context, the Mennonite Pioneer as a figure is imbricated and entwined with that of the noble settler in nationalist historical narratives. The pioneer becomes useful for a Canadian political history, as well as a meaningful Mennonite one. While the intentions may diverge in each narrative along with the impetus for the labour on the land, the landscapes produced by this labour have been leveraged in the service of the state to the extent that the two narratives – that of the pioneer and that of the settler – are nearly inextricable.

“FARMING IS IN OUR BLOOD”

Farming practices, as both Di Brandt’s book (2007) and a tour of the thriving agri-businesses of Mennonite communities in Manitoba will attest, have continued the narrative of domination and ambitious land annexation. It is clear that the rolling prairie did indeed blossom in the years following Mennonite settlement, something vital to the national narrative of the noble settler, and reified in the productive Mennonite self-narrative of “farming is in our blood.” This idiom, this character, like “the quiet in the land,” offers both an “explanatory model” to borrow a concept from medical anthropology, and an ideal that sets a moral valence upon Mennonite comportment, one that simultaneously becomes “naturalized” through its grounding in embodiment. To say that, for Mennonites, “farming is in our blood,” is to draw upon myths of origin, and histories of migration that narrate Mennonites as not only *able* to move to any land and render it productive, but to be *invited* to do so.

On the frigid plains of North America and the Ukrainian steppe, the swampy lowlands of the Vistula Delta in Poland, the woodlands of southern Ontario, or the deserts of northern Mexico and South America, Mennonites have made the terrain “blossom” into productive farmland. The success of this endeavour, repeated over and over across the globe, has been noted by those authorities whose national projects align with the types of landscapes produced by Mennonite farming practices. The results of this quiet productivity on landscapes become a sort of public testimony that is used both to create and recreate the Mennonite self-narrative of productive farming. To receive invitations to produce these types of landscapes, then, reifies the farming narrative to the extent that it becomes naturalized, it must be “in our blood.”

Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies* argues that the principle of myth is to transform history into nature, where “historical multiplicities, politics, power struggles, and social constructions are flattened and reanimated with dominant narratives to appear universal, eternal, and absolute” (Barthes 1957:11). For Mennonites to suggest that “farming is in our blood” is to produce a type of “natural” Mennonite that has a mythological orientation. This idea, of course, is entangled in the Western notion of the biological as natural: that it is *blood* that stands for, and contains, the naturalized state of being Mennonite. The mythological figure of the “natural” Mennonite is a way of embodying the past, reckoning with the migratory narrative, and imbuing certain labours with morality: we are “naturally” good at farming, it is something that links us together bodily – in contemporary parlance, genetically – and it is reified through historical repetition. Since others have seen our capabilities and praised us for them, we must be “naturally” adept at performing this type of labour.

As with many discourses that naturalize particular actions or ways of being, to having “farming in our blood” is problematic for many Mennonites in terms of its contemporary implications for identity. For the Mennonite Church in a contemporary global context, the notion that “Mennonite” can be found in the blood – that is, genetics – is troubling for an institution whose growth and life depends on recruiting Mennonites by choice, rather than relying on Mennonites by birth. In other words, a Mennonite of “ethnic ancestry” possesses no more authenticity or authority to be Mennonite than someone of non-Mennonite origins who has come to be baptized into the Church.

The evocation of a blood connection, of a set of skills or labour practices that individuals have somehow been born into, is problematic for another reason. The image of the Mennonites with “farming in their blood” implies a moralistic ideal, that Mennonites were born to farm and labour in specific ways to achieve certain landscapes. Furthermore, the image implies that to reject, negate, or abdicate that role is costly for Mennonites themselves. I would argue further that for contemporary Mennonites in Canada, the formation of that trope has been enmeshed in politics of land ownership, stewardship, and productivity in a context in which Mennonites are aware of how their own narratives are entwined in national narratives. These national narratives are often uncomfortably viewed by Mennonites themselves as colonialist.

While Mennonites have created this naturalized farming narrative, of a deep and enduring relationship to the land, their ways of labouring on it – and the figures and characters arising out of such labour – are used in national projects to develop landscapes, with historical and characterological justifications. Though initially the insular Mennonite colonies sought to be productive for their own sustainability and

development, their project has developed the “national” landscape, and, through this development, Mennonites have moved themselves to an unprecedented level of engagement. As is the case with the trope the “quiet in the land,” these projects are made meaningful and cogent as dialogic narratives between Mennonites and others, produced only through a self-projected character, and reproduced through historic narratives.

“ROMANCE WITH THE LAND”

The production and reproduction of pioneering and farming narratives in the contemporary neoliberal context is not always coherent. In the new Canadian capitalist settler state, for instance, the Anabaptist vision, insular histories, and self-narratives of particular relationships to land, landscapes, and labour, has tended bifurcate into two politicized values: on the one hand, some Mennonites espouse a right-wing desire for small government, “family values,” and increased privatization that would allow large scale agri-business and industry to flourish. On the other hand, some Mennonites have a more leftist orientation, advocating a radical communalism, social accountability, environmental stewardship, and a critique of oppressive systems of power.

In contemporary North America, complicating the context is the arrival of evangelicalism in Mennonite communities, which has, in varying degrees, reoriented the self-narrative of being “quiet” and disinterested in external conversion activities to one explicitly outwardly focused on “missions” and the evangelization and conversion of non- or fellow Christians.

In the evangelical orientation, too, wealth is reframed as not worldly, but as a blessing from God, and the pursuit of it is a measure of such divine blessing. For some,

this perspective is commensurable with the idea of Mennonites possessing “natural” agricultural abilities and business acumen. The fact that Mennonite agri-business is thriving in southern Manitoba can be seen in this light as an indication of divine blessing. The desire for personal wealth, the means to achieve it through hard and dedicated labour, and, I would contend, a residue of mistrust of “others” and of the state left over from a migratory history, position some Mennonites in support of more right-wing political parties. Yet the bifurcation of political loyalties that I have just sketched is precarious, causing significant tensions between Mennonites.¹⁴

The tensions surrounding materiality and claims to land, and the entanglement of land with “home” are unsettling for many, and political orientations are not mutually exclusive, nor consistent over time. Examples of the precarity of political stance in a public Mennonite context can be found in the publications of various Mennonite conferences; some writers and essayists may also make public their experiences. In a more egregious example, Mennonite writer Julia Kasdorf (2001), for instance, describes her shock at the decision in 1997 by the Franconia Conference of Mennonite churches in the US to expel the Germantown Mennonite Church from the conference because of its willingness to accept LGBTQ members. While the issue of inclusive membership is, currently, particularly divisive, Kasdorf points to a “particularly cruel irony” that the Germantown congregation, founded in 1683 in Philadelphia, supported the first formal

¹⁴ James Urry (2006) traces the Russian Mennonite involvement in politics from the Reformation to the present in his book *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood* to reveal the deep roots Mennonites have in politics despite being “the quiet in the land.” See also John J. Friesen’s discussion of Mennonite involvement in politics in Manitoba in his 2007 book *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites*. Included are records of Mennonite candidates and their political affiliation for election to both provincial and federal office.

protest against slavery in North America: “the congregational site of a seventeenth-century human rights protest could not now speak to one of the most pressing human rights issues of the moment” (79).

In a Canadian context, where the issues of human rights play out as well, another cruel irony is evident: the ease with which the Mennonite project of salvation has imbricated with the capitalist project of the Canadian settler state has allowed Mennonites, through labouring on the land, to become some of its wealthiest citizens. Indeed, the same process has occurred in Russia, Paraguay, Mexico, and America.¹⁵ Yet at the same time, through socialist critique, many Mennonites are, as Pamela Klassen (2011) also suggests for other contemporary liberal Protestant Christians, coming to realize that they were and are uncomfortably implicated in and engaged with colonialism. For some Mennonites, particularly ones I came to know during fieldwork, this engagement has resulted in deliberate actions to enter into dialogue with Indigenous Canadians regarding the relationship between Mennonites and colonialism.

Mennonite Church Canada, for instance (one such “liberal” Mennonite church conference), has an Indigenous Relations department, out of which came a publication in 2013 titled *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together*. This edited volume contains essays, stories, and poetry by both Mennonite

¹⁵ This was true also for the context in which the *Martyrs Mirror* was published in 1660. The Mennonites at the time, no longer persecuted, enjoyed the same rights and privileges as other citizens, and many became part of a wealthy and cosmopolitan merchant class. Thieleman van Braght published his book as an admonition to the increasingly affluent Dutch Mennonite church, writing: “These are sad times, in which we live; nay, truly, there is more danger now than in the time of our fathers, who suffered death for the testimony of the Lord. Few will believe this, because the great majority look to that which is external and corporeal, and in this respect it is now better, quieter, and more comfortable; few only look to that which is internal and pertains to the soul, and on which everything depends” (8). See also Letkemann (2004).

and Indigenous artists and writers, intended to “offer up alternative histories, radical theologies, and subversive memories that can unsettle our souls and work toward reconciliation” as the back book jacket describes.

In this anthology, two poems by Rebecca Seiling (2013) pondering the implications of Mennonite purchases of treaty land in southern Ontario in the early 1800s bookend an essay by Indigenous author Leanne Simpson lamenting the loss of her ancestral lands in southern and eastern Ontario. As Seiling writes:

My people were the quiet in the land:
Do not conform to this world.
Be transformed by the renewing of your minds.
Be in the world, but not of it.

Each year my grandparents grew bountiful produce:
‘I love every square inch of this land,’ Grandpa said.
‘I was born here, and I want to die here too.’

Permanence.
Land.
Home.
...
I’m unsettled (48-49)

And as she continues:

Whose lands are these? Yours? God’s? Settler? Indigenous?
Every division is a fragile line...
if this is your home, where is mine?

Ashamed of skin and story,
every identity a sorry embarrassment
I carry guilt, anger, a muted voice,
claiming: this is not my story.
This was not my choice.

But these were my people.
My ancestors: settlers.

I’m unsettled (58).

Di Brandt, too, writes of her farming family's problematic relationship to land in Manitoba: "Not once did I hear a single one of them talk about the land, except to pronounce gleefully that we 'shall have dominion over it,' a special permission, a decree from God, though on the other hand, paradoxically, we should not go to war to defend it." These questions of land, ownership, stewardship, and appropriation become paradoxical because they act as sites of enactment of the Christian imperative of salvation. Working the land, and the narratives that produce and reproduce this act as salvation, become, in part, a strategy to mitigate the problem of incarnational living: the necessity of the material for spiritual gain. This mitigation, then, becomes generative of a Mennonite way of life that is uncomfortably (for some) aligned with colonialism and settler politics.

In line with what Lawrence Taylor (2007) suggests in his discussion on moral geographies, for Mennonites, the idea of working the land appropriates it morally, yet the idea of living with/on the land lends moral claim to this land by the Indigenous inhabitants. These conundrums concerning claims to land, along with the ease whereby Mennonite farmers on the prairies have adopted the corporate and technological agribusiness model of production index the complex entanglements of settler narratives, development, and neoliberalism. For Mennonites, the pioneer narrative and its promise of salvation that drives "production" is both produced and reproduced by the very materiality of the land. The act of labouring on the land to create particular landscapes is dual. On the one hand, the act of "producing" is salvational – ensuring, in a sense, a place in an abstract heavenly "home." On the other hand, the ordering of landscape into agricultural units that signal development is affective, reiterating the narrative of "successful pioneer" and "farmer" in Mennonite mythology. Mennonites have

themselves created the affective object that allows the narrative of salvation to be enacted, yet the colonial settler context in which this creation takes place also shapes its creation.

In acting upon and reacting to the land, Mennonites both resist and affirm the settler state. Without the nationalist narratives of land-claim, they could “put it all in a suitcase and take it with us” to re-quote Di Brandt, migrating on to new territories where they could live apart from worldly concerns. Yet the affective power of these landscapes – created through Mennonite labour – has begun to shift Mennonite engagement with the nation. Through the act of labour – a form of claim-staking – Mennonites have imbricated themselves in national narratives; they are historically written in as pioneers and settlers to the extent that “home” now includes claimed and worked land and accountability and engagement to and with the state.

The new context is “unsettling” because it is here that materiality impinges upon the ephemeral, and complicates the enactment of cherished ideals. It is the land itself that is required for the narrative to come alive, yet the land is simultaneously rejected through the evocation of subjectivity. Anabaptism took into its theology and ideology broader evangelical Christian notion of “worlds” divided spiritually and materially, and subject to the rule of Christ and the rule of Satan. Giving the figures of the peasant, the pioneer, and the farmer a virtuous characterization through their relationship to the land and their labour upon it, acknowledges the necessity of the material despite the pull of allegiance to an “other” intangible spiritual domain.

NEW NARRATIVES, OLD MYTHOLOGIES

During a Mennonite studies conference I attended, I gave a paper on the topic of the extent to which biomedicine is commensurable with the martyrological ethos. The conference was held in Winnipeg and the audience was made up of academics and “lay-persons” (the conference’s term) interested in Mennonite studies. If there is one area of study at which Mennonites are *particularly* adept, it is navel-gazing (present company included). I received several responses to the questions I raised in my paper. These responses are helpful in outlining, at least in part, the desires, hopes, and concerns associated an imagined Mennonite future.

In the paper I noted how many millennial Mennonites I encountered joked about their emotionally controlled, silent, and “proper” parents and grandparents who liked to listen to funeral announcements on the radio. From the perspective of the millenials, older generations had a more “well – life is suffering” attitude. This observation, as I intended, elicited a self-deprecating laugh. This view of life as full of suffering, I continued, often stands in contrast to the “life and youth and health at all costs” biomedical system.

I asked whether the older Mennonite “affect” of suffering is constituted as an abnormality in the biomedical regime? I suggested further that my purpose was not to critique the biomedical system, but rather to shift the frame and attend to the new and changing social categories, worlds, and discourses that shape and are shaping contemporary contexts in which Mennonites negotiate subjectivity. Identity itself is about holding on and letting go – binding and loosing to use an Anabaptist trope. What is

lost and what is gained in these negotiations, in shifting subjectivities, in choosing new discourses of affect, and in attending to new orientations?

I repeated that these are rhetorical questions, played out in lives lived and ways of being-in-the-world. The possibilities evoked through this line of questioning – what is lost and/or gained – were, however, a source of unease for some people in my audience. One middle-aged woman was adamant in her response that there *was* something “Mennonite” lost in moving into new worlds. She referred specifically to her dismay over the state of contemporary funerals that have become about “celebrating a life” instead of mourning a loss. This tendency to elide grief, she continued, should not be something “Mennonites do.” Rather, they should maintain the affect of sadness, grief, and mourning at which “non-millennial Mennonites” are so adept.

This woman’s very clear rejection of the encroachment into Mennonite practices of what she regarded as an inappropriate optimism in contemporary Canadian funerals provided a fascinating perspective. It was also one I had not heard, despite talking with numerous millennial Mennonites. Consider the more sarcastic view of Mennonites and death as described by novelist Miriam Toews: “A Mennonite telephone survey might consist of questions like, would you prefer to live or die a cruel death, and if you answer ‘live’ the Menno doing the survey hangs up on *you*” (Toews 2004:5).

I am offering this example here as a means to attend to productive self-narratives. I am interested in how the past is used in such narrative production, and the stakes of the lived negotiation between ideas about the past and presumptions about present practices. Clearly, for the woman responding to my paper at the conference, the enactment of an affect that embraced sorrow and grief was increasingly necessary for the maintenance of

Mennonite identity in a broader cultural context that validates optimism and the avoidance of “negative” emotions.

The sarcasm in describing Mennonite tropes that Toews’ offers is an oft relied upon form of self-parody that I heard most frequently from younger Mennonites. These younger people seem to be in the interstitial space between an older generation that is envisioning their future with Jesus in heaven, and a very “worldly” orientation that seeks to reconcile itself with the self-narratives of insular community, and construct some new sort of “Mennonite” looking life. These can be tricky negotiations, and among my Mennonite friends, I suspect, it is difficult to navigate the dual need for affirmation for “doing something good” and honouring the past through a tangible relationship to the land and a “peasant” sensibility, and a concurrent rejection of the less desirable aspects of agrarian life as uneducated, provincial, and simple.

LAND AND COMMUNITY

Navigating these divergent narratives has sometimes resulted in revisions of the past, but revisions that “utilize” different elements of the familiar tropes. One means of revision, for instance, draws on the “farming is in our blood” trope to recommit to living in relation to the land in a more “Anabaptist” mode. The relativity of being “more or less” Anabaptist, is, of course, vital: it is a particular rendering and reading of history, of the past, that justifies certain ways of living in the present. For some more “radical” Mennonites, a more just way of living with and on the earth is sought in so-called intentional communities or co-operative farms, sometimes disconnected from the grid, but self-sustaining, and environmentally sustaining.

In one of those intentional communities I visited on several occasions that was located north of Steinbach, the members drew on what they felt to be Mennonites' "natural" ability to farm. However, many of these intentional communities originated with urban Mennonites whose inclinations toward social justice issues impelled them to seek, like the early Anabaptists, "radical" ways of rejecting the traumatic effects of capitalism. In the community in rural Manitoba, structures are made from renewable resources, with as little environmental impact as possible. Likewise, the children are home-schooled to engender creativity and practical skills, and to learn how to grow a sufficient diversity of food to sustain themselves through four seasons. And while the desire for a "romance with the land," is present and in full force, sometimes the "natural" ability to farm requires a steep learning curve for those young Mennonites whose existence has been exclusively urban.

This option is a clear embrace of the highly communal nature of Anabaptism, and the members of these communities find justification in their modes of being in the rejection of worldly power by their early Anabaptist ancestors. While at the outset it may appear that these intentional communities are akin to, say, Hutterite colonies, or Amish communities, and therefore represent a "step backwards," the members of such communities are often motivated strongly by "worldly" issues. That is, their engagement with the world and the problems they identify in capitalist structures of power and its concomitant environmental degradation and wanton consumption, compel these Mennonites to act against the world; their disengagement is an active resistance to structures of power.

This resistance, however, is not without critique from the wider Mennonite community, particularly those members of the community who push towards “progress” and the embrace of a more public existence, one that values education and engagement with the world. Yet the radical communitarian movement represents an engagement with the world through the utilization of the past in service of an imagined future in peril. In this rendering, the global future is precarious because of harmful systems of power that must be rejected. It is also important to recognize that from this radical perspective, the world is not subject to God’s will, and direct action is necessary as Mennonites can – and should – engage with the world to shape its future.

This new orientation draws on the self-narratives Mennonites have fashioned in relation to land, using these narratives to authorize particular ways of being and doing. In a more controversial way, the past, and specifically a radically communal past, has also been utilized in support of theories of communism by some younger Mennonites. Communism is a rather fractious subject, considering the Mennonite escape from the communist Soviet Union, yet some more politically minded and highly educated Mennonites see communism as a radical solution to many social problems, dissolving unhelpful classist hierarchies in favour of equality. Socialism is indeed commensurable with Anabaptism, and the structure of communities like those of the Hutterites and Mennonites in the past, attests to a socialist mode of living. Yet the deep fear and loathing for communism of those Mennonites who lived through the Russian experiment make this a controversial political stance for that generation of Mennonites. As a fellow Mennonite PhD student told me, “I am definitely in favour of communism, but I would never tell my opa that...”

MUSIC AND PERFORMANCE

The seeming totality of the agricultural narratives in Mennonite lives tends to background other narratives, yet there are certain non-agricultural talents and abilities that are nonetheless fostered and valued. That Mennonites are good at music is a specific narrative that is both internal and public, yet its authorization is imbricated with subjectivity. Musical ability is authorized and encouraged because it can and should be used for the well-being of the community. This makes music more valued over other individualistically-oriented talents. Moreover, music is perceived as an expression of praise to God, and a reification of submission to the divine.

Music is also, perhaps most potently, a salient and affective means for performing the past, a form of expression that holds tremendous meaning for many Mennonites as it intersects with and embeds itself in Mennonite worlds so totally. The performance of song that is most potently *felt* and not reasoned and I think, can only be understood as a sort of affective relay between persons, is an act of concomitant listening and voicing, of discipline. Mennonite singing is such a vital enactment of community and of the past that it is difficult to render into text the incredible emotional and affective resonance of this practice. The work that such acts do and the meaning of melody and song effects response far beyond words.

Applying Tanya Luhrmann's (2012) query about how God is "made real" for Christians, for Mennonites I would argue that the presence of God is most thoroughly embodied through song and singing. The performance of hymns is an enactment of community in, to use Victor Turner's (1974) language, the vein of *communitas*. Singing

hymns has been deeply political at times, an embodiment of theology, emotion, affect, and aesthetic: it is one very overt performance that Mennonites make deliberately beautiful. It is also a performance in which “talent” is encouraged, where the most skilled singers and accompanists lead exceptional and exemplified lives, often to the extent that not being musical – and specifically not being able to sing well – is not being a “good Mennonite.”

I offer, as an example, memories from my own childhood. When we were children, my parents enrolled me and my brother in piano lessons; while I continued studying piano into university, my brother asked to quit to focus on sports. I felt neither passion nor antipathy towards these piano lessons, and so I continued them with little feeling, mostly categorizing my musical education as another area of knowledge, along with biology, team sports, and French, that would make me a more well-rounded adult. This view, no doubt, was reinforced by the fact that nearly all my friends also took either piano or voice lessons. It was not until I was part way through university that I came to understand that the high proportion of my friends who took music lessons was because they were *Mennonite* students taking music lessons, and music and musical education is a high art for Mennonites. Indeed, Mennonite music is a particular type of art firmly entrenched in a Western musical tradition, specifically a church music tradition, whose performativity evokes very specific affects and modes of attention.

Along with the disciplines of history and theology, music as an academic discipline is highly valued in many Mennonite communities, and the scholarly literature about its history in Mennonite congregations and communities around the world is

notably vast.¹⁶ While the very presence of this large body of literature is evidence of the importance of this type of affective performance in a Mennonite ethos, it was never something I was interested in interrogating for my project, nor was I interested in delving into its theoretical depths. Yet just as I was perhaps remiss in ignoring my own musical history, its importance to Mennonites irrupted in particular ways in conversations and interactions during fieldwork. The taken-for-grantedness of music – its familiarity – is unremarked upon in an overt sense, while its significance, and the affective role it plays in Mennonite life, acts as a ground of sorts, a foundation forged in childhood, very much in a domestic, quotidian sense. The importance of music is expressed through the “necessity” of piano or voice lessons for children, the casual hymn sung or hummed during work, carol-singing during family holiday gatherings, and the high value placed on individual musical skill. Iterations of all of these events, values and performances are enmeshed in discussions of identity, religion and the church, and morality.

As a teenager who at that time attended a Mennonite church, I was part of a rotating monthly schedule of pianists who accompanied the hymns during church services – a task I dreaded to my core. The act of playing piano as one hundred people sang along – of *leading* them in song, caused my palms to sweat and my hands to shake to the degree that a temporary amnesia fell over me, and I could no longer decipher what the black dots on the page came to symbolize. My greatest fear and source of anxiety was making a mistake, somehow hitting the incorrect notes, and, even worse, having to stop and begin the song again. These were tense times, and I can say happily that there were few times when I did make any remarkable errors in my playing. Yet the anxiety

¹⁶ See, for example, Dueck (2011); Epp and Weaver (2005); Klassen (2008).

which seemed entrenched within me and caused my hands to tremble was an internalized expectation of musical competence: I was expected to play well. Pianists in church were not chosen arbitrarily, and, in true passive-aggressive form, if they did *not* perform adequately, there would be critiques from church members from the safety of their cars on the drive home.

What was perhaps most telling during my bouts of performance anxiety would be my parents' deployment of a common, if not overt, understanding about the "performative" character of a church service. They would tell me, "Remember: it's not a performance. It's about praising God." This simple discursive turn was supposed to alter the intent of the music: it was never supposed to be "for" anyone or their own enjoyment, but rather "for" God, an act of praise and worship. This purpose was what musical gifts, talents – given by God – were to be used for. As a result, accompanying hymn singing in church should not be seen as an occasion for anxiety about the quality of one's personal achievement or "performance."

A distinction between this "mode" of playing piano and playing at concerts or recitals was evident in the clear division of audience responses in the different venues. At recitals, held in secular venues like school auditoriums, I received applause for my efforts at performing correctly. Conversely after a hymn in church, or following an offertory (a musical piece played while ushers collect money from the congregants), the congregation remained still: to applaud would be to acknowledge the music as a "performance" for the enjoyment of an audience, while to remain silent would be to acknowledge the music as "for God," who did not need applause.

Here, it seems, is a point of tension, exemplified through the performance of music in church, yet running thematically throughout many Mennonite lives. It is frustration that derives from the impossibility of relegating one's life and body completely to the will of God. Or, more aptly, frustration arises from an ideology that views lives and bodies as gifts from God and therefore sanctified. This understanding of one's body and talents renders lived experience and materiality problematic. While the idiom "it's not a performance" would suggest that God does not expect perfection when you play worshipful and praiseworthy music for the Divine, the human "listeners" nonetheless uphold high aesthetic standards since one must strive to make one's musical offering to God on behalf of the community as perfect as possible. It also works as a subtle critique of the performer's presumed worldly vanity: to feel anxiety would be to acknowledge the desire for appraisal for the performance itself, as opposed to forgetting one's own pride and desire not to be embarrassed in public, playing solely to praise God.

ART AND THE IMAGINARY

There is a vein of pride in Mennonite self-descriptions of their musical ability: talent as a musician is authorized as a praise-worthy character trait. This valuation of music, however, contrasts to other artistic forms of expression, and, in particular, visual art. Producing art, or, more aptly, individual expression, in a Mennonite context is paradoxical, and ideas about art intersect with notions of beauty, individuality, ethical expression, and moral authority. It is music, for Mennonites, that is perhaps the most potent and deliberate location of both "individuality" and "skill." Music is both a means

of individual expression and God’s gift. This focus on music, however, does raise the ire of some Mennonite visual artists, who also critique the Mennonite narrative that singing is “legitimate” because of its “praiseworthy” character.



13 The Bloody Theatre \ Meg Harder & Dan Root

A modern retelling of Mennonite-Amish martyrdom with music and live projection art.

The Bloody Theater, also known as *Martyr's Mirror*, is a collection of stories about Anabaptist martyrs. It was first published in Holland in 1660 and historically was an important text in Mennonite and Amish communities, including the Region of Waterloo. **Dan Root** and **Meg Harder**, both of Mennonite-Amish backgrounds, are interested in critically reinterpreting stories found within this text through folk music and illustrated projections that speak to contemporary issues and diverse audiences.



Their collaborative performance will feature an original song composed by Root making its debut at #NightShift16, accompanied by live illustrations created by Harder and projected from behind a simple white sheet.

SHARE



- 📍 In the basement of Adventurers Guild (36 Ontario St. N.)
- 🕒 Sat Nov 5th, 10-minute shows at 8, 9, 10 & 11pm
- 🏠 Indoor
- 🚫 Limited Space
- 🚻 Washrooms
- 👁️ No touching!
- 🎭 Performance

Figure 2.1 Advertisement for the collaborative art installation “The Bloody Theatre” by emerging artists Meg Harder and Dan Root at Night/Shift in Kitchener, October 2016. Note the prominent use of images from the *Martyrs Mirror*, linking this martyrological past with Mennonite/Amish identity.

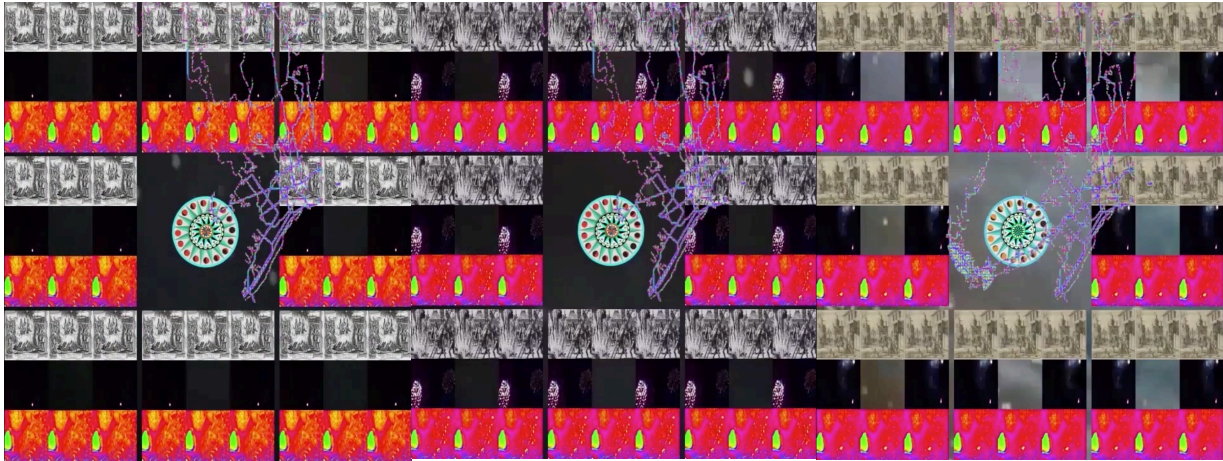


Figure 2.2 Stills from the video portion of an art installation entitled “Block Two” by Mennonite artist Julia Gingrich, at Ryerson University in May 2014. Again, note the series of stills from the Martyrs Mirror in the top frames, once again linking Mennonite identity with a history of martyrdom.

One visual artist I met at a Mennonite studies conference summed it up with brevity in a conversation we had over lunch: her work, performed at a later event at the conference, was an intense performance piece that combined spoken word, projected video that looped photography from various locales and centuries, and music. It traced the life of a song called Katyusha she had heard in Ukraine sung spontaneously by a group of elderly Ukrainian women when she was visiting the site of the former Mennonite colonies there. Additionally, the song was used to solidify nationalist sentiment during the Cold War. It was also most famously recorded by a singer named Anna German whose mother was Mennonite, and had married a German national. Tracing the interweaving strands of this song and its singers across time and space, the performance piece was nothing short of incredible.

My discussions with Mennonite visual artists, including those working in digital media, sculpture, paint, and textile and multi-media art, has led me to the conclusion that those choosing to embrace the “hostile territory” of making art as a Mennonite invite the use of narratives about talent or artistic “gifts” as sites of both praise and critique by other Mennonites. A “Mennonite artist,” said a painter I talked to over her paintings, is not always a commensurable identification. In fact, “Mennonite” and “artist,” she continued, seem to be separate identities altogether, drawn upon at different times, spaces, and places to negotiate the particular needs of the context. This artist suggested that the one identity does not inform the other. The unease in bringing “Mennonite” and “art” together is perhaps a postmodern phenomenon, made palpable to some through the use of earlier narratives that deride the individualist nature of artistic pursuits. What is more, artistic endeavours outside the flourishing genre of literary art, often get short shrift for their focus not on The Word, which I will discuss at length in the following chapter, but on more abstract, visual representation.

My questions regarding why these visual artists felt their “identities” to be fractured were answered with recourse to some familiar Mennonite tropes, and personal struggles to either overcome them, revise them through a creative use of historical narratives, or compartmentalize them as unwanted and parochial. Above all, those Mennonite artists I talked with referred to the frequent Mennonite critique of non-functional forms of artistic expression (“art for art’s sake”) because of their perceived frivolity. The artists’ responses to this trope were usually sarcastic in nature, mockingly suggesting that painting, for instance, was individualistic, selfish, and useless. “Why paint a landscape,” one artist said, ironically parodying the criticisms of older

Mennonites, “when you can just go outside and look at it?” The “practicality” or “usefulness” of visual art is often suspect for Mennonites who understand time in terms of the mode of productive labour. From this perspective, as this artist continued to explain, labour to produce ordered agricultural landscapes enables success and salvation. Activities, like painting, that take up time but produce no action on the world do not conform to this time-modality and are rejected as “useless” or unnecessary.

These are, of course, generalizations and distortions of what may seem to be rigorous and historical facts. However it is precisely because these attitudes are *not* facts and maintain power in the imaginary that attention must be paid to them. It was through recourse to such tropes, narratives, and/or idioms that artists discussed their unease with the bifurcation of identity: Mennonite/artist. While there are ample examples of the vivacity of Mennonite visual art throughout the long history of European Anabaptism, these seem to be discarded in the construction of self-narratives that, chiefly, value productivity and community over individualistic pursuits.

The discomfort associated with artistic production is commensurable with the uneasy and precarious movement into new social and cultural worlds that many contemporary Mennonites negotiate. To revisit the self-narrative of “the quiet in the land,” let us look at the brochure helpfully entitled *Who Are The Mennonites?* published by Mennonite Church Canada – a church conference associated with more ‘liberal’ theological leanings. The brochure offers, in its first paragraph, a description of Mennonite Contributions to Society. The title of the paragraph is itself a telling appellation for a group of people keen to legitimize themselves in “Canadian” society as producers and contributors. Here the author writes:

In many ways, Mennonites are like everyone else. They are farmers, businessmen, teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, carpenters, politicians, social workers – almost any profession and trade you might name. ... The Mennonites of Manitoba are well known for their efforts in such diverse fields as education, music, health care, and emergency disaster services.

I would suggest, however, that the specifics of this list suggest that Mennonites are not quite “like everybody else,” and the “diversity” of fields of engagement is a particularly Mennonite selection. There are key components here that signal an authorized set of professions or means of engagement with the world: education, health care, social services, and music are all the “most” acceptable vocations, as they reify Mennonite values and being-in-the-world most fully. These professions represent service for the betterment of society, a strong communal orientation, and a rejection of individualist pursuits and capitalist tendencies. This hierarchy of professions also represents an ideal, and there is considerable community conflict generated by a sort of self-righteous judgement on vocational pursuits deemed too “worldly,” “self-indulgent,” or “un-Christian.” While the above quote does indeed suggest that there are Mennonite “businessmen,” and, indeed, there are monumentally successful and wealthy business owners, I would contend this is a precarious position to hold, and those pursuing such ends are not universally lauded for their ability to make money *for themselves*.

Here, too, lies the problematic nature of Mennonite artistic endeavours that are not musical; they lie in the midst of the “disturbing category” of visual beauty (Brandt as cited in Klassen 1994) and its expression. The boundaries of art and the effects and affects of its expressions are giving meaning because of its relation to worldliness (often drawn around the perceived frivolity of beauty, however defined), and the *ability* to be artistic is equally bound within such frameworks. This is not to say that visual art,

expression, and affective response are absent from Mennonite lives, but their presence in Mennonite lives is authorized in very specific ways, and the effects of this authorization frame the Mennonite imaginary in specific ways. Abilities – “gifts from God” – are not arbitrary, but are cultural productions that are authorized through recourse to theology, and reified through narratives of praise. In other words, “talent” is appropriate as long as it praises God, and does not engender individual pride.

These are, of course, generalizations, and the scope and beauty of Mennonite art is generous. There are, however, narratives that continue to haunt Mennonite imaginations, and have been sources of troubling struggles of expression and desire. One such powerful narrative is given particular vitality in a contemporary postmodern context in which feminist critique has framed “arts and crafts” as illegitimate art, mired as it is in patriarchal systems of power (Buszak 2011). Arts and crafts, or handiwork, is most often associated with women and women’s work in the home, and includes embroidery, textile work, quilting, knitting, and other needlework. Such projects require particular skill in their rendering, but work simultaneously as objects of beauty that showcase such skill, and objects for practical use. For many Mennonite women, “art” was constituted in this way: as handicrafts that are both practical and skilfully executed.

One of these crafts, quilting, has become something of a Mennonite symbol, particularly in Ontario, where “Mennonite” or “Amish” quilts fetch high prices at auction sales for their supposed authenticity and skilled craftsmanship. As Gingrich (2014) notes about the act of quilt-making, it holds multiple meanings as a sign of “homespace” and feminism, and as a site of reproduction for the myth of the noble settler. That quilts hold “feminist” meaning points to a more recent re-visioning of craft, and specifically

handicrafts, as sites of resistance and power, and indeed, the quilt and quilt-making are artistic, communal, and women-centred and object activities and object.

Swiss Mennonite settler women held a precarious position, on one hand being complicit in the oppression of indigenous women, and the other holding only a small sphere of control over the outcome and impact of their lives. They conveyed their affective inner worlds through pattern and colour, and their quilts, made of “disparate and recycled elements organized into a square,” or those modeled after them, might be seen as acts of rebellion to history’s arrangements for setting out the past in a linear form. The material quilt object is ordered and bound, but is none the less creative (Gingrich 2014; 38).

The complexity of meanings in such arts and crafts objects, and their subsequent public life as a fetishized commodities, offer a compelling example of the intentionality of objects of artistic expression. For Mennonite women, the quilt was a creative object and process and an authorized site where particular skills were encouraged and developed. It was also a practical thing, one imbued with history and past lives, and with communal work. In this way, certain forms of labour and work are seen as artistic, and authorized only if they produce certain types of objects. These objects – and their materiality – are then used to produce worlds of meaning, creating boundaries around things “worldly” and thus authorizing their rejection. It is the production of these worlds, and boundaries around them, then, that authorize certain self-narratives, sets of skills and aptitudes for practical production that are praise-worthy.

The complexity of meanings in such handiwork, and their subsequent public life as a fetishized commodity, offers a compelling example of the intentionality of objects of artistic expression. For Mennonite women, the quilt was a creative object and process – and an authorized one – where particular skills were encouraged and developed. It was also a practical thing, one imbued with history and past lives, and with communal work.

This work and labour, authorize how certain forms of it are seen as artistic, and authorized only if it produces certain types of objects. These objects – and their materiality – are then used to produce worlds of meaning, creating boundaries around things “worldly” and thus rejected.

Mennonites thus do not perceive themselves as being entirely subject to God, but work at negotiating a subjectivity in relation to others and other worlds. This happens in a variety of contexts through the production of narratives that both produce and reproduce affects and affective objects within the Mennonite imaginary, and situate Mennonites themselves within larger affective contexts. Self-narratives, and the use of the past, are not as insular as Mennonites may think, particularly since these narratives are enacted in material worlds: in landscapes that “others” move through and thus enfold in broader narratives, and through artistic endeavours that insert Mennonite communities into the “public” domain through the consumption of their goods (quilts or furniture), or stories written about them through the proliferation of Mennonite authors.

Mennonite visual artists, more so than authors, foreground history explicitly, collapsing the time frame of Anabaptism, and bringing it close. The repeated use of images from the *Martyrs Mirror* in artists’ work (and, notably, artists of both Russian and Swiss background), along with public information (like pamphlets), signal that martyrdom and martyrology is of primary importance in the Mennonite imaginary, and that this radical history is *the* defining moment of identity in Mennonite life and ethos. It is artists and historians publishing “promotional” material that create the narrative that martyrdom is important for Mennonite lives, one that revives a narrative of radical faith.

While for some Mennonites this discarded, more “radical” history is useful for reimagining an alternative more “radically Mennonite” way of being in the world, the sanitizing of their profile is as much a public project as a self-directed one. That is, I would contend that Mennonite self-narratives, of self-praise, or the story of what we value, contribute, and have talent for, the so-called “Contributions to Society” as the brochure suggests, are forged in public. These positive narratives are created in the worlds to which Mennonites have moved, and at the borders and margins where encounters with others occur. It is “appropriate” to claim that Mennonites are good at certain things, but these things are also subject to the appropriateness of other narratives that shape their “public” character: migrant, national, and capitalist narratives.

In line with the arguments of Ochs and Capps (2001) and Good (1994), such narratives can be accessed as a resource in bringing experience to awareness, of mediating a subjective involvement in the world and of providing a “representation” of experience in which events are given meaningful and coherent order (Good 1994). While personal narrative both emerges out of, and gives shape to, experience, Ochs and Capps (2001) argue further that narrative and self are inseparable, asserting “the self” to be broadly comprehended as an “unfolding reflective awareness of being-in-the-world, including a sense of one’s past and future” (Ochs and Capps 2001; 21). Narrative provides, as Myerhoff (1978) argues, a sense of constancy and recognisability, attending to disruptions, a “breach” of the commonplace (Mattingly 1998).

The most urgent need for constancy arises out of the Christian “problem” of incarnational living. And, as Fenella Cannell (2007:7) notes, “Although most writing on Christianity in the social sciences has focused on its ascetic aspects, on the ways in which

Christian teaching tends to elevate the spirit above the flesh, Christian doctrine in fact always also has this other aspect, in which the flesh is an essential part of redemption.” The flesh, the bodily, the worldly, take a central place in the unfolding of Mennonite narratives, arising out of the generative space in the failure of incarnational living: of the necessity of land, and the complexities of claiming it and rejecting it in favour of a heavenly home, the immediacy of art and artistic expression over its perceived frivolity and individuality, and the affective response to making, hearing, and experiencing music.

Praising God in the space of a church, a gathered body, reaffirms for this gathering the necessity of a divine presence – moreover, one that leads – in mitigating the paradoxes of Christian life. Singing hymns of praise that were sung years ago in situations of migration and distress reproduce the bonds of community and its sense of constancy and recognisability: “for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore” as the hymn suggests.

The narratives that are produced through historical analysis create Mennonite identity itself, and, in the process, make coherent the contradictions of Christian life. These narratives, and the negotiation of them, pose further questions about who has authority over Mennonite lives. To whom do Mennonites feel they are subject, and how do narratives of authority become a) public, and b) authorized narratives? The authority granted to certain narratives is, in a significant sense, tied to texts, to the written word. Whose story gets told, when, and under what circumstances is situated within the broader narrative of Mennonites as people of The Word.

CHAPTER THREE

HEARING THE WORD

INTRODUCTION

The message, sermon, or meditation characterizes the climax of the church service. Hearing the word involves listening to a speaker expound on theology, or provide exegetical direction from biblical passages. Hearing the Word, meant in the dual sense of attending to the authoritative speech of a church leader and the bible as the Word of God, the most authoritative and definitive voice, is the performance and reiteration of the Anabaptist tenet of *sola scriptura*, the positioning of the bible as central and authoritative for faith and life (Yoder 1981). While these Anabaptists reformed the Catholic views on biblical interpretation, and thus, community, Anabaptists, as Christians, continued to wrestle with the Incarnation, the essential ambiguity in Christian thought of the separation of God and humanity, the “human Christ and divine Logos [Word]” (Leach 1983; 75).

This particular ambiguity of Christianity plays out in Mennonite lives where a deference towards Logos exerts a strong, and, perhaps, literal pressure. In this chapter, I discuss the ways that the primacy of the Word – in various iterations – pulls lives, shapes discourses, and pushes against that Word. These dynamics, of course, produce sites of tension, and I explore, in this chapter, the process of authorization – the ways certain Mennonite responses to the problem of incarnational living become authoritative. This, too, has particular effects, and I explore the silencing of certain voices, how certain acts of speech and ways of speaking are erased in favour of those that are authorized. While Mennonites claim an ideology of pacifism and non-violence, the reality is often its opposite, where the exigencies of authorization are violent. Responses to this tension, too, are generative of Mennonite practices – some new, some old – in which speech acts are deployed either to reify power structures to manage particular forms of community or escape from those structures.

There is ambiguity around the idea that Mennonites are people of “the book”; the reference, primarily, is towards the bible, yet there is an “other” book whose legacy – in abstraction and literal weight – shapes Mennonite lives to an equal, if not greater, degree. The *Martyrs Mirror*, a collection of accounts of Christian martyrs from the early church to the Protestant Reformation published in 1660, documents the stories of those martyred for their faith. For Anabaptists, its centrality and prominence of place signals the theological importance of witness, of a willingness to sacrifice the body in order to most faithfully live a Christian life, to suffer and die as Christ did.

Most prominent in this book are accounts of martyrs whose tongues were screwed down or cut out entirely, in order that they might no longer speak: in losing speech, they

lost their most potent weapon. Speech acts, therefore, those that offer testimony, figure significantly for Mennonites in their martyred history, and my discussion of Hearing the Word takes into account this significant broadening of “the word” to include acts of speech. Framing the discussion in this chapter is a comment I heard from John, who, in describing the effects and affects of his church’s response to his divorce, explained that it was “a silence that you feel.” With tears in his eyes as he spoke, he positioned his hands on his chest as if to simultaneously protect and locate the bodily sensation of this rebuke.

John positioned the inverse of “word,” silence, as a bodily – fleshy – response. As the separation of humans from the divine in Christian thought offers the possibility of attending to ambiguity and the richness in its navigating, understanding the ambiguity between hearing the word and silence is also productive. Indeed, it seems that attempts at living this incarnation are visible in the Mennonite vacillations between word and silence, authenticity and the marginal, perception and the imaginary.

These attempts, however, are entangled with the wielding of authority and power: while the early Anabaptists proclaimed biblical interpretation to be available to all through the mediating effects of community, the wielding of such power was uneven. For Christians, words “do” things, and in this chapter, I trace how words, for Mennonites, create community as injurious and/or life-giving. Tracing how the early Anabaptists positioned their theology in relation to the authority of the bible, I discuss how the authority of the bible becomes an authority of the pulpit, particularly through the theological concept of *Gelassenheit* or “yieldedness.”

This authority then becomes a power enacted through speech acts: who can speak, the effects and affects of silencing, and how one speaks signal “otherness,” where words

connote a struggle between high and low, rural and urban, sacred and profane, educated, and uneducated. Again, these ambiguities come to be fruitful, and out of the exertions of power in the name of the authoritative Word come new ways of speaking and writing, where words offer the means of escape from repressive and oppressive communities. The wealth of Mennonite literary authors is situated within a tradition that emphasizes the word, but draws from the history of martyrdom to voice witness, testimony, leaning in to the ambiguity of the Incarnate, between flesh and spirit. The Anabaptist martyrs, after all, sacrificed their very flesh and their ability to cry out in witness to their faith. The optics of such sacrifice to Mennonites today is not without a sense of enormity and symbolic and material weight: indeed, as I will explore in the next chapter, the effects of this martyrology can be injurious.

HEARING THE WORD

Magdalene Redekop (2009) writes about the tensions and desires in Mennonite oral culture, particularly in relation to the bible. She suggests that for Mennonites,

There is a historic preference for harmony that comes out of the pacifist tradition, but this goes contrary to a tendency to question that comes out of the tradition of dissent. The experience of language is the place where these tensions are concentrated. A strong desire for surface harmony is belied by the destabilizing impact of oral culture. The experience of orality, in short, goes against the logocentrism in Mennonite writing...that goes back to a view that all other texts are subordinate to scripture. At the extreme of that spectrum this becomes fundamentalism. "In the beginning was the Word," says the Bible (2009).

While the bible as the Word is constructed as authoritative, and those that preach it from the pulpit both take and are given authority, such words, such speech acts, are, like Baptist narratives of conversion, particular narratives created through a way of listening. Here, Charles Hirschkind's (2001) work provides a useful comparison. Looking at the use of sermons on cassette tapes by Muslim men in Cairo, Hirschkind describes how the 'senses' are trained through certain cultural practices to perceive a particular world. As Hirschkind suggests, the disciplinary practice of listening to sermons in this way requires a 'hearing with the heart,' a set of skills honed from infancy in order that the sermon evokes a change – a pattern of ethical responses – the “affective dispositions that endow a believer's heart with the capacities of moral discrimination necessary for proper conduct” (548). Listening to sermons, then, becomes a disciplinary practice that allows contemporary Muslims to relate the senses to the ethical.

Mennonites, too, hone skills in sensory perception and affective response, trained, as Hirschkind suggests, to perceive a “particular world” performed by an authoritative voice behind a pulpit. Indeed, as Kirmayer (2000) offers, performance and interpretation are social processes, where issues of power and legitimacy come into play – whose story gets to be the authoritative one. The construction and re-enactment of authoritative stories is a process not easily reckoned with for Mennonites, but these shifts are innately generative, working to transform and signal an engagement with wider worlds and ways of understanding what it is to “speak.” As Arthur Frank (1995) observes, the speaking of personal stories figures only within postmodern times, and functions as an “ethic of voice,” a reclamation of the capacity to tell one's own story: telling personal stories fulfils a “need for a voice they can recognize as their own” (7).

The identification of an ethical dimension to speaking personal stories confounds the concept of speech in Mennonite worlds, particularly within the church, where the pulpit – and hearing the Word of God from it – carries moral and ethical dimensions that impinge and extrude upon individual and collective lives. As Saris (1995) offers, the relationship between the speech acts of narration, and the institutional frameworks that shape them, emphasizes “both the undeniable creativity inherent in narration and those real power relationships that exist in the social life of narrators” (66). The Word, words, speech, and silence frame how lives become understood as moral and ethical, and reveal the stakes that living immoral or unethical lives hold.

ANABAPTISM AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

In formulating their original manifesto, the early Anabaptists made their revisionist tendencies for the institution of the Christian church apparent. Of primary importance, they felt, was access: biblical literacy should be for everyone. This idea itself had only recently become possible through the technological advancement of the Gutenberg press and the ability to mass-produce text. The willingness of Anabaptists to champion and embrace such technology presents a paradoxical contrast with Mennonites’ frequently negative relationship to technological advancement. At the time of the Reformation, the Mennonite position on access to the bible was revolutionary, and, as the narrative goes, counter-cultural and radically communalist (Snyder 1997; Klaassen 1981).

These early Anabaptists concurred with other Protestant revolutionaries in elevating the bible above the Catholic authorities of popes and councils, but diverged in

understandings of the nature and function of scripture. Anabaptists formulated a view in which the bible provides models for Christian teaching and church organization and order (Klaassen 1981). Splitting from Luther's version that "eternal life" could be granted through contact with the Word of God as inscribed in the bible, Anabaptists chose an interpretation that suggested the bible acted more as a "sign" pointing toward a faithful Christian life. For Anabaptists, "the Scriptures are often referred to as the outer word and the voice of God in the soul as the inner word" (Klaassen 1981; 141). The necessity of a congregation's literacy was apparent if the "outer" led to the "inner." This necessity, however, led to questions regarding interpretation: if everyone was able to read the bible, which interpretation would prove correct, and how could correctness be identified? If the bible was understood to provide a model of a Christian life and the organization of the church, an emphasis was placed on the doctrine of Christ and the apostles. Biblical interpretations are reliable, it was therefore reasoned, if they lead to behaviour that conforms to Christ (Klaassen 1981).

Applying this new interpretation more broadly, this view of the bible also intersected with a critique of the Catholic clergy. Martin Luther's emphasis on a "Priesthood of all Believers" was echoed by the Anabaptists, but to a far lesser extent. Menno Simons, for instance, offered the concept as a means to anticlericalism, arguing that Christian believers must become kings and priests in order to be a chosen people, serving God in love. This service, then, is a witness to God's divine power. As kings, Christians reign with the Word of God rather than "worldly weapons"; the Word is therefore more powerful than wealth, armies, persecution, and death. As priests, Christians are called to live as those sanctified by Christ, emphasizing the moral qualities

of such a life and the importance of self discipline and mutual discipline, the dependence on the power of God's Word, and a willingness to suffer for it (Klaassen 1981).

As Klaassen points out, however, in the centuries intervening between the Reformation and the contemporary era, the agreement upon what such a life might entail for church practice and Christian lives was called into question. Cautiously suggesting that "Mennonites have usually agreed in theory, if not always in practice..." that the priesthood of all believers indicates the church should be a community of believers rather than composed of separate classes of clergy and laity, believers are called to participate in the life of the church, share in mutual discipline, and interpret (together) Scripture and doctrine. Ministers are also to be appointed by community.

It is not surprising that there is a lack of consensus on how such theological concepts play out in lived experience; all theological renderings inevitably have a rich and varied social life. The concept of the primacy and power of the bible continues, however, to be central to Mennonite church life, though in what sense "primacy" and "power" enact themselves differs greatly. The centrality of "God's Word" in Mennonite church life holds the potential of intense problems for individual and communal lives, particularly in its most troublesome iteration, biblical interpretation. The generalities and vagaries of theological concepts like the priesthood of all believers invite interpretations and reinterpretations that vary tremendously, and are entangled – perhaps despite what Mennonite historical narratives may contend – in wider and broader social discussions in the diverse contexts Mennonites have found themselves in.

Of particular resonance with churchgoing Mennonites in a Canadian context since the last quarter of the 20th century (depending on the sort of congregation you attend) is

how The Word figures into constructs of gender and power. Since the early Anabaptist writings on the bible and church leadership are not particularly specific or directive regarding the roles of men and women, this issue is left up to interpretation. Further, because biblical interpretation was considered ‘accurate’ if it conformed to the life of Christ, ideas about the “correctness” of such interpretation – its degree of conformity – were subject to structures of power within the church. The outcomes of such interpretive dissonance have very significant resonances for the lived experiences of contemporary Mennonites, who must navigate an entanglement of biblical authority, institutionalized (and authorized) systems of patriarchy, and eschatological threat as the penalty for an immoral life.

GELASSENHEIT AND THE AUTHORITY OF THE PULPIT

In the midst of these interconnections is the pulpit, an object holding the symbolic weight of both the production and reproduction of authority. It is given agency through the performance of power, such that it imbues certain speech acts with power through its position relative to the speaker. It is, therefore, an object with considerable gravitas within the Christian – and Mennonite – traditions, and it can be an artefact of transformation, of transgression, and condemnation, precisely because of its positionality as a “powerful” object. The meaning accorded to the power of the pulpit is also, of course, enacted through the speaker behind it, and, in many senses, moves beyond the small space of the pulpit on a Sunday morning to encompass whole lives; those authorized to speak from the pulpit must conform to a life worthy of this authorization.

In his comic novel *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, Armin Wiebe's (1984) main character Yasch is at one point deliberating on Forscha Friesen, preaching from behind the pulpit in the community's church. Having gone to school with Forscha, Yasch recalls him as "like the boss in the school," though he can't figure out why, since "he used to play with Plasticine and Dinky Toys on his desk and he was already fourteen. But he was the biggest and the others did what he wanted, even sometimes when they would have liked something different to do" (122). As Yasch sits in the congregation as an adult and looks up at Forscha the Preacher, Yasch, in recalling some of Forscha's more sinister acts, says

I wonder me now how Forscha Friesen can stand there behind the pulpit and talk about Jesus like there is nothing to it. I mean, I would think that such a thing would bother a person. But then it has sometimes fallen me by that maybe Forscha Friesen isn't a person at all (123).

Here the preacher is one whose subjectivity is precarious – not embodying a "truth," perhaps he's not a person at all. The pulpit – an object idealized as a platform from which to speak words of love, kindness, and Christian morality – has been co-opted by someone who does not embody those words. Forscha abuses his power to speak and sway others; for not embodying and enacting the words he speaks from a place of authority, he is imagined as perhaps without subjectivity. The pulpit, in this way, becomes a place and space of contestation, an object imbued with rich symbolic meaning, where, though the performance of speech acts, one's very personhood is enacted.

In the introduction to an edited volume on power and the Anabaptist tradition, Redekop and Redekop (2001; vii) argue that "power" moved from a "radical and innovative stance" of opposition to the power of the Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation to a "peaceable people who rejected military service and practiced a

communal ethic of love and *Gelassenheit* toward each other” has, as they argue, the potential to yield its opposite: “and, even, worse, can provide a deceptive, benign cover behind which naked power may operate as though invisible.” In other words, they suggest that the paradox in the Mennonite view of power and authority is that mundane power is rejected and renounced yet not forsaken.

What might these complex iterations of power and authority mean for Mennonites? Pamela Klassen (1994), in a rare piece of ethnography on Russian Mennonites, describes the emerging narratives of two elderly Russian Mennonite women living in southern Ontario. Part of Klassen’s task, she explains, is to move out of the “motherhood” and “marriage” plots of Euroamerican women’s stories that only allow centrality to romance, courtship, and marriage. In talking with these two women, both of whom grew up in the Soviet Union and lived through World War II in Europe, Klassen invokes the spectre of the selfless and silent woman: “for some women, the struggle to reconcile their internalized sense of femininity with their lived experiences as women continues today – the selfless woman is not a fitting model, but they don’t yet know who is to take their place” (Klassen 1994; 11). One of the women, Katja, has chosen to remain single, causing consternation within her church for not “fitting in” to expected models of family. The other, Agatha, preaches, her religious life taking on public form. Despite this rather obvious publicity, Agatha agrees with her detractors that men should be behind the pulpit, arguing that women’s *bodies*, adorned in make-up and fancy clothes, are far too distracting for male congregants (Klassen 1994).

The degree of involvement of women in the church is as varied as the denominations and church affiliations that Mennonites congregate under, with some

churches having long “gotten over it” and moving on to questions of ordaining LGBTQ leaders, while other churches adhere strictly to male-only leadership. To a significant extent, I would contend that these differences reflect wider social and cultural contexts, though, curiously, there is a distinct lack of acknowledgment as to the power of those contexts in shaping theological discussions. In Canada, one of the more politically liberal countries where Mennonites have found themselves, a significant number of Mennonites are university educated and “worldly”; as such, their congregations reflect the progressive and humanist ethos that a liberal arts education affords. “Conservative” and “liberal” issues are, in Canada, most frequently reflected in a rural/urban divide, one that has significant import on inter-Mennonite relations, and one which I will discuss at length further on.

The marker of true discipleship – of the true Mennonite woman – was an embodiment of yieldedness and submission. Marlene Epp (2008) writes that Mennonite perspectives on forgiveness, obedience, and suffering have been interpreted with very gender-specific meanings for women dealing with violence. In this interpretation, she continues, “biblically mandated submission became a Mennonite woman’s highest virtue, even while her husband’s exertion of power was an abuse of scripture” (Epp 2008; 112). Katie Funk Wiebe (2007), in looking at her own family’s burial practices, provides a typical excerpt from a woman’s obituary written by her husband, extolling the virtues of Mennonite womanhood: “Her short life was very difficult. She had raised 12 children and, in spite of the extreme poverty she had to cope with, she never complained about or bemoaned her lot in life. She bore the cross she was given in silence” (216).

For now, it will suffice to say that as more Mennonite women became educated or chose to work outside of the home as reflected in the broader transitions of Canadian society, the desire for involvement in churches in leadership positions became more present. Women with musical skills (and increasingly, education) wanted to lead music in church services, and women with university education and oratorical skills were increasingly seen as potential preachers. Yet these transitions were not achieved without discomfort. I grew up in a small Mennonite community where I went to church with everyone in my class at school; my mother, however, unlike all the other mothers in the community, was not “from there,” having grown up in an urban context in southern Ontario. She felt, as she describes, always an outsider, particularly as someone who worked outside the home. My father’s home congregation, which we attended during my childhood, became an untenable place to worship, as both my parents and a small group of like-minded individuals, left over the church leadership’s intransigent stance on women in leadership.

As a family we began attending a Mennonite church in the city where women were free to lead in any capacity; women’s leadership was therefore something I took for granted through the rest of my high school years, and into university. Subsequently, after graduating with my first university degree, I discovered, much to my great dismay that I, as a woman, would not be allowed to participate in my grandmother’s funeral. Having moved to British Columbia several years previously, my grandparents began attending a Mennonite Brethren church there, a denomination that was not yet prepared to allow women behind the pulpit. This rule, apparently, included grandchildren speaking at a grandparent’s funeral. This exclusion struck me as particularly egregious, considering

my grandmother had only two grandchildren: my brother and myself. As a woman, I was not permitted to read the scripture passages at the funeral, nor was I allowed to be a pallbearer. If this writing seems tinged with bitterness, it is because, nearly fifteen years later, the acrimony of being excluded in this way does indeed remain.

I felt (and still feel) a deep tinge of anger toward the system/institution that would not permit me a public expression of grief and loss for my grandmother. Yet this anger was something I used to connect and empathize with some Mennonite women I encountered during fieldwork who shared similar affective responses to this “leadership issue.” Of course, controversy over gender roles is deeply mired in social contexts that stretch beyond the Mennonite world. My education in a secular university in part framed my desired approach to gender in the Mennonite church: if women are as educated as men, and live as “public” lives, why should their leadership skills be questioned?

Helen asked similar questions concerning her role as a chaplain, situating her own narrative within a dynamic and mutable social world that also extended beyond Mennonite communities, informing men and women of shifting roles, and negotiation about authorities. Helen was approaching her 80s when I talked with her, and had been a widow for a number of decades. Her role as housekeeper and mother had changed drastically following the death of her husband, and her subsequent decision to go to university. She graduated with accreditation to work as a chaplain, and in this role, she was able to care for the spiritual lives of patients and residents in long-term care facilities, medical institutions, and nursing homes. In these settings she developed countless relationships built on an earned trust and intimacy. She connected with the webs of family, friends, and support persons that enmeshed the patients and residents, and worked

diligently to be responsive and attentive to the spiritual needs of those with whom she interacted.

In light of the strength and significance of the relationships she formed, Helen was particularly disappointed and angry on numerous occasions when she, as a woman, was not allowed to conduct funerals for residents or patients who had died and had previously requested her to officiate at their services. Helen described occasions when she met with residents and their families and friends to “pre-plan” their funeral services, and Helen would be asked to read a bible passage, pray, or even preach the sermon. Her efforts were frequently halted, however, when the leadership of the resident or patient’s home congregation (whom Helen always identified as men), “took over” Helen’s tasks, suggesting it was inappropriate for her to perform any such public role.

More deplorable, perhaps, from the perspective of these male Mennonite leaders, was Helen’s status as a widow (for all intents and purposes a “single woman,”) a position apparently fraught with even more danger. She recalled a male church leader questioning the “appearance” of a woman sitting alone at the front of the church pews (where leaders of the service typically sit) or in a row of chairs next to the pulpit, also often reserved for leaders. This, Helen mused, was “quite ridiculous,” particularly given her age – she was in her 70s at the time, hardly “dangerous” as a sexual being. Yet Helen’s stories are suggestive of a perceived entanglement of speech acts and bodies. Her stories remind us that it is the bodies that do the speaking that also represent the threat of temptation by worldly desires.

Helen’s stories are also embedded in the theological concept of *Gelassenheit*, one that, though predating the early Anabaptist movement, became its “basic attitude.”

(Friedman 1955). While there is some difficulty in translating its conceptual fullness from German to English, its ending “-heit,” connotes a state of being. As Friedman describes, *Gelassenheit*, encompasses self-surrender, self-abandonment, resignation and yieldedness to God’s will, a peace/calmness of mind, and the passive opening to God’s will, including the readiness to suffer for the sake of God. *Gelassenheit* is an orientation, continues Friedman, a self-abnegation, and subjective demarcation. Although the concept was first noted by Christian mystics in the Middle Ages, the Anabaptists utilized its conceptualization, and could not have achieved martyrdom without it. In the 1950s when Friedman described this concept, he also linked it to a contemporary notion of pietism, writing: “The *Stillen im Lande* [Quiet in the Land] practice *Gelassenheit*, that is, aloofness from the turmoil of life and strife. The world is left to itself, and all activism, i.e. the application of love to the shaping of life, becomes reduced to a mild morality” (Friedman 1955; 448).

It could be argued that the martyrdom of the Anabaptists could not have occurred had it not been for this fundamental “orientation” towards a readiness to suffer for God’s sake. Yet, as Friedman alludes to, in its intersection with the narrative of “Quiet in the Land,” yieldedness becomes aloofness, a “mild morality.” In its more egregious forms, this theological concept is open to criticism from those, like Helen, who have been subject to its use by “abusive tyrants” (Redekop 1993), and the “yielding” of its opposite: naked power operating as though invisible.

ACTS OF SPEECH

The “naked power” that Friedman alludes to here finds expression through certain acts of speech, and, perhaps more importantly, through silence. The “Quiet” in the Land (or, as the German *Stillen* also implies, a stillness) takes on an affective resonance, where silence and stillness become virtuous, both as a historical means of self-preservation and a way of mediating power. In “the world” the strategies of silence and isolationism were deployed, again as Friedman states, to leave “the world to itself” yet within Mennonite communities, the effects and affects of silencing were and continue to be woven into patterns of authority and the wielding of power.

The “wielding” of silence gains potency in a context in which deference is given strongly to hearing the Word, and, as in Christian thought, being transformed by it. This is particularly true in Christian denominations that foreground the conversion from unbeliever to believer, using particular rhetoric techniques to achieve getting “saved.” This is an area relatively well-covered by anthropologists of Christianity: Susan Harding (1987), for instance, examines the persuasiveness of Baptist narratives of conversion, suggesting the rhetorical strategy employed is a dialogue, both an argument for self-transformation, and a method to achieve it; Tanya Luhrmann (2012) attends to evangelical Americans who, seeking an intensely personal God, work at hearing God’s voice in direct ways and thereby making God real; and Simon Coleman (2007) looks at the conservative Protestant Christian perception of sacred words as key to their faith, regarding them as “thinglike” in the expectation that their deployment will produce tangible results.

While Mennonite narratives are perhaps not as formalized or stylized as Baptist rhetorical techniques (with the exceptions of those Mennonite churches and denominations most influenced by Baptist theology and rhetoric), the Word, as preached in a church service, works similarly as perlocutionary, localized, and performative. Preaching is where identity is enacted in a very formalized setting, and similarly, preaching encompasses past, present, and future, in a particular narrative. What is particular about the Mennonite relationship to words and the Word, however, is the powerful ambiguity and concomitant tension between words and silence, and the entrenchment of this ambiguity in a history and ethos of martyrdom.

HOW YOU SPEAK

Language, as a particular performance of education, works to signal the stratification of class, and this is never more apparent than in the uses of Low German in Russian Mennonite communities. Mennonite Low German is a particular language used by Mennonites of Dutch ancestry, including those who migrated to Canada by way of Russia, or the territory that is present-day Ukraine (Epp 1993; Reimer et al 1983). The history and use of Low German has political qualities, too: since it is not a written language, Low German is thoroughly enmeshed in discourses about education, class, and “intellectualism” as a result of its orality. At the national levels in Canada and the US, its use as a “Mennonite language” is often contested by leaders of the Mennonite Church conferences for being divisive. These leaders see Low German as a “cultural marker” that serves not to unite so-called religious Mennonites who were born into the church, but rather to exclude Mennonites-by-choice through its in-group separatism. In other words,

speaking Low German marks Mennonites as “ethnic,” and therefore signals a claim to authenticity and power over those unable to speak it.

This danger of exclusivity, of course, is a valid concern for church leaders; yet the rejection of cultural or “ethnic” markers such as language in the forging of identity – either religious or not – ignores the meanings and loyalties that language can signify. In addressing the frequent (though increasingly infrequent) use of Low German in so-called “Mennonite ethnic literature,” Magdalene Redekop (2009) attends to the complexities that such a presence entails:

It is true that the interpolation of Low German words in English texts has the potential...to become a shibboleth separating Mennonites from the world. It is also true, however, that the use of Low German sets up divisions within the Mennonite community. The fact that Low German words keep bubbling up into the texts of even secular Mennonites like Miriam Toews has to do with the relation of Low German to class divisions that are denied by the theological rhetoric of community. The insertion of even one opaque Low German word can have the effect of making power imbalances visible.

The presence of a language that is particular to one group of Mennonites, as Low German is to Russian Mennonites, works in part as a cultural marker that is simultaneously revered and contested, particularly as it is fast becoming arcane in the Canadian context. The language, Plautdietsch or Plattdeutsch in German translates as “flat German,” or Low German, a wonderfully dual appellation that signifies its origins in the European Low countries of Holland and the Vistula River Delta of Prussia, and its use as an everyday, “lowly,” and earthy language – an unwritten one – in opposition to the High German spoken only in Church. This language was adopted in the 16th and 17th centuries, when Dutch and Belgian Mennonites moved to what is now Poland.

Influenced by the Dutch language and related linguistically to English, the language of East Low Saxon (German) became common in Prussia (Epp 1993).

In the 18th century, Mennonites moved to Russia, (the territory which constitutes the present-day Ukraine) to form two colonies. The first, Chortiza, or Old Colony, was settled by poorer peasants from Prussia who spoke primarily Low German and were for the most part illiterate. The second colony, Molotschna, was settled later by more prosperous migrants from Prussia who had received education in High German and were literate in this language. Their spoken Low German was also influenced by this education. The differences in language use and education that were the result of these migrations are still discernible despite the later migrations by members of both groups to Canada. Among Mennonites in Canada, the remnants of these divisions continue to mark classist discourses (Epp 1993).

The ways Mennonites speak Low German indexes their social status, and the timing and frequency of migrations changed the language to the extent that speakers can identify and evaluate each other (Epp 1993; Reimer et al. 1983). The Mennonites from Chortiza Colony for instance, were the first to move to Canada in the 1870s, carrying their more “peasant” sensibilities and way of speaking Low German with them. Fifty years later, they were joined (uneasily) by migrants from Molotschna Colony, whose Low German was influenced by the literary history of High German. In Manitoba, these groups referred to each other as Kanadier (“Canadians”) and Russländer (“Russians”) respectively. As was frequently stated by the Mennonites I talked with – both those with first hand experience, and those for whom the experience resonated through generations – each group harboured judgments about the other, with the Russländer viewing the

Kanadier as “uneducated peasants” and the Kanadier considering the Russländer to be bourgeois. As Magdalene Redekop (2009) describes, the distinction between the Russländer and Kanadier remains a well-known and clear class marker, with Low German being both a site of comic relief and a sore point.

As an unwritten, “informal” language, the Low German spoken by Russian Mennonites varies tremendously throughout the regions of North and South America into which it was taken, and becomes enmeshed within the variety of other languages that are used by Low German speakers. It is, like all languages, something mutable and living. Formerly, in Canada, Low German was understood as an everyday “mother tongue,” to be a distinct marker of ethnicity and in-group identifier. High German, however, was the formal language of literature and church: my great-aunt, for instance, still refuses to pray in Low German because its “flat” and quotidian character are unsuitable, she asserts, to address the Divine. While these two languages have, over several centuries, come to define “Mennonite communication” in the realms of sacred and profane, the national languages of the countries where Mennonites have migrated have been adopted to varying degrees. The extent to which Russian, Spanish (in Latin America), and English (in Canada) become incorporated into communication is a very direct and public instantiation of unboundedness, of moving into new worlds through new ways of speaking. The negotiation of three languages therefore becomes a deeply political and subjective act.

Though not a “formally” written language, attempts have been made at standardizing Low German in written form, though even native speakers will “read” it in a deeply stilted manner, with a look of utter confusion on their faces. One group of

editors collected numerous Low German stories into a collection, from which the following rather sublime “fable” (in the literal sense of the genre as providing a moral or teaching a lesson) is drawn. This fable that keenly illustrates the mercurial nature of negotiating language in a variety of contexts:

Doa weare mol twee Esel. Eena wea *grauw*, enn dee aundra wea *greiw*. Enn dee Grauwa säd toom Jreiwen: “Fuj, waut du oba fe ‘ne daumelje Kollea hast!” – “Waut!” schreajch dee Greiwa, “meine Kollea sitt nich schmock? Diene sitt noch dusentmol ferretjta!” Enn see funge sich opp earnst aun doll too woare.

Once upon a time there were two donkeys. One was *grauw* [the colour grey, but pronounced “*grauw*” by Molotschna Mennonites] and the other was *greiw* [also grey, but pronounced “*greiw*” by Old Colony Mennonites]. The *grauw* donkey said to the *greiwen*; “Yuck, what a horrible colour your coat is. “What!” cried the *greiwa*, “my colour of coat doesn’t look nice? Yours looks a thousand times more terrible!” And so they started to become angry at each other in earnest.

Een truhoatja Hunt kaum febie, head ‘n Stootje too en säd dann: “Warum streitet ihr euch denn, ihr seid doch beide *grau!*”

A kind/truth-hearted dog passed by, listened for a while and said, [speaking in High German] “Why are you arguing, you are both grey!” [Except using the High German pronunciation of grey]

Oba doafonn ulle onse Esel nuscht weete enn streede wieda.

But about that the donkeys didn’t want to hear and continued arguing.

Mett eenst kaum ‘ne Op aun. Dee haud enn eena Haunt ‘n Amma Foaw enn enn’e aundre een’n Pensel. Enn waut meen Kie, eea dee Esel soorajcht wiste, waut fääjintj, haud dee Op ahn beid *grey* jeforwe enn stunt nu enn freid sich. Dee Esel heade ahr lache, wiste oba nich, daut see äwa ahn lacht – enn lachte met.

All of a sudden a monkey appeared. She had a pail of paint in one hand and a brush in the other. And what do you know, before the donkeys realized what was happening, the monkey had painted them both grey [using the English word] and stood by and grinned, enjoying herself. The donkeys heard the monkey laugh, not realizing she was laughing at them, and laughed along.

Daut oajad dem Hunt, enn hee fung aun too gnorre enn dee Täne too spiele. Nu word dee aundre angst. Dee Op kjneep aules enn enn kroop opp’em Boom. Uck dee Esel

This upset the dog and he started to growl and show his teeth. Now everyone got scared. The monkey gathered herself together and climbed up a tree. The

stuake ut enn kaume aun'n Wota. Aus see
doa nenntjijtje enn sich emm Speajel sage,
bewundade see äahre niee Kollea.

donkeys also ran away and came to some
water. When they looked into the water and
saw their reflection in the mirror, they
admired their new colour.

Enn fonn nu aun meende see sich waut.

And from then on they thought something
of themselves.

(Written by Abram Johann Friesen, date unknown; from Reimer et al 1983: 177)

Here the language negotiations are given life: two (stubborn) donkeys feel each other's shade of "grey" is superior. The dog, and his allegorical authoritative and intellectual status, uses High German to chastise and admonish them for, really, being the same hue – and speaking the same High German language in church. Before long, the dog becomes annoyed at the trickster monkey, who turns the donkeys "English" with her paintbrush, offering the poor, hapless donkeys a new 'identity.' Yet they laugh along, not understanding they are being laughed *at*; the "English" laugh at the donkeys' ignorant peasantry. The donkeys are unable to see themselves as the butt of the joke despite their "posing," or trying to pass, as "English." The dog – the intellectual – is angered by this turn of events, and, in response, causes everyone to "run away," to escape authoritative retribution, and, perhaps, correction. The donkeys, seeing themselves reflected as members of the English community, then commit a staggering trespass: thinking highly of themselves.

This complex tale captures the angst and precarity of social change, expressed through shifts in language use, and the concomitant movement of identity and subjectivity. The unease around the inevitability of this shift became an undercurrent in most Canadian Mennonite communities, as the use of English represented something unstable, something tricky, something with potentially dire consequences for Mennonite

identity. In the 1920s, the government of Manitoba began to change the privileges of school and language autonomy that it had granted to Mennonite settlers in the 1870s. It was demanded of Mennonite schools that they adopt an English standardized curriculum, which was enough of a threat to group cohesion that a large group packed up and left Manitoba for Mexico and Paraguay, desiring only to be left on their own to be able to speak, teach, and learn in German (Friesen 2007). The adoption of this curriculum was, indeed, so significant that it became a touchstone for widespread “cultural” change, or as historian Harold Bender describes it, a narrowing of the “breach” between the surrounding culture and language.

Written in 1957 in an article entitled “The Language Problem,” Bender’s descriptions came at a time when post-war social change was impinging precipitously on Mennonite communities, and the wider Canadian context in general (Loewen 2006). In Canada during the two World Wars, Mennonite communities were looked upon with suspicious anti-German sentiment, and their frequent status as conscientious objectors heightened these suspicions. In the following quotation, Bender’s discussion is rife with the language of angst and an air of educated superiority towards the quotidian negotiations of language that immigrant families must engage with – particularly the “undesirability” of a “foreign accent” that marks them. Bender’s article is also a lament for what he sees as a generational loss, and the conflation of “way of life” with religion. Whatever the case, Bender’s rather static view of language, and the “intelligence” necessary to properly master new ones is illuminating in its revelation of scholarly attitudes during a time of abrupt social change. As such, his diatribe seemingly becomes a real-life version of the fable of the two donkeys.

As long as the breach with the surrounding culture and language was complete and continuous, problems of adjustment, either of the group with the outside world, or of individuals to individuals within the group, seldom arose. However, when the breach has been only partial, or when individuals or a subgroup within the larger group become wholly or partially assimilated to the "outside" language, serious problems of internal adjustment have arisen. At times this has been a problem of adjustment between the generations, so that youth has come into conflict with age, and usually large numbers of the youth have been lost to the group and its faith and way of life.

In such groups where the dialect has displaced the High German, at least relatively, the people have lost almost all touch with the literary German language except Bible reading, and therefore have largely stopped reading serious literature of either religious or secular character, with resulting cultural and religious impoverishment.

Sometimes the theory of the cultural value of using two languages has been propounded to support retention of the "mother tongue." Actually it is probable that only highly intelligent persons who diligently pursue both languages on a literary level profit from this dualism. More common outcomes are the failure to master either language adequately, confusion of vocabulary and ideas, undesirable carryover of idioms from one language to the other (Germanisms in English and Anglicisms in German), and undesirable foreign accents which handicap individuals in their speaking and other expression as they move in public life.

The language problem has often become acute in the pulpit. Without diligent effort few preachers acquire the ability to preach well in a second language after middle age is reached, and they may be unwilling to pay the necessary price to do so. Consequently congregations have suffered in pulpit leadership because of preachers able to use only the older language. With the older generation of members unable or unwilling to accept a new language in the pulpit, they have denied their children and youth the privilege of religious teaching and worship in the new language, the only one which the latter fully comprehend (Bender 1957:35)

Several words and phrases are key in Bender's argument, chief among them his use of the term "breach" to describe the boundary between Mennonite communities, and the contexts in which they find themselves. Bender suggests at the outset that when this "breach" is intact, "adjustment problems" do not arise, and it is only through assimilation through language – through particular acts of speech – that generational conflicts arise, and "youth" are lost. It is High German, he suggests, and the loss of literacy in such

serious intellectual study, that results in cultural impoverishment. Bender further names intelligence as a key to cultural maintenance when suggesting it is only “highly intelligent persons” who are able to manage two languages to the extent that the users not be seen as ridiculous, “undesirably” using idioms and foreign accents in moving into “public life” – that is, the “world.”

He finally conjures the image of the pulpit, the centre of authoritative voice, to call out those older preachers whose grasp of the “new” language is so poor, they deny their children and youth the privileges of religious teaching and learning. The “breach” in this argument is traversed through language that “enters” the community, and creates what Bender terms “internal adjustments.” His recourse to the image of the pulpit and its grounding in authoritative voice contextualizes this shift in internal struggles with the religious life of the community. The reference to language use in the pulpit suggests that in language destabilize the authority of The Word; to be unskilled at a second language “behind the pulpit” is to open the speaker up to ridicule for “undesirable foreign accents.”

The anxieties around language shifts also compel and enact escapes from the community. Contemporary Mennonite writers who trace the variety of “escapes” do so, for instance, through changes in language, referencing as they do the escapes that English language education and access created for many Mennonites moving out into “the world.” Such escapes, as Bender’s arguments elucidate, are always negotiated, always binding and loosing. As Di Brandt explains of her own parents’ and community’s trepidation at the breach of language occurring in their village:

They were worried about the effects of an English school education on their children, the loss of tradition and culture that would result. They were quite right. I’m sad now to see the enormous losses that did occur

in my generation, which I enthusiastically helped to enact, but then, I just couldn't wait to get away, to throw it all away (Brandt 2007:206).

What Brandt and Bender suggest, then, along with those Mennonite writers who have been “shunned” from their communities for their writing (in English, significantly) can attest to, are the high stakes of engaging with certain speech acts, and how the adoption of English – and how proficiently it is spoken – foregrounds a precarious Mennonite subjectivity. How might new words, new ways of speaking of things, change “culture” and “tradition”?

The worry expressed by Brandt's parents and many Mennonites navigating such large social shifts is also tied in to a wider conversation on the role of intellect and education, and how speech acts are put to work in ways that both reject and radicalize the Mennonite “anti-intellectual” narrative. Brandt confesses that she “enthusiastically helped to enact” the loss of culture and tradition that an English school curriculum facilitated; she also “couldn't wait to throw it [culture and tradition] all away.” It is a simultaneous grief and affection that can be evidenced by the use of Low German to both bolster a sort of anti-intellectualism, or, more specifically, a posturing that places one individual above another through academic achievement. In other words, use of English and education risks “thinking something of oneself” and use of Low German unsettles or destabilizes such hubris. Indeed, as Reimer (1980: 225) writes, “in the name of their own language, Mennonites actually identify the very figure of their rhetoric: *plaut dietsch is plain speech.*”

In a postmodernist contemporary re-imagining, Di Brandt contends that the Low German phrase “*Je jeliada, je vechieda*” (the more educated, the more corrupt) in reality offers an alternative way of being-in-the-world, where

Its purpose is not to cultivate stupidity or anti-intellectualism, though it is sometimes understood that way, both inside the community and outside it, and sometimes, alas, practised that way. Its more serious purpose, as I understand it, is to cut through the perceived false posturings of people who have allowed themselves to be split off from their earthy physical/emotional lives through institutionalized ‘higher’ education. This aim is both aesthetic and political: to undercut the pomposity and authority of hierarchical bureaucratic systems and people who represent them, holding themselves ‘above’ other people in some way, in favour of a radically communalist, embodied sensibility, lived flat, *plaut*, close to the ground (Brandt 2007; 105)

Here Brandt hints at the complexity of the language, and how it is situated within wider ethical discourses and affects. It also indicates how such idioms can be read and used in multiple ways, to cohere and insulate those that speak it.

Low German has worked both as a marker of radical communalism and a more “provincial” marker of the uneducated. While both my parents, for instance, fluently speak High and Low German, my father’s family utilized it in a carnivalesque manner, to bring everyone to an “earthy” level of joking and laughter, while for my mother, a “German” immigrant to Canada, speaking anything other than English marked her as a DP – an outsider, a refugee, a “displaced person.” My mother’s ability to speak Low German was an embarrassment as a teenager, yearning desperately as she did for enculturation to the point of being indistinct. She and her siblings craved education and intellect in order to rid themselves of what she calls the “shame” of working class parents with foreign accents.

Low German, in such instantiations, is not useful aesthetically nor politically, and is rejected as such; its entirely oral nature signals, perhaps problematically, a disconnection from intellectual, political, thought. As Redekop (2009) has suggested, Low German is not useful for abstractions: it is “impossible to say anything abstract in

Low German. There are few equivalent words in Low German for abstract concepts such as justice, freedom and love.” As my aunt realized during a conversation we had about Low German, there is also no direct way to say “I love you.” She recalled that telling her parents she loved them necessitated a switch to High German. There is also, however, no word for murder, while descriptive words for the variety of ways one can fall down or pour liquid abound.

Redekop’s suggestion, then, is that such direct language, without recourse to abstract concepts, can work in a carnivalesque sense to revise the tendency toward intellectualization and hierarchy. In Armin Wiebe’s comic novel *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, there is a notable motif or trope of flatness that is evidenced by both the written voice using Low German syntax and literal translation, as well as the setting, and motivations of the characters. Wiebe’s insistence on using the translation of *Plattdeutsch* or *Plautdietsch* as “flat German” rather than “low German,” is telling. It works effectively at re-orienting a rather carnivalesque inversion of “high” and “low” or the “exalted” and the “base” to the horizontal, offering instead, a Mennonite ethics, a morality tale that presents both a counter-cultural mode of being (possibly read as emancipatory), and one that identifies – perhaps reifies – a source of particularly Mennonite trauma. Characters in the novel are decried by Yasch in various iterations for their “vertical movement,” their disconnection. Yasch goes to the *trajcht moaka* (a Mennonite healing practitioner: literally “rightmaker”) for instance, because he isn’t a “high person” like a doctor:

...a doctor is learned so high that people are scared and you have to talk English – sometimes to a Catholic yet! Even the Flat German ones have often learned themselves away from the *Schmalen Lebensweg* – even so far as the United Church! (Wiebe 1984:37)

Both education and religious affiliation (the Catholic Church as “high church”) represent an “elevation” where language itself (having to speak English or orienting oneself to the “English” United Church) necessitates a shift of subjectivity, “learning themselves away” from a “true” self – one lived close to the ground.

As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White (1986) argue through the politics and poetics of carnival transgression, symbolic polarities of high and low (or official and popular, exalted and base) are both destructed and constructed – this becomes a form of “symbolic inversion” (or transgression, or liminality) that acts as a resource providing actions, images, and roles invoked through the “cheerful vulgarity of the powerless as a weapon against the pretence and hypocrisy of the powerful.” The use of Low German, its orality, its “flatness” works, at times, as inversion.

In a fascinating article, Lesley Glendinning (2005) looks at the recent popularity among Mennonite audiences of (apparently hilarious) Low German plays, that, as acts of subversion, present exactly the type of imaginative and elastic model of reality that Redekop calls for. These plays are most often unpublished, performed by amateur theatre groups, and written by women. They are short “vignettes” (sometimes only one page long), defying the conventional theatrical form of beginning-middle-end, with the dialogue switching from Low German, to High German, English, and sometimes French. The characters are excessive examples – caricatures – of silly *men* who provoke the audience to laughter. The plays are written by women playwrights and serve as illustrations, Glendinning attests, to the power (and necessity) of the carnivalesque. The plays demonstrate the process of integration into Canadian society, sometimes a painful negotiation of language, culture, and attenuations of difference. Glendinning suggests

these plays work similarly to Mennonite “folk” songs (again, another differentiation between the “low” – folk songs – and “high” – hymns or sacred choral music); they operate as a mode of inter-ethnic differentiation but also as a means of conveying morality through the expression of ideals and tensions.

The songs and drama “disrupt” by protesting the “totalizing” narratives of authorized culture – a literalist reading of the bible for instance, or the supposed ease of enculturation. The use of flat German in *Yasch*, works, too, to disrupt, and therefore critique totalizing narratives – the hypocrisy of the church, and an inter-ethnic differentiation through hybridized (and incorrect) use of both Low German and English. Ultimately the plays “present an unofficial side of Mennonite life, suggesting that the truth put forward through official doctrine is not the only one, and that there are other ways to apprehend the world than through...the Bible” (Glendinning 2005: 26).

It is this “unofficial” narrative that is becoming a significant part of the Mennonite story, and, as some scholars point out, is not necessarily about “intellect” as it is about imagination. Magdalene Redekop (1985), for instance, offers a reading of the Mennonite crisis of identity and the active silencing of certain forms of creativity, drawing on the imagery of a looking glass to orient her discussion. Rather than focusing on a failure of “intellect,” she describes a failure of the imagination. I would contend that this is a profound observation, referring to a history of persecution, martyrdom, and interiority, and capturing the anxiety of a created “world”. Ann Hostetler (2005) and Victor Doerksen (1980) also observe this rejection of the imagination. Hostetler, for example, describes a Mennonite reluctance to embrace the imaginative or the “lie” of literature, and the individual voice, in favour of statements of fact, “the more sober

narrative of history, the pragmatism of sociology and statistics” (Hostetler 2005:141).

Imagination is necessary, Redekop contends, not so much for a recovery of the Anabaptist vision, but for a perpetual *re*-vision of it – which, she suggests, laughter makes possible.

This imaginative act, she continues, is one that is redemptive in its ability to identify with *other* ways of living (Redekop 1985). Quoting Northrop Frye’s definition of literature as an anxiety dream and a wish-fulfilment dream focussed together to become a fully conscious vision, Redekop urges that, for Mennonites, the “looking glass” must be recognized as similarly divided in order to see *through* it rather than gazing *at* it. To merely gaze at oneself, Redekop laments is a “way of life that deliberately denies the most redemptive feature of the human imagination: the ability to identify with *other* ways of living” (Redekop 1988; 228).

Yet, as Brandt and Bender point out, the fear of many Mennonites is that identification with *The Other* will come at the cost of “Mennonite culture and language.” And, to be sure, Low German, for all its earthy and carnivalesque orality, is being lost in Canada. While authors like Glendinning, Brandt, and Redekop may celebrate the “carnivalesque” qualities of an oral language like Low German, their arguments and passion are increasingly irrelevant. While many of my own generation of Russian Mennonites living in Canada would cite “Low German” as an ethnic identifier, and be familiar with hearing it spoken by grandparents or at Mennonite Central Committee relief sales and thrift stores, none of us can speak it. That generation of Mennonites that began its educational and urban exodus from farming and rural communities unanimously and without consultation decided to discontinue teaching Low German to their children,

citing its “uselessness” and archaic peasant character as reasons for choosing English.

What happens, then, when this language, and its concomitant affective expressions, is no longer drawn upon to engage a form of carnivalesque inversion?

CLASS AND EDUCATION

Here most potently Redekop identifies the confluence of metaphor, affect, and the body, and the grounding – for Mennonites – in the construct that they are “People of the Word.” She also pointedly evokes a fascinating divide between academia and community belonging, one she likewise tethers to bodily metaphor – a “feeling in our guts.” What is particularly useful about these evocations and their positionality in relation to the body is how they intersect with the essential struggles of Mennonite subjectivity in a Canadian context: how belonging is negotiated through language, and the troubles that class and education index.

The place of education in Mennonite communities has been a deeply contentious one, and it signals a key mode of negotiating subjectivity. “Words” and speech acts are fraught, and education, the means to access, learn, and use these acts, is often a dangerous and divisive path. The academy offers the ability to move to new worlds; yet this movement can be constructed as either liberatory or transgressive, positive or dangerous, and the ideological differences on this matter have been a deep source of division among Mennonites, and the impetus for migration and church schism.

Author Di Brandt, who could not wait to leave her village home after the discovery of the “new worlds” that literature offered her as a child, writes with love and

mourning about her father, a “brilliant farmer” who scoffed at “city people” sitting at their little desks, or going to the gym, or reading instruction manuals, and writes of the migration of Mennonites to Mexico and Paraguay in protest against the enforcement of an English curriculum in Manitoba schools. The contemporary reverberations of the divisive role of education can most certainly be felt, though they remain mutable, shifting in and about the thin and porous boundaries of Mennonite communities and identities.

Ultimately education is used and rejected in the construction of meaningful subjectivities. I, for instance, am keenly aware of the role the academy has played in negotiating a Mennonite subjectivity (either desired or rejected) as I compose a document intended to fulfill the requirements for a graduate degree. I am aware that there is a Mennonite joke that suggests the letters of “PhD” stand for “piled higher and deeper,” as Di Brandt explains, “among the village Mennonites.” This metaphor “is all the more pungent and resonant if you’ve spent time on a traditional Mennonite farm” and highlights how education serves as a telling demarcation of urban and rural that lies at the root of Mennonite divisions (2007: 105). A “peasant joke,” as Brandt describes, it is a reflection on “the contrasting modes of labour involved in farming and white collar professions, both of which involve shovelling around large piles of ‘stuff,’ but with very different affects, the one wet and dirty and fertile, the other chemically bleached, clean and dry” (2007:105).

I am also aware of two Low German proverbs that reflect Mennonite orientations to the world. Reference has already been made to “*je jeliada, je vechieda,*” and another that my grandmother was particularly fond of translates as “don’t stroke the cat or his tail will go up.” The implication of this latter proverb that if you are effusive with your

praise, the person praised will think too highly of him or herself. Thus, the proverb functions as a stern rebuke against vanity and ego, and a reminder of the central virtue of humility. (It can also be interpreted as a warning against giving pleasure to another being – a reminder to remain ascetic and aloof from physical, worldly pleasures). Such proverbs and their concomitant implications for comportment work as a caution against “higher” education. Here, higher must be understood in the very literal sense of hierarchy, implying that through education, a person may better themselves at the expense of others, and, in so doing, transgress the communal and egalitarian spirit of Mennonitehood.

Part of the divisiveness of “education” stems from its role in the construction of Mennonite narratives of identity. Perhaps the most strident critique of the silencing and denial that Mennonitism has wrought upon itself comes from scholars of Mennonite literature. In a rather scathing article, for instance, Al Reimer (1980) – a writer and literary critic – laments that Mennonite historians have limited their research to studies of economic, administrative, church and educational systems, and folkways, thus shaping the Mennonite “profile” to one of utter practicality. These accounts, Reimer attests, remain “external,” offering only “thin abstractions” of experienced life. Reimer suggests that only a group’s imaginative literature, arising from “within” the collective mind and soul, can most vividly embody a people’s most “vital aspirations, its most powerful and complete vision of itself” (Reimer 1980; 221). He goes on to argue that 19th century Mennonite colonies in Russia “remained culturally barren islands devoid of genuine intellectual life and artistic activity,” while “Mennonite culture” lacks the “boldness of

vision, capacity for self-criticism, and a radical social consciousness” that fosters literary and artistic expression (Reimer 1980: 221).

Don Wiebe (1980) also echoes Reimer’s claim that Russian colonies were characterized by a sort of “anti-intellectualism,” and he cites the refusal of critical thought about theology as particularly problematic. He further suggests the retreat from “the world” was also a retreat from the world of the “mind,” to the extent of “the establishment of a peculiar hermeneutic that sealed itself off from all possibility of correction, development, and growth from the outside” resulting in an “intellectual ghetto” (Wiebe 1980: 160). While such historical interpretations may provide some insight, Al Reimer’s (1980) ultimate contention that a people without literature (as 19th century Mennonites were) remain “culturally primitive and complacently provincial” (221) signals a strong discourse that links intellectualism with literary competence and education.

While both Reimer’s and Wiebe’s arguments are now decades old and Mennonite historians have written beyond these initial characterizations, their public rebukes of the primitive and provincial or anti-intellectual Mennonites remain viable precisely because the tensions raised have not yet been resolved in the 21st century. As I have shown, there remains both a valorization of education and intellectualism and a suspicion of it among many Mennonites. This ambiguity, regardless of disciplinary affiliation and academic production, signals that a tension exists and continues to be generative of Mennonite life: what to do with intellect, artistic ability, and production in relation to being in the world but not of it? This is a very entrenched conversation in Mennonite communities, and one enacted most prominently through language use.

SILENCE AND ESCAPE

While sermons and preaching from a pulpit becomes “the authoritative story” through performance and theological justification, I would suggest that the issue of whose story does *not* become the authoritative one is equally if not more significant. It is the silence that, as Hirschkind describes, “hones a set of skills” for Mennonites, endowing certain affective dispositions with the moral capacity to discriminate proper conduct. Silence also becomes meaningful through the history of martyrdom that Mennonites have emerged and continue to emerge from, and such silence is authorized biblically.

In a paper presented at a 2015 Mennonite/s Writing conference in Fresno, California, Delores Friesen began tackling the topic of Mennonite/s Writing on Sexuality. Saving the diverse body of LGBTQ literature and writing on/about bodies for other sessions, she took a broad and historical frame. Friesen outlined a surprising array of documents, yet suggested, as I noted, that such resources and publications tend to focus on “educative, moralistic, theological, or exegetical principles.” Friesen also suggested that “there are a few topics on which we fall silent,” notably including the topic of sexuality. This silence is a mode of communication, and has tremendous affective ramifications for many Mennonites. It is echoed, for instance, by John, the divorced man whose marriage was assessed by a church council, who asserts that the “disciplinary action” taken by the leaders of his once-home church led to a deeply felt estrangement, a “silence that you feel.”

This “feeling” of silence is ‘read,’ to use text language, on bodies, and responded to in particular affective ways. To do so, to read and respond in appropriate ways, to understand the mode of communication, and what is communicated in and through silence, requires literacy. For Mennonites, the reading of silence as an affective and communicative tool resonates within the history and context of Anabaptist martyrdom. As Magdalene Redekop (1993) has also observed, the potency of Mennonite silence can, in part, be understood in the context of the martyrs’ stories and concomitant metaphorical embodiments. It works, in part, in parallel with the bible as *The Word*: outlining through text the stories of righteous Christians exemplifying the truest witness to the life of Jesus Christ.

Silence figures prominently in *The Martyrs Mirror*, the tome published in the 1600s, which features countless stories of martyrs who were literally silenced, either through death, or torture by means of cutting out or burning out their tongues. One entry tells the story of Maeyken Wens of Antwerp, a “very God-fearing and pious woman,” who was apprehended, bound, and imprisoned in 1573. “Tempted” into a confession to apostatize from her faith through various methods of torture (not described), she could not be “turned from the steadfastness of her faith.” As it continues:

They...pronounced it publicly in court...that she should, with her mouth screwed shut, or with her tongue screwed up, be burnt to ashes as a heretic. Thereupon, the following day...this pious and God-fearing heroine of Jesus Christ, as also her fellow believers that had been condemned with a like sentence, were brought forth, with their tongues screwed fast, as innocent sheep for the slaughter, and each having been fastened to a stake in the marketplace, deprived, by fierce and terrible flames, of their lives and bodies, so that in a short time they were consumed to ashes; which severe punishment of death they steadfastly endured (quoted from the second English edition, 2014: 980).

As Redekop notes, the Anabaptist “tongue” was something to be kept in check: as they were burned at the stake in such public venues as marketplaces, many Anabaptists cried out words or songs expressing their faith, decrying their persecutors, and “witnessing.” For these public and damaging outbursts, their tongues were screwed down or cut out entirely. Sometimes, even, the letter-writing (another form of witnessing) proclivities of Anabaptists was curbed by cutting off their thumbs.

What Redekop further contends is that, far from becoming meaningless, the martyr stories are re-framed in a contemporary Mennonite ethos, particularly for Russian Mennonites whose exilic history and entanglements in the Soviet Revolution came into contestation with a martyrological theology most acutely because of their persecution in Russia. The corpus of martyr stories is similar to the “system of stories” told within a religious framework that Kirin Narayan (1993) suggests get transmitted across historical eras, and are creatively reinterpreted and retold within the flexibility of spoken narrative. I would argue in addition that for Mennonites, such “religious stories” are also deeply embodied in the silence that frames these experiences: silence that, as Redekop notes, brings the storyteller just to the brink of tragedy, of the experience itself, and then stops.

In the story of the escape of the Mennonites from Russia, the “story” as a spoken narrative is not really present, but its effects and affects are visible and tangible. Redekop argues, for instance, that the burgeoning of Russian Mennonite literature out of Canadian Mennonite communities starting in the late 20th century results, in part, from a tension between having survived the Russian experience and the impetus toward martyrdom. As Redekop (1993) writes, “Since martyrdom is a ‘sign of divine election,’ an honour bestowed by God himself, active efforts to escape ought to be a mark of

dishonour. The passive acceptance of martyrdom, indeed, was seen as the true battle” (12).

Silence can be an affective option for living with trauma. For Mennonites, as Redekop notes, silence and the act of silencing has the further dimension of a violent act, of authorizing certain stories, certain narratives and certain performances above others. The exogamous violence of the persecutors of Anabaptists who cut out tongues and cut off fingers became, through the numerous acts of escape, an endogamous silence, one turned inward, though violent nonetheless. Writer Di Brandt, too, writes of this internalization of persecution in one of her essays, “There was another memory, too, ... an older memory, of a time when the women of my culture had voices and power and freedom...before the violence of the persecutions got internalized in our psyches and we began inflicting them on each other, the same violent subjugations of body and spirit the Inquisitors visited upon us” (Brandt 2007: 3). Here Brandt traces bodily memory to pre-Anabaptist times, past the patriarchal systems she sees as problematic, and most importantly, identifies and conflates the notion of voice and power.¹⁷

This is a very postmodern memory, and one that further signals more contemporary Mennonite preoccupations with words and silence. It is precisely out of these silences that new “words,” acts of speech, and voice are given new meaning. The revolutionary past of the martyrs’ radical speech acts (and attempts to prevent them) are used here, in the present, to evoke a sort of new “Anabaptist authenticity” for these “new” acts of speech. Yet there is much at stake in these words, as Magdalene Redekop

¹⁷ Brandt’s idea is not, however, unproblematic: this sentiment can also be read as a romanticization of the past, without evidence that women “of her culture” had voices, power, or freedom.

identifies when she writes, “If you focus, as I have started out doing, on oral stories rather than printed ones, you are forced to put things together that have been carefully kept apart. Letting in these oral voices can be entertaining but it may also threaten the fabric of the history we have constructed” (Redekop 1993: 11)

Author Di Brandt (2007), for instance, writes evocatively of her life as an aspiring writer coming out of the farming village of her childhood, and the power that words and language had over her flourishing imagination. As she writes, “I grew up in a house without books, other than the Book, which was more of a talisman than book in the way we think of books nowadays...” (203). As she describes, The Book, the bible, was read from daily by her father (in German), yet the stories within were seen as extravagant and irrelevant to the “sweaty village lives” of her family. Her schoolteacher aunt, as Brandt describes, would bring books from her collection for Brandt to read, and, as a good student with high grades, Brandt was given permission during the busy spring and summer months, to read. This permission allowed her to discover worlds outside her village, and to realize that she would not stay there when she grew up. As she writes,

...that was the moment perhaps when it began, my underground writerly aspiration, though, if I think about it, it was there from the beginning, from my earliest memories, the fascination with language, words, images, cadence, rhythm, intonation, as was also the determination to get away, to leave the narrow enclave of my ancestral culture with its strict separatist rules against the mainstream. (205)

Here Brandt identifies a significant preoccupation for many Mennonites, one that is, I think, at the centre of much of the burgeoning of Mennonite literature: words as a means of escape.

The potency of certain speech acts like oral stories, or, more recently, the types of stories that Mennonite writers produce in novels, is certainly clear. Such power through

writing is elucidated by Brandt when she describes her shunning “for my iconoclastic writing, for breaking the centuries long taboo against print culture, for breaking open their separatism, their stowed secrets, betraying them, as they saw it, to the world” (210). These events, evocatively described, arise out of an act of speech (or writing) that opens the policed boundaries of communities and churches. It is also, however, speech acts that bound those communities and churches to begin with, and it is these ambiguities – between orality and print, between authorized and transgressive speech – that bind and loose the margins of Mennonite communities, and allow for types of escape.

Consider, for instance, the titles of two edited volumes of Mennonite writing: Froese Tiessen’s (1989) *Liars and Rascals: Mennonite Short Stories*; and Froese Tiessen and Hinchcliffe’s (1992) *Acts of Concealment: Mennonite/s Writing in Canada*. In the introduction to the former volume, Froese Tiessen addresses the impetus for the creation of the volume, offering a sense of the “work” that Mennonite literature (as act of speech) does:

The curious title of this collection...will, perhaps, rightly suggest to the reader something of the sometimes harsh, but more often gentle sense of mischief that propels character and action in so many of these wonderfully evocative stories. But it is less the characters who people these narratives than the writers themselves who are the mischief-makers here, who confront their readers with new ways of configuring what is true and in so doing, subvert the familiar, comfortable assumptions that sustain convention. (xi)

In the latter volume, the quote that opens the book comes from Di Brandt, who, more directly describes her impetus for writing:

We’re working so hard, maybe harder than any generation before us, to make language honest & up-to-date & relevant, to turn over the stones that have covered our secret, repressed, unspeakable real lives, & find out, all over again, who we are. (9)

The theme of escape has dominated Mennonite literature for a considerable period of time, and it is significant that ‘escape’ is both a topic written about by novelists, and that the novel itself becomes that means of escape for authors. In two of Miriam Toews’ books, *A Complicated Kindness* and *All My Puny Sorrows*, her protagonists are from the fictionalized Mennonite town of East Village in southern Manitoba. They both also have older sisters, who are characterized as transgressive in their speech, dress, and music choices. They are written as near-heroic, bravely negating the “standards” of community behaviour with nary a care for consequence. As Toews describes of Nomi’s sister Tash:

One time on a comedy show, I can’t remember which one, the comedian wondered out loud if there would be sex in heaven and Tash, lying on her stomach, chin in her hands, said yes and it will be divine... It was more her deadpan expression that lingers in my mind, and the reaction of my parents afterwards. There was none... I spent a large part of my childhood praying for Tash’s soul. I hid her I’M WITH JESUS shirt for almost two years because I knew she was wearing it insincerely and because I had inadvertently destroyed it by using my Magic Market to put an arrow on it that went up instead of to the side... One time in church we were doing a call-and-response thing where The Mouth [the preacher] asks questions and the rest of us answer them in unison and every answer was supposed to be Jesus Christ but each time Tash said John Lennon instead... Why was Tash so intent on derailing our chances and sabotaging our plans to be together for goddamn ever and why the hell couldn’t my parents see what was happening and rein that girl in? (Toews 2004; 16-17)

These escapes, or attempts at escape, are not without consequence, however, as the transgressive sisters in Toews’ novels demonstrate, meeting, as they do, rather tragic ends. In contemporary Mennonite worlds, too, novelists can risk much: despite her broader critical success, many Mennonites see Miriam Toews as offensive and problematic, criticizing her novels as too personal, too revealing, too critical of Mennonites. As a consequence of publishing his first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Rudy Wiebe was fired from his position as editor of a Mennonite church conference

periodical when church authorities deemed his writing nearly blasphemous for its portrayal of a Canadian Mennonite leader's hypocritical past in which he murdered a Russian peasant.

Among the critiques I heard from Mennonites I spoke with, the most frequent were directed at Miriam Toews and Di Brandt. Their works were dismissed as being too *angry*, and for portraying the Mennonite world too recklessly. This criticism was particularly pointed with reference to Di Brandt's poetry, in which she very explicitly writes about the power structures in the Mennonite church that enable abuse (both physical and sexual) to occur and remain silenced; as Brandt writes herself, her words "broke something open." Yet the "problem" of her excessive anger is levelled against her, in part, because she is a woman who is speaking against and differently from the culturally mandated script. Her words, and many poems, deliberately transgress the authorization of Mennonite speech, and, in speaking – breaking speech open – re-appropriates the act of speech itself.

For the most part, these authors undertake these transgressions while claiming a Mennonite identity, and speaking as Mennonites. While many of these so-called Mennonite writers face criticism and a form of shunning from their own Mennonite communities and sometimes rebukes against such a "self-declaration" of Mennonite identity, these claims to this particular marker are reified not by Mennonites, but by the wider reading public and literary critics. As Rob Zacharias (2013) notes, the concept of "Mennonite literature" as a category of Canadian ethnic writing arose out the broader development of multiculturalism in Canada in the 1960s, where the push for specific "ethnic" literature created a niche for writers to tell specific "ethnic" stories.

Russian Mennonites, fond of words, wrote Russian Mennonite stories, and were slotted into ethnic literary categories, breaking open the bounded worlds and insular narratives, pushing the conversation within Mennonite communities to one of what, exactly, ethnicity entails, and whether it poses a threat. Words and stories were the impetus for such conversational movement, and provided a new discourse with the possibility of pushing religious identity to the periphery. This shift is uneven, of course, and this bifurcation of “religious” and “ethnic” also signals a wider preoccupation with the power of language as both a source of freedom and of danger: it is no wonder, then, that some words, ways of thinking about things, were characterized as fraught and perilous. Magdalene Redekop (2009) writes provocatively about Mennonites and language, and in an essay written for a past conference on Mennonite/s Writing that focused on orality and print, she writes:

From George Steiner I learned to see how language can mark a powerful ambivalence and that there is a constant battle between the centripetal forces that draw inwards into identification with the heart of a community and the centrifugal forces that draw outwards to escape. This is no academic question. It's about belonging or not belonging, and it's something that we all feel in our guts. (2)

The battle that Redekop alludes to here, as an ambivalence between identification and escape, finds a sense of resolution within the body. Feeling a sense of belonging is found “in our guts”: language is embodied and therefore intersects with how bodies are understood, how they become constituted as troublesome, sinful, sacred, and salvational. Bodies within stories and narratives are given authority and voice, both producing and reproducing portrayals that are performed with and against. These performances, too, can be a contentious act in positioning oneself in relation to these figures, something that some more recent academic and artistic writing has been addressing. Yet, what gets

written *about* Mennonites, how, and by whom, holds tremendous power in shaping Mennonite lives; such voices are given authority through the way they write Mennoniteness, and that authority works to indicate subjectivity.

VOICE AND WITNESS

Some of the most vital, interesting, and timely discussions of Mennonite subjectivity in contemporary Canada have come from the literary arts, where both Mennonite authors of fiction and poetry along with scholars of literature have begun various forms of “re-vision”, calling attention to the tendency to look outward and decry “the world” while disregarding any critical engagement with the *Mennonite* world. Mennonite authors of literature and poetry apparently so frequently construct stories around a community that is messy and conflict ridden – one that is figuratively wounded – that this messiness and attempts to escape from it have come to distinguish “Mennonite” fiction as a genre of minority literature in the Canadian context.

As previously discussed, novelists, poets, and writers of Mennonite background – writing in English, significantly – have worked to imaginatively revision Mennonite narratives. Yet the primacy of The Word has remained in Mennonite ethos, to the detriment of established and emerging visual artists who work within and around Mennonite narratives in modes and means that engage other senses, other imaginaries, that go, at times, beyond language. Returning to Ann Hostetler for a moment, who describes the conditions under which *Mennonite artists* create, we see references to the Mennonite reluctance to embrace the imaginative or the “lie” of literature, the individual

voice, in favour of statements of fact, “the more sober narrative of history, the pragmatism of sociology and statistics” (Hostetler 2005:141).

As Redekop notes, the Anabaptist “tongue” was something to be kept in check: as they were burned at the stake in such public venues as marketplaces, many Anabaptists cried out words or songs expressing their faith, decrying their persecutors, and “witnessing.” For these public and damaging outbursts, their tongues were screwed down or cut out entirely, and sometimes, even, the letter-writing (another form of witnessing) proclivities of Anabaptists was curbed by the cutting off of thumbs. This particular martyrology – and the *visual* record of it contained in the *Martyrs Mirror* – reminds the descendants of these original Anabaptists of the stakes of particular acts of speech, concomitantly valorizing “heroism” of faith and virtuous sacrifice (Letkemann 2004).

Kelly Oliver (2001) compellingly relates bearing witness to the dialogic nature of subjectivity, where subjectivity becomes response-ability, the linking of an ethical obligation of response by subjects by the fact of their very subjectivity. Di Brandt’s poetry perhaps presents a less entangled form of witness, speaking of her own “daily woundings” and the tragedies of an insular community. Brandt’s voice renders “trauma” and subjectivity problematic in her poetry by offering glimpses of horror, of abuse and misuse of authority, next to words of reparation, longing, love, and hope.

To witness, testify, is not without consequence, however. The confluence of a theology whose central tenet concerns the authority of the written word, the Bible, a history of silencing and persecution followed by narratives that reify an insular community orientation, along with the denial of the flesh in favour of spiritual salvation,

can create a deep anxiety within the Mennonite ethos, something increasingly managed through psychological intervention. the positioning of the bible as central and authoritative for faith and life (Yoder 1981). While these Anabaptists reformed the Catholic views on biblical interpretation, and thus, community, Anabaptists, as Christians, continued to wrestle with the Incarnation, the essential ambiguity in Christian thought of the separation of God and humanity, the “human Christ and divine Logos [Word]” (Leach 1983; 75).

CHAPTER FOUR

CONFESSING

INTRODUCTION

If in the church service, the sermon is the climax, the confession and reconciliation follow as a response to hearing the Word. In many Mennonite churches, this stage in the liturgy of the service is referred to either as Confession/Responding (to the Word), or Confession/Reconciliation, signalling the intent of the ritual. Confession implies that either the individual or community has, in some way, failed in their Christian life, and through this acknowledgement, seeks reparation and a correct response to God's Word. I have seen confession most often enacted in the church service as a spoken or silent prayer. Confession is short, often written out for the congregation to say aloud in unison.

In visiting a variety of Mennonite churches, I noted the tone of confession varies according church affiliation: more evangelically-minded congregations may favour words that confess a sinful nature, and seek reconciliation with God through the language of blessing and salvation. More social-justice oriented churches often phrase their confessions in terms of failures to live as good neighbour and citizens, or neglecting to care for the environment. Such confessions aptly delineate the trajectory of Mennonite

churches in Canada; some are interested fundamentally in the personal relationship with Jesus Christ and God through individual salvation (often referred to in the “vertical” sense), and others are more communally oriented, using the New Testament gospels as a call to act “horizontally” in the world through the virtues of justice and fairness.

Confession is a phenomenon of Christianity more broadly, one which Michel Foucault (1979) links with the production of Western concepts of truth and authenticity. Crucial to the rise of the modern self, confession produces an interiority that Foucault, looking genealogically, argues enables the production of psychoanalytic forms. Therapy becomes a mode of access to the interior, the “truth” of one’s self. Therapy, like confession as a sacrament, creates the belief in an “interior,” something hidden within the person. In this chapter, I, too, link confession with the psychological, arguing it works as a “technology” meant to respond to living the incarnation, where the failure to adequately model a Christ-like life creates a deep shame, mitigated through the acts of repentance and seeking forgiveness that confession entails. This shame, however, increasingly turns to the psychological – another type of confession – for its mitigation. This turn to the psychological, as I suggest in this chapter, is a response to the tension of incarnational living in a new form for a new context, one that has come to constitute Mennonite identity, subjectivity, and personhood in this time and place.

In tracing changing patterns of Mennonite subjectivity in the contemporary world, I attend to how Mennonite confession – as a communal act – is becoming psychologized, and the religious/theological discourse of martyrdom is turning towards an individualized discourse about the “modern self.” In this reframing, affects can become psychoses and trauma requires therapy. The “hidden” truth, the interior, however, has become for many

Mennonites a turning inwards to the community to become a critique of the very narratives that have produced and sustained it. These critical voices locate the ironic endogamous violence that the community produces within the community itself. Most potently for many Mennonites, while the ideology of the communal requires salvation to occur within the community (as the Body of Christ), failures, infractions, or sinful acts become the responsibility of the individual: there is no “communal” atonement, no acts of repentance or requests for forgiveness bestowed upon individuals on behalf of the community. This tension between the ideals of the community and the failure of the individual has left many Mennonites in distress, unable to reconcile this contradiction. This distress – these ‘confessions,’ as Foucault suggests – are now being taken up by modern psychological and psychoanalytic regimes.

In my fieldwork, the issue of mental health was often raised by Mennonites, and I argue that the apparent perseverance by Mennonites on mental health issues – most frequently depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder – is part of a process of reckoning with the communal, the narratives of history, the formation of power and authority. This perseverance also involves the identification of psychological categories as, in essence, explanatory models. Additionally, as I show, historical narratives of self-praise work as a discourse of virtue and raise questions about what it means to live up to, or not live up to, such historical precedent.

The historical fact of martyrdom and its tremendous power in granting salvation through suffering and witness comes into conflict with narratives of migration and trauma that end not in martyrdom (for some) but survival. It has been argued that the psychic weight of survival over salvific witness provides a rich ground for artistic expression and

creativity (Redekop 1993). As I show in this chapter, survival can also be read a leading to psychosis in a context where there is no place or authority for a religious formulation of suffering. Communal narratives of martyrdom and deference to the authority of community collide with the idea of the self – the “modern” self – that requires new subjectivities. Yet, while a psychological modernity requires a particular subject, this type of subject is not an authority wholly given deference to by Mennonites.

Reflecting upon her therapy experience and her affective legacy of silence and melancholy, one woman I interviewed queried “Who benefits from trying to make us seem happy?” This probe offers a framework for discussing the ways in which religious constructions of communal trauma are transferred to the psychological domain for Mennonites, linking community, memory, affect, and trauma with what it means to live in an unfinished narrative: what it means to live in the World.

HISTORIC NARRATIVES

In one particular church service I attended at a more social-justice oriented congregation, the following confession was read in unison as a prayer and response to the sermon. It comes from the hymnal of the Mennonite Church conference, and speaks powerfully to the ethos of the church, of a “social gospel” that seeks justice for the oppressed. It also works as a confession to culpability in the capitalist and colonialist projects: instead of seeking reparation and accountability in a political context, however, reconciliation is sought with God. In this confession, failures to “act justly” arise out of a wavering of faith, and a selfish inclination. God’s grace and mercy for and because of

these failures is sought, and will, ultimately, offer reparation for the failures of virtue and morality.

Gracious God, hear our confession.
 Our faith is uncertain,
 our forgiveness slow,
 our conviction weak,
 our compassion wavering.
 We have exalted the proud and powerful,
 put down the weak,
 saturated the rich with good things,
 neglected the poor,
 sent the hungry away empty-handed.
 We have helped ourselves.
 Show us your mercy.
 Help us show mercy,
 through your Son, our Saviour. AMEN.

(Hymnal: A Worship Book 1992; 702)

This confession is taken from the collection of written prayers and confessions for the variety of occasions in the church year. Such liturgies are intended to be spoken in unions, with a reverence and countenance similar to the act of prayer.

Just as the performance of confession in a Mennonite church is communal, the absolution received (or sought) is corporate. Here, again, the origins of the practice lie in early Anabaptism, and the emphasis is on reorientation to a direct relationship with God, and a rejection of any earthy intermediary such as a priest. In some contemporary churches, “the confession” becomes deeply entangled in postcolonialism, and notions of the salvific. These confessions also remain fully entrenched in theology, in confessing *to God*, and in seeking reassurances from God. For some contemporary Mennonites for whom church has become a rather fraught space, however, the notion that reparations between “failures to act” against systems of power (such as colonialism or patriarchy), and the necessity to seek reconciliation from God (versus with other people acting within

those systems) has become increasingly untenable, precisely because *the church* itself is identified as a degenerate system of power.

SURVIVAL AND MARTYRDOM

The writing about history, so vital to Mennonite academics, has itself worked to create, maintain, and reproduce narratives that have come to both sustain and damage Mennonites. These historical narratives, or, to borrow from Clifford Geertz, stories Mennonite tell for themselves about themselves – the “self-sustaining folk tradition” that James Urry (2006) describes – are problematic for many, though rarely addressed. The Russian experience and escape from it are a vital story, a crafted narrative of a particular history and those who share it, and one that Mennonite academics have excelled in telling. The effects of its telling, how it is told, under what circumstances, and, as Brandt notes, how it is edited are therefore are powerful in shaping identity. In historical narratives, too, there are often entanglements of memory. As Antze and Lambek (1996) point out, recognizing these entanglements also requires an examination of the cultural means through which the practice of memory is mediated, how the employment and deployment of memories become a discourse about subjectivity and provides the substantive grounds for claims to corporateness and continuity. For some Mennonites, then, how is it that memories of the Russian experience become entangled in larger narratives of history and theology, and what repercussions might this entanglement entail?

Two particularly memorable stories from my fieldwork help elucidate this relationship, both of which are set in the 1920s migration to Canada. During the

industrious years in Russia, many Mennonites became wealthy estate owners, standing in stark contrast to their ethnic Russian neighbours. Interactions between the two groups grew tense during the revolutionary years, and the famine that followed. Roving bands of Bolsheviks raided the Mennonite (kulak) colonies during this time, destroying the estates, and murdering many people. While many Mennonites were able to escape to the plains of North America during this time of upheaval, those that remained suffered, along with their neighbours through Stalin's forced collectivization and subsequent famine. Letters between separated families in North America and those remaining in Russia were heartbreaking: families already in the US and Canada wrote for reassurances that the rumours of rampant suicide and cannibalism were not true, though there were seldom responses to those letters. The migrants who escaped the Russian experience and did manage to come west were, to a large degree, silent.

Gerald, a man in his 60s recalls that he learned the circumstances of his father Henry's migration to Canada only when Henry was dying. Indeed, because Henry was a child when his family left the Soviet Union, he himself only learned the details of his family's migration years later when he was an adult. As Gerald explained to me, Henry's father had been murdered by bandits, leaving his mother and their four young children alone and starving. The mother, grief-stricken and unable to feed her family, poisoned herself and her children, an audacious act in a theological context that constitutes suicide as sin. As in other Christian traditions, those Mennonites who died in this way were not permitted burial in the cemetery proper, and were not buried facing east. That is, they were denied entrance to heaven, as their dead bodies could not rise to meet Jesus Christ upon his second coming from the east, and were thus punished for their sinful act.

Henry's mother, along with three of the children died, but Henry, age two, survived, and was found by relatives. Adopted into an uncle's family, Henry emigrated to Canada and had a family of his own, unaware of his near-death experience until, as his uncle lay dying, he was told the entirety of his story. Henry struggled with alcoholism as an adult and was abusive to his own children. When Henry revealed his past to his son, it came with a sort of relief for Gerald; Henry's "difficulties" as a person and father were understandable as the result of a traumatic (and secretive) past.

Such stories have within them a sort of "maw" – a contentious unease between a theology that valorizes suffering and death as witness, and the facts of survival by literally unspeakable means, followed by prosperity in a new land. This interstice is a dissonant space between the figures of the martyr and the survivor, and constitutes a rich terrain for artistic endeavour. It has been said that the current proliferation of novelists from Russian Mennonite background results from this so-called "creative tension." As intimated by Henry's story, however, this gap is also read as a means to mental illness.

I had another similar, but more potent, series of conversations along these lines with a man named Rob. He and his family were friends of my parents, and knowing I was studying anthropology, Rob contacted me to meet for what became a series of lunches. He was keen on being heard and he had a lot to say. Rob was not Mennonite (his words), and would not choose to be, for reasons he would explain. He did, however, "marry into" the Mennonite community, after meeting his partner in his native South America when she was doing Voluntary Service there. Rob was a student of international development, anthropology, sociology, and liberation theology, having grown up in the context of a revolution. He was very passionate and his attention was

acutely focused on the contexts in which classism and colonialism create situations of power, resistance, and marginality.

Rob's partner was from a large Mennonite family from southern Manitoba. Her father (originally) and now many brothers ran a large and growing agri-business near Steinbach that had started off as a small family farm. Her family was descended from immigrants who came to Manitoba in the 1920s, after fleeing repeated attacks by anarchist armies in Russia. Rob and his partner have three daughters, and after working in South America for a number of years, the family returned to Canada and now live in Winnipeg. Rob's partner has found work, but he has been unable to find a well-paying job, and struggles with reconciling his current capitalist context with his deep desire to continue working in his native country in a more politically activist role.

Rob's partner and two of his adolescent daughters have depression and anxiety. One of his daughters has been undergoing intensive therapy because the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness in adolescents is a clinically difficult task and the medications frequently used with adults do not work consistently with younger people. Rob was clearly deeply concerned, and in our conversations the range of emotions passing over his face and through his speech and affect ran the gamut: despair over the struggles of his partner and children, triumph at the successes or "breakthroughs" of therapy, and, most prescient, a deep-seated rage borne out of the injustice of suffering.

Out of this rage came Rob's most potent criticisms and derisions. He started one discussion with, "We don't go to church anymore. Why would we? Our children have no interest in it. No young people do, and the church will not be able to sustain itself and there won't be Mennonites anymore." Here I took issue with Rob and suggested that

“Mennonite” as a social category has quite a vigorous life outside the church as an institution; “Mennonite” does not always equal “Church.” Rob pushed onward to his point, however, suggesting that Mennonites (the church-going kind) were hypocrites: rich capitalists hell-bent on wealth, re-writing history to deny their culpability in the traumas of Russia. He claims that the crippling depression his partner contends with is the result of this denial, the shame in knowing about the wealth of Mennonites in Russia and their elitism.

According to this perspective, then, the horrors that these capitalist, classist Mennonites experienced at the hands of Ukrainian anarchists were self-inflicted and deserved. This truth was silenced, brought to Canada, and then wilfully forgotten – only to surface in subsequent generations in the form of psychic damage, or depression. Rob’s most compelling vitriol was levelled at his partner’s family, her father and brothers and uncles who were themselves enveloped (again) in the capitalist vision of wealth and prosperity, growing more conservative and business-minded through the fortunes of their ever expanding agri-business. Had they not learned anything from their history, he wondered?

As noted above, Magdalene Redekop has suggested that the vivacity of Russian Mennonite writing in Canada is partly the result of a tension between the martyr story and the fact of survival. In her view, artistic creativity has emerged from the unease of failing to be martyred during a time of persecution and suffering. Where Redekop identifies the creative potential that arises from this tension, Rob, I think, pushes the tension further, to reveal its potential for damage to those unable to write or speak these

stories. Instead, as he suggests, some Mennonites have internalized the stories to the point of mental illness.

From Rob's perspective those who share it, the Russian experience was not merely a "martyr" story, but one in which Mennonites were culpable in their own demise. The martyr narrative, and the uncritical historical one in which Mennonites in Russia – now Ukraine – were unwitting victims, removes the potential for guilt and shame that happens when lives and experiences and memories are "not good enough". This echoes both Redekop's and Di Brandt's postulations of Mennonite history as tracing an exogamous violence turned endogamous. The roots of this trope arise out of a history of persecution, in which the often short and dangerous lives of the early Anabaptists are seen as witnessing most faithfully to the life of Jesus Christ through torture, suffering, and death.

Those Mennonites that found their way to and from the Soviet Union, the site of later horrors, constructed their own experience of torture, suffering, and death, as faithfully witnessing to the life of Jesus Christ. The significance of this history, this prosthetic memory in subsequent generations, these prescriptions and proscriptions, can be overwhelming. How do you live in the world, a safe and comfortable world for many Mennonites in contemporary Canada, when the truest witness to a Christian life is suffering and dying for your faith as you understand your Anabaptist forebears, and in many cases, parents and grandparents to have done?

To turn the figure of Jesus into that of an abusive tyrant as Magdalene Redekop does is a rather apt image for the relationship between Mennonite women and the Church, and one that grounds the power of the imagery in bodily reality. It is also

embedded in the theological concept of *Gelassenheit*, one that, though predating the early Anabaptist movement, became its “basic attitude.” (Friedman 1955). Yet, as Redekop writes of the “husband usurped by an abusive tyrant,” the Anabaptist theological trope of “yieldedness” runs into dangerous exigencies of application, where an institutionalization of structures of power and authority (the Mennonite Church) transforms the Anabaptist vision into a rather tyrannical one that can (ironically) hold the potential of tremendous violence.

FIGURES AND SCRIPTS

Questions around power, violence, and witness are situated within some very powerful scripts, many of which figure prominently in Mennonite stories, themselves renderings of narratives of virtue. These narratives are embodied, and therefore understood in relation to how bodies are understood, how they become constituted as troublesome, sinful, sacred, and salvational. Bodies within stories and narratives are given authority and voice, both producing and reproducing portrayals that are performed with and against. These performances, too, can be a contentious act in positioning oneself in relation to these figures, something that some more recent academic and artistic writing has been addressing. Who writes, and who gets written about, however, remains a powerful mode of shaping Mennonite identification through the way “Mennoniteness” is made public.

The richest expressions of the effects of silencing (and decidedly less “clinical” than those offered by psychology) come from the literary arts. Some Mennonite historians, too, recognize the necessity of addressing omissions and the tendency toward

“androcentric formulations of Mennonite identities” (Klassen 1994) in the academic literature as a whole. This recognition in the literature seems therefore to be particularly attentive to women, and as a result, works in a way to re-orient scholarship and identity towards the material, and, in some cases, bodies both literal and figurative. Literary, historical, and ethnographic writing on women connects them to “the home” in both a physical and symbolic sense, yet this is, and is not, the “home” of the 1950s housewife functioning as the site of feminist critique. For some Mennonite women scholars and those women they write about, this “home” is a site of being-in-the-world, an earthly being, that is messy and filled with literal bodies, standing as a corrective to the “official” record, the authorized version of Mennonite history.

The form these redresses take are varied. Returning to the work of Di Brandt, she writes provocatively of the outcomes of the internalizing effects of persecution, of “inflicting them on each other.” Instead of the “violent subjugations of body and spirit” perpetrated by the Inquisitors, Brandt writes of Mennonites:

...we did it secretly, in our homes, we did it to our young children, so no one would see us, we did it to our blossoming young men and women, with ritual beatings and humiliations, so they would have no voice, no will, no say of their own. Our women were kept bound with rules of humility and obedience, as servants to the masters, their husbands who owned all the land, owned everything, and went to church with heads held high, proud in their democratic brotherhood, proud in their tyrannical lives at home.
(Brandt 2007:3)

Here Brandt grounds such “subjugations” within a gendered frame, and one that highlights the virtuous discourse of yieldedness, silence, and servanthood that the early Anabaptists outlined, yet get subsumed and distorted under troublesome structures of power.

In the historical literature, for instance, Gloria Neufeld Redekop (1996), looks at Mennonite Women's Societies formed in the 1870s in Canada that functioned as a "parallel church," while lamenting their absence in the Mennonite historiography. As women were prevented from assuming church leadership positions, they formed such "societies" out of a commitment to the church inspired by biblical texts compelling obedience to God. These societies provided a context in which women could speak, pray, and express themselves creatively, in ways that also worked toward the church's mission. Women clothed and fed needy members of their wider communities, raised money for missionaries overseas and other, more local, charities, as well as sewing and knitting clothing for troops in Europe during the World Wars. Marlene Epp (2010; 2008) offers portraits of Mennonite midwives, many of whom were formally educated in obstetrics in distant cities, and often functioned as the sole medical provider (and undertaker) for entire communities.

Looking more broadly at the historical context in which these women lived, historian Royden Loewen (2006) examines the Russian Mennonite "rural diaspora" by attending to how a group with clearly defined social borders must reinvent and reformulate teachings and practices in new situations. Approaching Mennonite history not as a static conception of a way of life (as an "inheritance") but as a "constantly renewed experience" (9), Loewen observes the boundaries of a shifting understanding of gender in North American Russian Mennonite communities, particularly in the post-war years. Mennonite women, for instance, increasingly adopted a changing cultural script of womanhood popular in Canada and the U.S. A new social reality of increasing mobility and leisure created a middle class, one of domestic and consumer-oriented femininity.

Consumption and domestic nurture became the public hallmarks of true womanhood, a concern with fashion and the female body (Loewen 2006). With increasing farm mechanization and commodity specialization, the relationship of mutual dependence between husband and wife in the farm household shifted, and women increasingly found paid work in urban centres.

Mennonite men, increasingly taking up work off the farm and alongside professional women, found ways of reasserting a shifting masculinity. Such “masculinities” underwent tremendous change among farmers who commercialized, and businessmen benefitting from the technological and consumerist post-war boom. Emerging football and hockey teams created tension in communities where the field and rink became contested sites of Mennonite gender negotiation. “The true man,” Loewen explains, “must be able to negotiate his way in the new postwar society, but he must not break the values of sobriety, pacifism, simple-mindedness, and quiet deference to authority” (Loewen 2006; 150). The pushback to a new and challenging masculinity came from both men and women in the form of an essentialized figure: the urban father who revealed undue aggression, self-centred preoccupations, and excessive independence, rendering him unable to identify or relate to his children (Loewen 2006).

This figure foregrounds a Mennonite anxiety, I think, a wariness about letting “openings” overcome the boundaries between Mennonite and Other; the urban father is no longer recognizably “Mennonite.” Yet while this odious vision compels anxiety, other scholars identify a female figure present in literature, obituaries, historiographies, and biographies that becomes imbued with gender proscriptions and a reverential manifestation of the suffering of the willing Anabaptist martyr. One literary scholar,

Katie Funk-Wiebe, identifies a female figure present not just in the fictional literature arising out of Mennonite communities in Western Canada, but in writing of a variety of sorts: obituaries, historiographies, and biographies. This figure – the wife, the mother, and/or the grandmother – is imbued with a gendered template of ‘goodness,’ significant as a reverential manifestation of the suffering of the willing Anabaptist martyr.

While Funk Wiebe identifies this figure in literature, historian Marlene Epp (a veritable pioneer in writing history on Mennonite women), looks at the constructedness of this image, addressing the omissions of history and the silencing of women, and, in a sense, witnessing to the sufferings of such “woman-persons.” Epp (2004) opens her article on Russian Mennonite women and food with an observation by an unnamed sociologist that Mennonite women are excellent cooks, as evidenced by their lack of concern for their waistlines. Images of the contented, jolly, and indeed robust Mennonite cook are contrasted, Epp argues, by those women enduring the famine of the inter-war years in the Soviet Union.

The physical nurturance of the family was considered the task of women, and Epp draws primarily from letters and diary entries of women from the 1920s and 30s to convey “a narrative that centres on the existential details of physical sustenance. The deep emotional pain of watching family members die of starvation and for women especially, the inability to feed one’s children, remain a subtext beneath the concrete descriptions of scarcity” (Epp 2004: 318). Mothers, for instance, would bake bread of which half was clay, or exchange sex for food from Soviet soldiers; one diary entry ominously reads “I have heard that some people have even eaten their own children” (Epp 2004: 318).

Yet despite such horrors, the marker of true discipleship – of the true Mennonite woman – was an embodiment of yieldedness/submission. Epp (2008) writes that Mennonite values of forgiveness, obedience, and suffering have been interpreted with very gender-specific meanings for women dealing with violence. In this interpretation, she continues, “biblically mandated submission became a Mennonite woman’s highest virtue, even while her husband’s exertion of power was an abuse of scripture” (Epp 2008; 112).

Implicit in this description is the conflation of womanhood and motherhood, a complex relationship of submission and agency, of messy physiology and materiality encountering a wilful (and scripturally sanctioned) silence. Until recently, many Mennonite families were huge, making the notion that neither sexuality or other bodily happenings were discussed rather incredible considering that the mere presence of *children* in a very real and everyday sort of way testified to fact of their *creation*. The “dual-world” theology of Mennonites put sexuality in the realm of the “fallen” world, a position justified by the fact that birth control and divorce were acceptable in the communist state of the Soviet Union – proof that birth control rested on a system of “unbelief” (Epp 2008). Yet while some scholars point to high birth rates as indicative of the submission of women to systems of patriarchy, Epp (2008) cautions that many Mennonite women, by framing “successful reproduction in abundance” in religious terms, may have found community recognition and admiration, honing their own sense of accomplishment as good Christian women.

How might we then view this complexity of power and agency, of the construction of history and narrative of Mennonite women’s relationship to motherhood?

Pamela Klassen (1994), in a rare piece of ethnography on Russian Mennonites, describes the emerging narratives of two elderly Russian Mennonite women living in southern Ontario. Part of Klassen's task, she explains, is to move out of the "motherhood" and particularly the "marriage" plot of Euroamerican women's stories that only allow a centrality of romance, courtship, and marriage. In talking with these two women, both of whom grew up in the Soviet Union and lived through World War II in Europe, Klassen invokes the spectre of the selfless and silent woman: "for some women, the struggle to reconcile their internalized sense of femininity with their lived experiences as women continues today – the selfless woman is not a fitting model, but they don't yet know who is to take their place" (Klassen 1994:11).

As Klassen explains, "the lines of worldliness were often arbitrarily but meticulously drawn in the contours of women's bodies" (Klassen 1994:237). Citing poet Di Brandt who observes that "beauty" is an altogether disturbing category for Mennonites, Klassen (1994) demonstrates how women's "resistance" sometimes took the form of an embodied disobedience – "worldly" fashion like lipstick and heels – while recognizing an irony in the demands that such practices of "femininity" place on women's bodies, time, and money to interiorize subordination.

What is perhaps even more ironic is the "visibility" of Mennonite women's dress and their invisibility in scholarly and historical literature. Epp (2008) suggests that styles of dress were applied with "particular intensity and inflexibility" towards women. Women's bodies, she posits, became public markers of Mennonitism. Clothing came to represent purity (a virtue of particular importance for women), a sign of salvation to the

world.¹⁸ Yet that women were “the sign” of that salvation in relation to their *bodies*, invites a compelling ambiguity (perhaps even paradox) of theology and practice – a symbol of heaven possible only through its earthly materiality and visibility, one that simultaneously denies that which makes it possible.

“GOOD MENNONITES”

This subjective turn is evident through the use and invocation of particular motifs, figures, and narratives drawn from the past, and reckoned with in contemporary settings. In conversations in interview settings and in informal contexts – parties, talking with friends, family gatherings – I repeatedly heard the self-deprecating comment, “Well I’m not really a good Mennonite...” These comments became curious proclamations for me, and I found them to be rooted in an unease at best, and deep anguish at worst. Further, these declarations exist in performance and relationships, entangled in a nexus of theology, martyrdom, and history, and work to enact subjectivity. For some people, the idealized figures of Mennonite “goodness” are unobtainable, and only offer failure – a state increasingly called depression or anxiety.

When I inquired as to why some people said they weren’t “good Mennonites,” the responses were most often “I can’t sing!” In one exchange, the response to this admission was, “No way – you can sing!” Followed by, “No, really. I’m actually tone-deaf.” While the tenor of this exchange was lighthearted, it does signal a shared imaginary of virtues, some of which have even come to be seen as “natural”. As

¹⁸ The notion of bodies signaling piety is also present in Islam. See, for example, Mahmood (2005); Abu-Lughod (1993)

previously discussed, for example, the phrase “farming is in our blood” situates the Mennonite relationship to land and work within the body, and therefore farming is represented as an inherent (natural) skill passed on to children. Likewise, musical skill and its concomitant virtues are also naturalized. To be born deficient, then, is to fail at *being* Mennonite.

While lack of musical skill is unfortunate in Mennonite communities, other perceived failures carry more significance and psychic distress. One woman named Maggie with whom I became close friends, talked about a long struggle with clinical depression, and had recently begun taking medication. Now in her 30s, Maggie told me how difficult it was for her to “get help,” though she had periods of complete incapacitation throughout her late teens and into adulthood. “I kept thinking I had to do this on my own,” she said, “that I just needed more willpower.” When Maggie described slipping further into depression, isolating herself, her sense of failure would increase; it was a sense of not meeting expectations, situated within familial and cultural narratives.

As Maggie explained, “I think about what my Oma and Opa went through in Russia, and to come to Canada, and I feel...weak. Like I can’t handle being a bit sad.” Her own perceived weakness was set against the heroic image and narrative of her pioneering grandparents’ stoicism and ability to withstand hardship. Feeling “a bit sad,” and the inability to will herself out of such an emotional morass, was constituted by Maggie as failure to be “as good a Mennonite” as her grandparents who had withstood the traumatic experiences of persecution in Russia and emigration, and remained (in Maggie’s opinion) positive in demeanour.

I also had the opportunity to get to know David, a man in his 40s who had recently left his wife and two children to begin a relationship with another man. David's subsequent divorce from his wife was bitter, and there was significant acrimony within their shared community. In addition to having a failed marriage, he had come out as a gay man: both rather fraught positions in the Mennonite church. He and his wife and family were notably involved in their church, had both gone to Mennonite post-secondary institutions for education, and had followed the "traditional marriage and children" script. These were the markers of what David called "good Mennonites." As he described his former life, "I was a good Mennonite. And I wanted to be! I really wanted to be good."

Indeed, as David explained to me, the intersections of "goodness," authenticity, and shame, caused him to seek out, in his words (and with a laugh) "intensive psychotherapy." He explained how, as a married man with children, he was a "person" within the Mennonite church. By breaking that relationship to be with another man, to live incongruently from the expected, David experienced a loss of his personhood: his Mennonite friends and family could no longer 'place' him, he had lost his voice. At the point at which we began talking, he said he needed to leave the church "to heal." "But I'm still Mennonite," he assured me.

While David was undergoing therapy, Maggie sought advice from a physician and counsellor and received a diagnosis of depression for which she began pharmaceutical treatment. Through these acts of reparation and reconciliation, David and Maggie had found new ways to engage with the figurative "good Mennonite" that framed their confessions. Through their quests for such reparations, they had found new mantras to guide their healing through the discourse of psychotherapy. For Maggie, the phrase that

now orients her life has become “it takes strength to ask for help.” Likewise, David no longer strives for the ideal, reassuring himself that “I am good enough.”

The ground of the “good Mennonite” discourse, with its idealized figures against which Maggie, David, and others position themselves, is multitudinous and varied, intersecting the political, the economic, the gendered, and the theological. To be a good Mennonite can also be entangled within “doing.” That is, perceived embodiments – good Mennonite bodies – can be both acted upon and enacted, and can enact goodness through right action.

PSYCHOLOGY, TRAUMA, AND AFFECT

SHAME AND MELANCHOLY

Lent and Advent are auspicious times in the Christian calendar, and in some Mennonite churches services are organized according to the liturgy in which a theme can be developed over the season. This was the case for one Mennonite church I attended during a Lenten season in which the theme was shame: a bold choice, many thought, because of its potential for “uncovering” some rather unsavoury aspects of Mennonite affect. Indeed, the notion of exposure is a daunting one for Mennonites, most potently expressed, as I have discussed, in the rejection of Mennonite authors such as Rudy Wiebe, Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, and Miriam Toews from their home communities for writing critical accounts of Mennonite life for *the world* to see.

The theme of shame in the church services I attended was not informed entirely by theology, but by the work of Brene Brown, a professor of social work at the

University of Houston who studies “vulnerability, courage, worthiness, and shame.” Along with several self-help best selling books, her work is most widely known through two TED talks, one from 2010 called “The Power of Vulnerability,” and 2012’s “Listening to Shame,” the content of which was used to discuss shame and vulnerability in this particular service. With the inclusion of such a perspective, the conceptualization of shame, its affects and resolutions, was moved out of the realm of the theological and into the psychological. For the purposes of the services, Brown’s argument that the power of shame comes from its ability to isolate was most developed. Silence and the act of silencing are certainly present in the Mennonite ethos, though to what extent the effects of silencing and its intersection with shame are discussed or acknowledged depends on the Mennonite you are talking with. What these particular church services attempted to do (as an institutional or authorized voice) was “normalize” and therefore dispel shame by suggesting that everyone feels ashamed and therefore isolated in some way or another.

Just as the Confession situated the congregation within wider political and economic systems of power, the framing of shame within the psychological opened up the discussion of Mennonite affect to something that both codifies the body and mind in certain ways, subjects it to new modes of discipline, and is placed outside historical narratives and contexts. How these frames impinge upon, complement, and displace Mennonite or Anabaptist theological frames for thinking about emotion, affect, power, and silence is uneven and mutable, but this movement itself has opened up spaces for renegotiating Mennonite identity and subjectivity in relation to theological or historical narratives.

As in the Confession, the discussion of shame in the Lent series ended, as the season does, with the death of Jesus. The means of resolution of shameful feelings was through symbolic ritual, a laying of a small stone at the foot of a cross erected near the pulpit. It was a symbolic ritual of “laying down” shame at the foot of the cross of Jesus as a means of establishing self-worth through the grace of Jesus, whose death enacted salvation. Through this theological “solution” to the problem of shame, those who engaged in the ritual, those who placed their stone/shame at the cross, were released from its negative power in their lives. Yet in discussions with people in the congregation after the series concluded, some expressed a sense of disappointment at this decidedly Christian turn, one, most evident through the use of varied frames: could a theological solution to a psychological problem be tenable? How were movements between these frames – the psychological and theological – even undertaken?

One man at these Lenten services spoke to me of a history of sexual abuse within his home Mennonite congregation, and, in his words, the “botched” response to it by church leaders. Attending this series on shame, he maintained, was unfulfilling. For him, the shame he felt and carried as a victim who was preyed upon by someone in a powerful position could not be removed through the symbolic action of placing that shame at the foot of the cross of Jesus. This man wanted an acknowledgement by the church that the institutional systems of power had caused him great pain, instead of a symbolic gesture towards “reconciliation” between himself and Jesus. In his case, after the abuse became public knowledge, the leaders of the church were seemingly loathe to condemn one of their own, and though this man explained that he did feel justice was eventually served (in what capacity was not shared with me), his point was that the

church took (and as he says, continues to take) no ownership in the shame that is caused by its own institutional proscriptions and structures. For this victim of sexual abuse, any discussion of shame should include a sense of accountability in a tangible sense over symbolic and abstract rituals of absolution.

While examples of sexual abuse and assault and their perceived mishandling by the church are the most egregious examples I was given, at the outset of my research I was certainly unaware of the extent to which grief and pain caused by the church are present in Mennonite lives. For many people I met, disappointment at the failure of the institution to rectify, acknowledge, and seek reconciliation for perceived wrongs was an even stronger emotion than pain. The institutional church's response to many of its perceived failures came to remind me of my grandfather, a man who was confident in the knowledge of his own authority and ability to "take up space," and without a great need for self-reflection. He frequently said "I tried my best" in a thick German accent. It was his way of off-setting his responsibility in family decision-making, and avoiding accountability for the frustrations and anger his behaviour caused. This succinct and droll catch-phrase remains a useful joke in my family, but I argue, too, that it, with wit and brevity, captures something particularly central in the Russian Mennonite view of history and its legacy. The phrase represents a sort of communal shrug: we tried our best, what is there to apologize for?

The degree of pain, frustration, and disappointment associated with the church was rather astounding to me: it was present in the background of nearly every conversation and discussion I had during fieldwork. These emotions signify the intensity and importance of the role of institutions in framing Mennonite lives. My conversations

were, in essence, confessionals of a sort, a way of revising and making quotidian that which is enacted ritually within the church service. The unfolding of a discourse of psychology, of mental health, and diagnoses was integrated into these confessional conversations in much the same way as the psychologized construction of shame was invoked in the church services, suggesting a rather potent (new) way of discussing affect.

I was told directly by a Mennonite academic, however, that “mental health” was not something talked about anymore, and that the relationship between Mennonites and mental health is in many respects a tired one. Most directly, this view comes out of literary criticism, in a “post-identity” moment when “Mennonite literature” as a category filed under “ethnic” or “minority literature” is moving beyond and out of the scope of identity politics and stories about Mennonites (Zacharias 2013). What is curious, however, is the presence of a gap (or breach, to use Harold Bender’s term) between academics writing about Mennonites, and the lived experience of Mennonites who engage in being and doing “Mennonite.”

I am also certainly aware of the positionality of anthropological writing on Mennonites, and the theoretical and methodological conundrum of both witnessing an on-the-ground experience, and the theoretical and abstract implications of being such a witness (Asad 1993). It is curious, then, to witness the effects and affects of “mental health” as both discourse and lived reality for Mennonites. The category “mental health” is at once a seemingly discarded topic by what one fellow Mennonite academic termed “trend-seeking Mennonite academics,” and a vibrant and lively means to enact and discuss subjectivity, hurt, and shame by Mennonites “on the ground”. Indeed, while I was told directly by one Mennonite academic to avoid “returning” to a discussion about

Mennonites and mental health and instead focus more on post-identity and its possibilities, outside of academia, the discussion around mental health remained surprisingly ubiquitous.

The affective state of ‘melancholy’ has been used extensively to frame the discussion of Mennonites and mental health, and it is melancholy as a state of being that both lives within and gives life to a certain Mennonite subjectivity. Indeed, it seems as though mental health terms are having a particularly wide-spread moment in popular discussions. That this phenomenon seems to be passé in some academic contexts is itself worth considering: to what extent do academic lives and discourses themselves frame Mennonite understandings of themselves? Even within the broader Mennonite community, there are jokes and comments that reflect a keen awareness about the trope of the “Melancholic Mennonite.” This affect does take on particular forms in various communities, and for Russian Mennonites, the historical narratives of the migrations out of Russia, and the subsequent “traumas” play an enormous role in how melancholy figures into emotion and affect.

As a Swiss Mennonite friend of mine told me (with a smile), “Oh my God – why can’t you guys just get *over* it already...” This observation speaks to a particular affective entrenchment, authorized by the past and its narratives, and how such narratives are understood by and embodied in contemporary Russian Mennonite experience. It is through the language of affect, emotion, and trauma, that the fact of “not getting over it” becomes increasingly psychologized in contemporary Canadian Mennonite life. This new discursive and subjective turn comes to inform and frame narratives of trauma, drawing them into broad categories of mental health. The work that such a language does

shifts the narrative in relation to martyrologies, affects, and history, reshaping as it does so, how Mennonites understand their minds and bodies as Mennonite subjects.

Though Katie Funk Wiebe (1985) claims that there is much misery and little grandeur among female characters in Mennonite literature (at least in the 1980s), the Mennonite woman in such literature is portrayed as “Eve Before the Fall, a pure and asexual preserver of Mennonite faith and culture” (232). She is a rarely beautiful but virtuous girl, a pious mother and saintly grandmother. In her more depreciative form:

The woman-person moves close to the earth and to the animal world and appears more as a beast of burden in human form than a woman made in God’s image. The women appear as stolid and hard-working, animal-like in their subservience to men and society. A life as wife and mother...is not a calling, but a slow yielding to the biological processes of childbearing... [The women] appear intellectually dull, spiritually unawakened, devoid of the joy of creative expression and thought...their animality dominates their humanity (Funk Wiebe 1985: 235).

This description is rather bleak, and, I believe, stands for a decidedly tragic figure at the margins – extremes, even – of the configurations of women. Nevertheless, the power given in Mennonite fiction to such metaphorical and, at times, literal figures uncovers the fact that they do significant work as characters both real and imaginary, material and ethereal, ordinary and otherworldly, revered and rejected.

While these figures are renderings, arising out of both nostalgia and theological frames of virtue, the sorrowful and affecting fiction in which these “good Mennonite” women are found signals the power they hold in the imaginary. For many Mennonites who are not writers, however, the expression of, identification with, and performance against such figures is less public, but no less significant in what is at stake through its negotiation. Most frequently, such women were evident in the descriptions I was given of mothers or grandmothers – stalwarts of home and faith, showing love through cooking

and feeding large families, reading the bible and singing hymns in pious devotion, and, above all, not complaining. While these mothers and grandmothers were often described in positive and nostalgic frames, their mere presence (an embodied one) as such good Mennonite women could be equally troubling. As Maggie's example attests, her grandparents' piety and silence through suffering and hardship became, for Maggie, an internalized failure.

The notion of failure was not isolated to Maggie's experience, either. Over coffee, the pastor of a Mennonite church told me about his time at a yearly assemblage of Mennonite pastors in Ontario, and the church-related issues they gathered to talk about (or to "discern," in pastor parlance). He said one of the issues they discussed was communion; for Mennonites, generally only adult-baptized church members are invited to participate, and this participation is predicated on "right relationships." If you are in conflict with another person, before you can take communion, you must take steps toward resolution. At this gathering of pastors, however, it was noted that fewer people in their churches were taking communion. Pastors described how their congregants disclosed that they now avoid communion because they feel the conflicts in their lives are too great, and they are unworthy, ashamed, or "not good enough" to partake. In many discussions I had, there were myriad ways of formulating shame that were both endogamous and exogamous. Shame was felt both because one was not Mennonite enough (or not 'good enough') and because one *was* Mennonite. It could flow from one person to another by association, by place of origin, or by migration; it could follow an act, or enshroud a person by "nature"; it was both being and doing, individual and collective; acknowledged in the abstract, and silenced in the particular.

During one of my visits to Steinbach, for instance, I stopped in at a coffee shop that was marketing a clever local entrepreneur's latest endeavour: Mennonite themed cards for every occasion! One card labelled "the perks of being a Mennonite" captured my attention for its bold hubris: it sounded a little too much like we were "thinking something of ourselves." One perk, found among the list of ten stood out: "you don't have to worry about fashion, or your weight." I found this to be a rather egregious assumption, yet one deeply entrenched within the body-narratives of Mennonite history. Concurrently, however, these assumptions about bodies and figures are uncomfortable precisely because, in part, they are also situated in the context of contemporary body notions in a wider field: few Mennonites live lives exclusively within Mennonite borders. For me, however, instead of feeling the relative "freedom" of "not worrying about my weight," the card's bold pronouncement brought up something much more visceral: embarrassment to a large extent, and shame to a greater degree.

In the spring of 2014 I was invited to attend a spiritual care conference in Winnipeg by a number of Mennonite chaplains whom I had come to know. The broad theme of the conference was assisted suicide, a controversial political topic in Canada, and one deeply entangled in the religious, medical, and ethical contexts and institutions in which spiritual care practitioners were working. Of importance to some Mennonite chaplains I spoke with, and a topic imbricated in theological discussions of assisted suicide, was shame. For care practitioners, the workshops on shame were intended to provide practical skills in order to alleviate, mitigate, or heal the deleterious affects of this "state" of shame. Further, as "spiritual care" facilitators, these Mennonite chaplains

would need to broaden the scope of their ministry to encompass the range of spiritualities and religious affiliations found in typical Canadian health care institutions .

In this context, shame was defined at the workshop I attended as an affect; specifically the feeling of unworthiness that disallows connection with others to be made, or, in other words, a feeling that one is not worth getting to know. This conceptualization of shame was explained to be crucial to spiritual care because “re-connecting” with God is a task of re-establishing worth, and shame, defined as a sense of self-worthlessness, is a grace-less, God-less vortex. It was clear in this workshop that “shame” as a concept was being illustrated in the broadest strokes, that such concepts, understood to limit healing, must be overcome in a rather diverse and divergent group of patients. The concept was therefore made to be seen as universally applicable, located within the individual psyche rather than arising out of any dialectic and dynamic social encounter or context.

This workshop also provided a means of coming to understand shame in a Mennonite context, particularly through conversations with Mennonite chaplains. Jen, a young chaplain working in a long term care facility, talked about her training and the necessity of coming to understand her own “spiritual background” before moving forward to help others. This practice is common in therapeutic education, and in spiritual care, the emphasis is on understanding religion and religious practice. Jen found her cohort religiously and spiritually diverse, and this diversity worked to foreground some particularly Mennonite orientations and affects that Jen struggled, in her words, to “come to terms with.” One of these issues was shame, sparked by a comment made by a fellow student who, upon learning she was Mennonite, said, “Oh – Mennonites. That’s a very shame-based culture, right?”

Jen talked about how she was taken aback by such a stark and broad characterization, while simultaneously recognizing that the comment resonated with her own experience. Since my discussion with Jen, I too have started discussing shame and embarrassment with Mennonites, as the topic seems to stoke a sort of ethnological vitality, and is always at the periphery of discussions. Most tellingly, whenever I get asked “what are you working on” or “what are you writing about,” I have often offered in answer that my work has.... something to do with shame. The response to this statement is overwhelmingly positive: “YES – that’s so true, isn’t it?” It is as if, for the first time, the notion of shame could be spoken, or, in a more potent and entangled sense, that many Mennonites are ashamed that *shame* cannot be and has not been spoken of. In my conversations with Jen, we sought to untangle some of these affects, while coming to realize both their resiliency and genealogical entrenchment.

One woman I talked with, for instance, spoke about her sister who, in the 1970s, got pregnant out of wedlock, and was asked, along with the young man who got her pregnant, to stand in front of the church council (a group of men and boys) and ask for forgiveness for her sins. In another similar story I heard, only the young pregnant woman was asked to stand and ask for forgiveness. In such cases, the concept of sin, sinful behaviour – an act – is made public, and the affect of shame becomes imbued with the self: as in, “you should feel ashamed of *yourself*.”

The cases of pregnancies “out of wedlock” to use the term offered by some of my older participants – a grievous sin in many Mennonite churches – also foreground the problematics of the body, its simultaneous grounding in worldly materialism, and its symbolic rendering as sacred vessel. In many cases, these are confounding and

troublesome tensions, which are most often, though certainly not exclusively, felt by female bodies. I would contend, in fact, that body politics are the most potent sites of shame for Mennonites, intersecting – as bodies do – vulnerabilities, economies, politics, the ineffable and the substantial. Because of these intersections, Mennonite theology has struggled with bodies, and they constitute, currently, the most contentious debates in Mennonite churches: do women('s bodies) belong at the front of the church? Are queer bodies sinful bodies?

In negotiating these conundrums and their concomitant complexities, deep divisions have arisen among Mennonites with respect to how bodies should be understood. In the midst of these theological revisions sits shame, as inured within these webs of significance as bodies themselves. Novelists, writers, and artists from Mennonite communities have been the most public voices speaking about these complexities, much to the chagrin of fellow community members. Di Brandt in particular writes with temerity about the complexities of Mennonite bodies. In one of her essays, “This land that I love, this wide, wide prairie,” she writes: “when did I first understand this, that the women had no place, no voice of their own in the Mennonite farm village economy, even though they worked as hard as the men, keeping huge gardens, and weeding and canning all summer long, and cooking and sewing and cleaning year round?” (2007: 4) As she writes later, of her future and that of her sisters: “And for us, disapproval, endless disapproval, for our women’s bodies and dreams, going off to the city to find our own lives, with no parental support, our mother’s eloquent, unspoken dreams of freedom and adventure raging in our blood, unacknowledged.” (2007:5)

Here, Brandt speaks to several Mennonite motifs, including shame, escape, and silencing. One of the women I met in Steinbach, Helen, too, touched on many of these motifs in her own life, speaking with chagrin about the hard work of her youth that went unacknowledged by the “powerful men” who seemed to direct public life. She also spoke about the absurdity of pregnancy – she herself had six children – observing that the most potent cultural script for women was to be a mother, yet the fact of pregnancy was shameful. Children and babies did, in fact, exist, but, as Helen said, “We were not even supposed to show that we were pregnant! Can you even imagine? How did they think we got the baby?” It reminded me immediately of the one and only picture of my mother during a pregnancy; she was standing in front of a summer garden beside my father, whose arm was around her shoulder. “I’m pregnant here,” she said to me once – it was certainly not clear from the photo, as she held a huge purse in front of her body. “It wasn’t very...nice...to show that you were.”

When I asked Helen why she wasn’t allowed to “show” her pregnant body, she replied “Well *exactly!*” In response to the same question, my mother replied, “I don’t know...it’s just the way it was.” After telling of her experience of pregnancy, Helen then moved our conversation from the personal to her work as a chaplain in a psychiatric ward. Here she spoke about providing spiritual care to girls with eating disorders severe enough to warrant institutional care. The nurses on this ward had told Helen that the majority of girls in Winnipeg who were institutionalized for eating disorders were from Mennonite or Jewish backgrounds.

This correlation between religion and eating disorders was completely startling to both Helen and myself. The nurses explained that the correlation was the result of the

fact that both Anabaptism and Judaism are highly patriarchal systems, and for girls in these cultures, sometimes the only “thing” within their control was their body weight. Though Helen spoke quite generally about the young women and girls she met, not wanting to provide any identifying details, she discussed the difficulties of discharging these girls to their homes and home communities, where they seemed to inevitably be met with gigantic portions of food, and commanded to eat. We discussed the dissonance between the imagery of the Mennonite woman-figure, textualized articulately by Katie Funk-Wiebe, and these thin girls, how body images are embedded both within the psyche through cultural scripts and narratives, yet writ large: embodied and made visible, open to assessment.

ENDOGENOUS VIOLENCE

Redekop and Brandt direct their arguments toward the entanglements of patriarchy, theology, and power in attending to who authorizes silencing, who it is that is silenced, and by what means. I would contend that such “endogenous” violence can be extended to include the examination of “Mennonite relations” in general, relations that are grounded in historical narratives as well. The most pronounced internal divides in Russian Mennonite communities come from church divisions, and immigration history, and, as previously discussed, are also connected to language and education. The waves of migrants coming in the 1870s, 1920s, and 1950s were not easily integrated into existing communities, and, indeed, similar “adjustments” are currently underway with the migration of Mennonites who are returning to Canada from Mexico and Bolivia.

In Manitoba, where the boundaries between groups of migrants were most pronounced, the impingements of the 1920s group into the existing communities that had arrived in the 1870s were fraught. In Ontario, there were more difficulties between the 1920s and 1950s groups and between Russian and Swiss Mennonites. These conflicts were never something I was privy to as a child, but were alluded to throughout discussions of identity and the “legacies” of transitions into Canadian society. One performative aspect of Russian Mennonite identity comes through what is referred to as “the Mennonite game,” and, once again, works as an informal marker of authenticity. People will refer to themselves as “good Mennonites” on the basis of their ability (or willingness, or affinity for) engaging in this performance of identity – or more specifically, ethnicity.

Mennonite appellations are a particularly potent tool of recognition, where surnames offer a way of contextualizing migratory history as well as (potentially) church affiliation: in short, names “place” people and families. Surnames of Dutch, German, and Polish derivation are the most common among Mennonites, and offer a means of “situating” people geographically. My own surname, for instance, is a rather uncommon one, but in Manitoba, most Mennonites I met could “place” me with it. In so doing, a connection and relationship was formed, and my “authorization” as a community member – regardless of how I may have constructed and performed a Mennonite identity – was assured. It was, as someone aptly shared with me, like “starting at a 7 instead of a 0,” meaning the shared history of place, family, and orientation became assumed and unspoken, and the trust borne of such familiarity allowed for a more open conversation.

Returning to the importance of surnames in “opening” such conversations, the origins of the Pletts in Manitoba comes from one particular family that settled in the Steinbach area in the 1870s, and were members of the EMC church: the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, or Kleine Gemeinde as it was known in German. While relatively few Mennonites under forty would be geographically and historically astute enough to ask, most older Mennonites from Manitoba would ask very specific, very knowledgeable questions regarding my geographic heritage. This “Mennonite game” is always about connection, and follows a series of questions intended to outline such connections to places and people. Depending on the degree of separation between generations, the questions can refer to different sets of ancestors: “Who are your parents?” or “Who are your grandparents?” “Where did you grow up?” The final series of questions involves shared relationships: “Do you know [insert name here].”

When connections are discovered, the relationships established can create deep affective responses, a sense of mutual recognition, and, in many cases, trust. This sense of trust has a distinctly ineffable quality, and several people I spoke with were inarticulate in expressing this feeling of connection, suggesting an affinity that transcends language. One man shared this feeling as “safety,” others as “kinship.” One woman simply said, “well you know how it is, right?” “I” did, in fact, know how it is, and her comment included me in a sort of implicit cultural knowledge, one that encompasses the means to “place” people based on names, relationships, and geographical origins.

These places, and movements to and from them, further work to situate individuals and “code” them in particular ways. As Lawrence Taylor discusses, for instance, certain places, certain landscapes, produce certain kinds of people: “morally

good places producing upright citizens” (Taylor 2010). He also observes that moving through places in particular ways can accompany the process of creating meaning and morality in those spaces. I would argue that for Mennonites, the spaces and places they have moved through and stopped in are, too, morally coded, as is the process of movement itself. These valences, however, are evident only as Mennonites come up against each other, as their codes and modalities take on form through interactions. “Migrations,” church affiliations, and even surnames for Mennonites index particular characteristics, many having to do with education and class differentiation, and signalled, as previously discussed, through language.

The arrival of Mennonites to Canada after the Second World War was another precarious transition, in the context of a country that had begun to coalesce into a particular kind of nation, and whose citizens had a clear vision of the “enemy.” There were thousands of refugees from Eastern Europe, collectively coming to be known as DPs or Displaced Persons; the appellation under which Mennonites arrived in Canada. Speaking German, these Mennonites were not particularly welcome in wider Canadian society and they struggled to integrate themselves within established Mennonite communities and churches (Epp 1987).

The term DP became a pejorative handle upon which difference was enacted. In the communities of Leamington, Niagara, and Kitchener-Waterloo in Ontario, many post-war migrants joined churches established by 1920s immigrants (Steiner 2015). Those that left the Soviet Union during the war came from communities bereft of leadership and education, as teachers and community leaders had been removed by the Soviets to forced labour camps. Education was controlled by the state by this point, and “religion” was

discouraged. Many young men were enchanted by the German soldiers who stayed in their homes as the war front moved through the colonies, and enlisted to fight against the Russians who had forcibly removed many of their relatives and community leaders.

When the Mennonites left their Russian home and fled to Canada after World War II, their possessions were meagre, their education “lacking,” and their theological knowledge was not rigorous. These qualities were imbued in the label of Displaced Person, along with what many 1920s descendants saw as “poor, dumb, immigrants” according to those Mennonites I spoke to that were either 1920s immigrants or descendants, as well as the immigrants who came after World War II. Those Mennonites who had previously established themselves in Canada were moving towards the middle-class, as educated and sophisticated professionals, with musical training and theological training; the immigrants were unskilled, and sought out menial or factory work. Within Mennonite communities and churches in Canada, the enactment of such “class” differences was never overt, but for several immigrants and their descendants with whom I spoke, the connotations of being a DP – markers like poor quality or handmade clothing, factory work, poor English – worked internally, and silently, as markers of shame.

While the immigrants worked diligently in menial labour, their children, adjusting to the new Canadian school system, forged negotiations in identity that their parents did not. My mother, her siblings and cousins all came to Canada as children who did not speak English and were poor. Attending large, urban elementary, junior high, and high schools, my mother and aunt recall living an “intermediary” life, one common to children of immigrant parents. Quickly learning English, they would help negotiate the logistics

of life in Canada for their parents who did not speak English, including doctors' visits, and interactions with government offices. As this group of Mennonites considered the German language to be a significant and vital component of identity, their children attended "German school" on Saturdays in order that they maintain the language; church, after all, was still conducted in High German.

These markers of identity and the necessity of children attending to the negotiation of new lives in urban Canada were often related to an uncomfortable period of transition. In Mennonite churches the DPs were never asked to assume leadership positions as they were considered too uneducated, backwards even – particularly those, like my mother and her family, who had immigrated from Paraguay. In schools, the lingering war-time resentment of Germans was felt strongly by those children whose accents lingered a bit too long, sounded a bit too "foreign." Here cultural markers and indices of identity take a generational divide, one that is affectively constructed through shame. As my mother has said about her childhood and teenage years, "I was deeply ashamed of my parents."

With such rapid and tumultuous social changes occurring through migration and integration, with community boundaries breaking open, and new subjectivities as "Canadian citizens" being forged, the ideation of generational difference becomes a key means through which concepts like religion and ethnicity are fundamentally challenged. "My parents' generation" becomes a mode of being that is performed against or in relation to, as something weighed against the possibilities of new lives lived in Canada. In my conversations with Mennonites, reminiscences about how this performance of difference was enacted were most frequently formulated in a discourse of shame and/or

embarrassment at *being* Mennonite, cast against a parents' or grandparents' "excessive" Mennonite-ness, class differences, education, or overt religious displays.

RELIGIOUS AFFECTS

Shame, embarrassment, and melancholy remain themes with vitality in Mennonite lives, particularly in their new entanglements with psychology and psychological or mental health discourses. It is worth considering, therefore, the genealogies of such "themes," and how, or in what circumstances, they are also about the negotiation of subjectivity in relation to religion and religious lives. The framing of the Mennonite subject in increasingly psychologized language signals movement, one that requires reckoning with narratives of history and affect. This psychological turn also requires an examination of what it means to be "subject," what new forms of discipline that may entail, and how religion figures in such an examination.

This movement, however, is not without risk, and there is much at stake in the incorporation of psychological renderings of affect, trauma, and shame: mental health is not neutral, and the work such categorizations do in reframing or revising identity and subjectivity is significant. In other words, a salient question to ask is why, at this moment, are many Mennonites using the discourse of mental health – calling particular affects syndromes, anxiety disorders, depression, and melancholy – and what is entailed in doing so? Who, or what, does "Mennonite" mean in such a process of transition? Is the depression and anxiety that many feel or have felt in the past just a way of being Mennonite, one only "visible" when shifts to other ways of being or new discourses are attempted?

Calvin Redekop, a sociologist of Mennonite background, describes in one of his publications a rather obscure psychological study from the 1960s that identified a “Mennonite syndrome,” defined as a higher proportion of mental health problems due, the researchers concluded, to an emphasis on productive work, rigidity, dogmatism, and repression of the “joy of living.” Other features of this syndrome include an expression of an awareness of guilt, the threat of (church) authority coupled with an unease with non-Mennonite authority (government), and the apparent suppression of sex (Redekop 1989). Using this data, Redekop concludes that this “syndrome” finds fruition in a context where no credence is given to subjectivity, creating an internal melancholy managed through silence. Whether or not this “syndrome” of mental health problems is something diagnosable, a category worthy of the DSM, is certainly not a uniquely “Mennonite” questions, but rather, how Mennonite culture engages with the life of the social category of mental health, is, as there is a “realness” to the angst and unease, but its framing as a mental health problem divorces it, as it does in many contexts, from its embeddedness within culture.¹⁹

Trauma, as a subject of inquiry, is certainly having a moment, particularly in its more contemporary and neoliberal rendering as a psychological – or more accurately, psychologized – state of damage. The tendency to understand trauma as a state of damage, however, is to universally lend agency, authority, and authenticity to the “traumatized,” often problematically rendering those who witness to trauma or give voice to it, victims. A contemporary conceptualization of trauma is firmly embedded in psychology, one linking collective “woundings” with individual trauma.

¹⁹ See, for example, Jenkins (2015), where the author argues for the necessity of understanding mental health within cultural contexts.

Cathy Caruth (1996), for instance, suggests that it is trauma that provides the link between cultures, and that response to the suffering of the world is derived through an identification with our own traumatic pasts – our own wounds – rather than on the basis of another’s experience. The cultural impact of the work of Sigmund Freud in the field of psychoanalysis has meant that the location of such trauma, either categorized as collective or individual memory, is found within the individual psyche. Fassin and Rechtman (2009) argue that situating trauma in this way – suggesting a shared experience of trauma that “links” cultures – is an overly psychoanalytic reading of trauma that is embedded within a tendency towards universalization where all experiences of human suffering, of wounding, are “trauma” most potently felt (either collectively or individually) within the psyche. Psychological trauma, then, appears to be *the* fundamental reality of violence. The response to trauma that is understood this way is therefore seemingly necessarily placed within the domain of the mind, presided over by experts in the field.

Though the hallmark trauma diagnosis “PTSD” is not something I heard Mennonites speak of often, it is gaining traction as a sort of diagnosis of hindsight – as in, “I think my father actually had PTSD.” Mennonites who have historical connections to the Russian experience are increasingly fitted into the frame of the now quintessential diagnoses of trauma, PTSD and anxiety. One woman I talked at length with about traumatized Mennonites was a social worker in her 60s named Catherine. She had a contentious relationship with her mother, a silent and taciturn woman. Catherine herself struggled with an anxiety disorder, one that she discovered as a student of psychology, could be passed down from mother to child. Catherine’s grandmother was pregnant with

her mother when they escaped the Soviet Union and Catherine explained that the stress hormones present in mothers during traumatic events are passed on to the fetus, resulting in an overly anxious child and subsequent children. Feeling vindicated in her discovery of the origins of her disorder, Catherine pondered aloud the heady possibility of ‘healing’ whole generations of anxious Mennonites.

There have been significant contributions to the discussion on Russian Mennonites and trauma in Mennonite studies literature, from a variety of perspectives. Most notable in this regard is the dedication of an issue of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* from 2011 to the discussion of mental health. In this issue, for instance, Elizabeth Krahn (2011) discusses the biological transference of affect in an autoethnographic study on the intergenerational legacies of Soviet oppression on Mennonite women. In addition to this issue from 2011, other authors have taken on the topic of intergenerational trauma. Elaine Enns (2016), for example, writes of the problematic silences that have interrupted and inhibited useful communal dialogues of healing and reparation in Russian Mennonite communities, while Linda Klassen Reynolds (1997) writes of the multigenerational effects of trauma on the migrants and descendants of the 1920s migration from the Soviet Union.

While these authors and others write importantly of the recognition of trauma in the Russian Mennonite experience and ethos, my aim in discussing trauma is to argue that the turn towards a discourse of trauma itself is informative. In line with Fassin and Rechtman’s (2009) argument, trauma language and diagnosis is *doing* something for the Mennonites that are accessing it. Many aspects of Mennonite life were located as potentially traumatic by the Mennonites I spoke with: being labelled a DP and speaking

German, being “outed” as Mennonite without a choice, silence, and diagnoses such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD. In a psychologized construction of trauma, speaking of oneself as traumatized lends authority and agency in speaking, and therefore offers Mennonites a new discourse – an opportunity for a subjectivity located as authoritative and agentive – to mitigate the tensions of a history that at times valorizes suffering and martyrdom and the fact of survival of the Russian experience.

Yet how has trauma come to be consequently constructed, and how has it become conflated with morality and empathy, the language through which we respond to the distress of others? If “trauma” lends authenticity to the experience of suffering, to what extent do the “witnesses,” those who desire to speak and to be heard, take on the category of victimhood in order that they can become “authentic”? Recalling the case of Rob, whose wife and daughters have been diagnosed with depression, we see that he denies the possibility of guilt about how his conduct, or theirs, might have led to their depression, in favour of the narrative that positions them as victims of historic trauma. Martyrdom becomes victimhood, a clinical rather than religious category. The ways in which the Russian experience is remembered shift from the theological to the psychological.

The ease with which victim becomes equated with martyr in such a framework has the potential for damage. For Mennonites, for whom the script of the self-righteous martyr, whose life and more importantly, death, witness most faithfully to the life and suffering of Jesus Christ, is particularly potent; the link between victimhood and martyrdom can be particularly harmful. As some Mennonite scholars have pointed out, numerous historical narratives have been increasingly criticized for evoking the ‘victim/martyr’ figure in their readings of Mennonite history. These histories evoke a

narrative of a persecuted and ‘chosen people’ and reify the “good Mennonite” figures, who, in practice, are hard emulate. The failure to live up to the standards of the martyrs of the past can be devastating psychologically for present-day Mennonites.

More fraught, perhaps, is the disjuncture between the individualist tendency of the psychological discourse and the deeply communal orientation of Mennonites.

Psychological therapies for mental health problems focus on individual experience. Individualism, in a Mennonite context, problematically evokes the rather violent practice of excommunication or shunning – a literal cutting off of someone deemed sinful in order that they may not cause others to sin. The trauma of the experience of excommunication arises from the refiguring of the sinner’s subjectivity. Excommunication forces individuality upon the sinner, and, in turn, the deep pain of separation. While Anabaptist groups are all grounded in a theology of pacifism, the practice of shunning or excommunication is implicitly, and intensely, violent.

Psychological therapies for mental health problems focus on individual experience and pharmacology, while at the same time, psychologized renderings of trauma and suffering are also removed from the theological. In the psychological discourse earthly pain and persecution is not related to righteousness, and suffering does not confer dignity or heavenly reward on the victim. What, then, to do with the martyrologies, with the guilt and shame of previous generations, with memory? Can “healing” in Mennonite contexts afford to lose the communal context, or does it even matter any more?

The subjectivity of many Mennonites – their sense of personhood even – is therefore contingent upon, and negotiated through, a performance against the good

Mennonite figure, a historically produced and reproduced narrative. The traumas of what poet Di Brandt calls “the Burning Times” and “the Drowning Times,” and the traumas of Russia and the escapes from it, have embedded anxieties within the Mennonite imaginary. The work that psychological language does positions such ‘melancholic Mennonites’ into negotiating a new subjectivity, a personhood able to move into new worlds. It offers a way of negotiating between the historical narrative of trauma, theologies of martyrdom and salvation and how they are remembered, and a world that provides the language to assess these uncomfortable states and a potential means to alleviate them.

Now that Mennonites seem to be more invisible than visible in broader Canadian society, these borders between worlds become more porous. To access the language of psychology – to acknowledge a diagnosis of and treatment for depression, for instance – pulls Mennonite melancholy into this new psychological world with its promise of healing. Together with this process, shifts are taking place in how Mennonites understand themselves to be Mennonite subjects and persons. The figure of the Mennonite woman, this “Eve Before the Fall, a pure and asexual preserver of Mennonite faith and culture,” retains a power and potency because it is performed *against*. Within the psychological frame, new ways to be a good Mennonite are being discovered. “I am good enough” as a mantra still invokes the figure of Eve Before the Fall, but in ways allowing for new, renewed, revised, or rejected subjectivities. Calvin Redekop concluded his 1960 study on the “Mennonite syndrome” with the conclusion that this condition finds fruition in a context where no credence is given to subjectivity, creating an internal melancholy managed through silence. While Redekop is correct in making the link

between syndrome and subjectivity, I would contend that this “melancholy” exists in a context exactly where credence is given to subjectivity – a Christian one enmeshed in deep configurations of the martyrological.

I found that it is younger Mennonites, those born in the US or Canada and with distance from the Russian experience, who more freely use the language of mental health both in hindsight to explain the affect of their parents or grandparents, and about themselves as holders of traumatic prosthetic memories. This language takes on a thoroughly postmodern character as a broader ethics of voice, and indexes a struggle between visibility and invisibility, the individual and the collective. Perhaps the presence of a Mennonite syndrome is actually the result of the increasing visibility of a worldview that stands in contrast to the cloying optimism of contemporary America, a worldview that allows space for suffering, and a melancholic affect.

The work that psychological and medical language does, positions Mennonites utilizing such discourses into negotiating a new subjectivity, a personhood able to move into new worlds. It is a way of navigating between the historical narrative of trauma, theologies of martyrdom and salvation, and how they are remembered, and a world that provides the language to assess these uncomfortable states and a potential means to alleviate them. To navigate the new and changing social categories, worlds, and discourses that shape and are shaping the conditions into which Mennonites now move requires holding on and letting go – binding and loosing to use an Anabaptist trope. What is lost and what is gained in these negotiations, in shifting subjectivities, in choosing new discourses of affect, in attending to new orientations, in the desire for healing and reparation to traumas remembered and forgotten?

Scholar Don Wiebe (1980) once suggested that the Mennonite retreat from “the world” was also a retreat from the world of “mind,” a state of anti-intellectualism. That the “mind” as both a constructed location of intellectual capacity and, in contemporary theory, the seat of trauma, is something rejected by Mennonites as “worldly” may therefore offer a perception of trauma that renders its locatedness within the psyche as problematic, and troubles the conception of it as universal. Where, for Mennonites, might trauma be located if a theory of mind was a rejected, worldly, concept?

Such shifts are necessarily processual, mutable; they are negotiated every day, by, in, and around inhabited bodies – and they are all, at the same time, Mennonite bodies, medical bodies, and capitalist bodies, under the affective and subjective regimes of these constructs, and oriented at various times towards or away from them. Returning to Sara Ahmed, who writes that the question of orientation becomes a question not only about how we ‘find our way’ but how we ‘come to feel at home,’ I would suggest that the ease into which Mennonites have entered into medical and psychological discourses, and have become increasingly medical and psychological subjects indexes the extent to which the concept of “the world” can shift.

This new means of constructing a Mennonite subject links with a notion of modern selfhood that must reckon with the demands of Christian living. That is, reckoning with, as Webb Keane (2007: 322) describes, the modern subject’s “anxious transcendence:” “this irresolvable tension between abstraction and the inescapability of material and social mediations.” Confession becomes a technology able to mitigate this tension, acknowledging failure to surpass the material and social for the abstract, while producing a self that opens to the psychological through the uncovering of an interior,

hidden truth. This truth is necessarily mediated through the body, and as I will discuss, this body, as irreducibly material, also mediates how and where “the world” gets located.

CHAPTER FIVE

SENDING

INTRODUCTION

The conclusion of the church service orients the congregants, once again, towards their lives beyond the service, to an affirmation of their relationship to God, and to belief in Jesus as the means to access such a relationship. The church service as a place out of “ordinary” time and space is an instantiation of the mutable quality of Mennonite religious practice, one that is evidenced particularly at the conclusion of each service. The ritual of ‘sending,’ or concluding the service reflects the positioning of the church and its members to the grounding, supple, and capricious construct of the world. This construct of the world is so central to Mennonite affect and ethos that its meaning has become idiomatic and recondite, used mutably to index the theological and material negotiations of Mennonite subjectivity.

The iterations of “worldly” continue to be plentiful in conversations: movie theatres and roller rinks were recalled as being “too worldly” to frequent (“what would Jesus think if he came down from heaven and you were roller skating?”), long hair and too much (or any) makeup on women was discouraged, a teenager’s record collection

was burned by a father for being sinful. These examples, though frivolous, note the realness and everyday quality upon which boundaries were drawn. As theologian David Schroeder suggests, Mennonite theological concepts were able only to be articulated through an interaction with “difference”: seen this way, the world and its boundaries and authority arise out of an interaction with an Other, necessitated through openings and a movement of Mennonites out of them and into the world.

This movement has been documented and described by a number of Mennonites of varying academic affiliations: some sociologists, for instance, suggest that the rise in professionalism in the post-war years is an “urban” form of being “in the world but not of it” – a re-creation of a detached “colony within an alien culture” that characterized the Anabaptist vision of Christian life and witness, and came to describe how bounded Mennonite communities in Russia and Canada came to regard themselves (Pauls 1980:249). The Anabaptist forebears of contemporary Mennonites outlined a radical split between the authorities of church and government, and the idealized state of being in the world but not of the world. In the Christian framework of a fallen world, death becomes the defining moment of a life, the reunification with the divine that exists in another another realm (Cannell 2007).

In this chapter I explore how the Mennonites I encountered understand death in a Christian framework, and how this “reunification,” now taking place in a secular and medical age, causes particular anxieties. These anxieties result from a fundamental paradox in Christian life: the necessity of the flesh for the salvation of the spirit. The tension between the spirit and the flesh is generative, too, and is articulated most significantly in how the boundaries of the world (and where to place oneself in relation to

it) are understood, engaged with, and acted upon. Central to this discussion is the body itself, both because of its prominence in my conversations during fieldwork about how worldliness is policed, punished, or reckoned with, and because the body constitutes the flesh, the sinful material of life. Indeed, it is the body, the material, that must be reckoned with at death: the necessity of the flesh for spiritual salvation, and the contingencies of illness and suffering.

For Mennonites, death is positioned alongside a history of martyrdom that celebrates the bodily sacrifice to Christian witness – that celebrates death and suffering – and the subsequent salvation of the spirit. While salvation is spiritual, witness necessitates the body, and it is the conundrums of that body in light of a martyrological history and theology that can, at times, valorize suffering and cause the lines of worldliness to be redrawn. In practice, the moveable boundaries of the world, being in it but not of it, can take a variety of forms, the result of which can be seen most visibly and broadly in the breadth of church schism. As I discuss, too, the medicalized context in which most Mennonites now die often rejects notions of the suffering body, particularly religiously-based notions, that push against medical authority. The Anabaptist narrative of martyrdom and Christian witness makes obvious the contemporary resonances of this narrative, complicating it in a new technologically-oriented medical context.

Narratives of pain and suffering, so vital to early Anabaptist theological constructions of virtue and salvation, must be reckoned with under these new regimes, particularly inasmuch as these narratives construct an understanding of death: is it a victory and home-coming, or medical failure? The lure of the modern with its promises of immediate gratification shifts the boundaries of what constitutes ‘the world’: new

understandings emerge of where God might be (if God is seen to exist at all) and the idea of heaven-as-home becomes less certain, and, in Mennonite fashion, that hierarchy between life and death comes to look more *plaut*: flat.

INTO THE WORLD

As a child, I accompanied my parents to the Mennonite church in the small town where I went to school and where my father grew up. My cohort (at school, church, and community events) was made up (generally) of cousins of varying degrees of relatedness. In this town, the conclusion of church services was usually perfunctory, and terminated with a hymn. This era was, of course, before the music used in evangelical church services shifted away from hymns to a more dynamic “praise and worship band” style, far more emotionally charged, and augmented with electric guitars and drums. While the amplification of both the accompaniment and affective response to this musical shift formed, and continues to form, intense generational rifts, the theological content of the lyrics runs, in many ways, parallel.

One particular hymn offers a prescient memory for me, and its very invocation presents a vivid scene of the conclusion of a childhood church service. To hear this hymn evokes the anticipation of removing the deep discomfort of the nylon stockings I had to wear on Sunday mornings, and my father leading the congregation in a song that affirmed and confirmed the church’s servitude to God, and belief in Jesus as saviour. From the concluding verse:

Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done,

And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son,
But purer, and higher, and greater will be,
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
And give him the glory, great things he hath done.

(Hymnal: A Worship Book 1992; 102)

This particular hymn suggests the necessity of affirming the special relationship between believers and Jesus-as-saviour characteristic of evangelically-minded Christians. The hymn also claims that a relationship with God is possible only through a life lived in the service of Jesus and that Jesus is the access point to relationship with God. Yet the hymn further invokes the promise of the relationship's fulfillment, the possibility of meeting Jesus in heaven following the living of a "proper" Christian life.

When I was growing up, the church community was integrated into the school community, and community life in general. As such, the "sending" from the service was an eschatological confirmation of heaven-as-home. In contrast, more recently, when I attended a Mennonite church service in Paraguay, its conclusion came following a song, and the rather abrupt filing out and dispersal of everyone gathered there. It was all a rather rapid affair to me, after a perfunctory service; a concluding song, and the building emptied in swift silence.

As in rural Manitoba, this church in the midst of a Paraguayan Mennonite colony was well integrated into the wider community, to the extent that the boundaries between church and community, between the space and time of Sunday morning and the other moments of weekly life were, in fact, unmarked. The church service was a ritualized extension of everyday life, signalled by (slight) changes in clothing, and a more stylized

comportment. “Church” in these contexts was not somehow “out” of ordinary time and space in the same way that contemporary urban Mennonite churches are separated from the quotidian context. The boundedness of “worlds” in traditional Mennonite churches in rural Manitoba and Paraguay is therefore reflected in the ritual of the service itself, and as a result renders the very concept of the World – so central to Mennonite life – mutable.

Urban Mennonite congregations mark the space as “Mennonite” in part because, for many, the church is the only space in which Mennonite identity is explicitly performed as previously discussed. Without the geographical demarcations of Mennonite “homes” – of reserves, colonies, or communities – the movement of Mennonites into worlds and The World becomes more abstract, even ephemeral. Church, through its space, becomes a ritualized affirmation of the grounding metaphor and idiom of The World, because the space of the Church is separate from and contrasts with worldly space. Here I follow Fernandez’ (1986) argument that metaphors “lie at the base on of inquiry and animate it,” allowing us to “leap beyond” what he describes as the essential privacy of the experiential process.

Within the anthropological literature, some authors understand narrative as a representation of experience (or homologous to it). Others, in line with Laurence Kirmayer, suggest metaphor to work similarly as narrative, and Fernandez (1974) argues for the primacy of metaphor among the devices of representation of experience. Metaphor, according to Fernandez (1991), seeks to move an inchoate subject to the grounds of a known, delineated subject. In looking at metaphor within anthropological inquiry, then, Sapir and Crocker (1977) suggest that far from being a simplistic form of

substitution, metaphor is a creative interplay of two disparate terms that can be profound and revealing of deep and important cultural understandings.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit that the system by which we conceive of everyday realities is metaphorical, and therefore metaphor is embedded in the way we think, what is experienced, and what we do. For these authors, the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. Fernandez (1986) suggests the performance of metaphors is therefore a strategy, whereby the metaphoric assertions people make about themselves or others influence their behaviours, thus creating “manageable objects” of the self. Performance of such metaphors is enabled by providing images in relation to which behaviour can be organized. Because the social world is a world “in becoming” and not static, metaphor becomes metamorphic and transformative, particularly as enacted within social drama (Fernandez 1986; Turner 1974).

The Mennonite church service as social drama enacts the metaphor of The World, where Gathering and Sending in such a space become an overt description of moving into and back out of a ritualized performance of identity. This performance is set apart in time (away from “everyday lives,” “the work week,”) and space – particularly through the invocation of God’s presence in and amongst the congregation. In such a setting, the service, and the social connections forged informally afterwards, demarcate lives, and the intentionality of such practices indexes the shifts in modes of being. Much more than a ritual act among people who share quotidian experience in lives lived entirely in proximity, the urban contemporary Mennonite church experience is deeply social, lengthy, and deliberate in making those connections immanent and accessible – for they

may only last for one morning out of the week. This becomes a significant transformation: that the urban church becomes a more liminal space, something ‘set apart’ in a new way from its origins as embedded within a Mennonite enclave.

In its intentionality, the ritual of the contemporary urban Mennonite church service both produces and reproduces a shifting concept of The World and Mennonite identity and subjectivity in relation to that concept. Sending, the concluding portion of the service, is often deliberately directional in its intent: it is a sending back into “ordinary” time and space, out of the divine presence, yet (hopefully) transformed. Litanies, a form of public prayer consisting of a series of invocations to God, found in the back of the hymnal for the occasion of “sending,” feature phrases like “as we go...,” “send us...,” “as we leave...” These are phrases evocative of movement. Yet the space and time of the church service is liminal, and the movement invoked at the gathering and sending is one between worlds, a vacillation that enables subjectivities and identities to be managed.

These subjectivities are, in many ways, orientations. For Mennonites, the positionality of orientation is produced through the construct of the World, grounded deeply in the wider Christian theological concepts originating from biblical interpretation, as well as in a quotidian, material being-in-the-world that has moulded the theology into a sort of “realness” of experience. The World, for Mennonites, is therefore simultaneously material and abstract, complicated by desires and flesh, revered and reviled, formative and elusive, respected and rejected. It is within and against this metaphor that the complications of living, material, bodies impinge most upon

theological and ideological constructs, and become a fruitful, if precarious, site of exploration of subjectivity and identity.

The notion of ideological “worlds” and citizenship in them is rooted in early Anabaptist theological outlines of The World. Yet the echoes of these concepts in contemporary settings have been myriad, such that The World has an impressive vitality as an idiom. As an embodied and materially oriented theological concept, it is most visible in Anabaptist sects that have, with great and deliberate intention, separated themselves from The World in a very evident way. The idea of being “in the world but not of the world” renders the Amish, Old Order Mennonites, and Hutterites curiosities in their Canadian and American contexts. These groups are somehow paused or plateaued in a technological and material era that reflects their theological and ideological leanings. For these groups, the material – specifically the technological – is understood in varying degrees to corrupt Christian spiritual life. From this perspective, the desire for “things,” a faster pace of life, and bodily adornment, disrupts the goal of being a true and humble servant of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life.

CIVICS

For contemporary Russian Mennonites, this notion of the world has dual iterations – accretions, maybe – around which lives are understood to be Mennonite: the notion of involvement in civic and national life, and the body. Early Anabaptists followed Martin Luther’s notion of the “two kingdoms” doctrine in formulating their view of government and the Christian’s role in it. Both the Lutheran and Anabaptist views suggested that government was divinely instituted because of the sinful nature of humanity. Yet,

government belonged to the institution of law, in contrast to the church, which was given to humanity through the grace of God and belonged to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Government belonged to the kingdom of Satan – that is, this world – characterized by strife, vengeance, anger, and the Sword – punishment, military might, and murder. The kingdom of Christ, in this view, was understood to be characterized by peace, forgiveness, nonviolence, and patience (Klaassen 1981)

Menno Simons provided religious and scriptural justification for disavowal of participation in government and a rejection of involvement with politics (Klaassen 1981). However, the survival of the Mennonites as a “functioning religious community” necessarily led to engagement with external sources of administration and power, particularly in the negotiations required to obtain privileged protection from political authorities throughout the European and North American migratory contexts (Urry 2006). Framed as a distancing from “secular” concerns based on Christ’s requirement to concentrate on *otherworldly* pursuits and remain separate from the world, an association with government and politics is therefore considered not just worldly but contrary to Christ’s teaching of non-resistance, since political power is based on exercising force.

James Urry (2006) traces this tenuous engagement with politics, which generates and arises from the tension between “worldly” and “otherworldly,” throughout the Russian Mennonite history of migration. To maintain a separation from the world, Mennonites sought the privilege of protection and special rights. Yet with the emergence of popular forms of government, often following revolutionary activity and the formation of nation-states, such special rights were often revoked, hence prompting migration. In Russia, the rumour of conscription prompted, in part, the migration to Manitoba in the

1870s, and the adoption of an English school curriculum in Manitoba prompted a migration to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s.

The attempt to maintain a distinct Mennonite *identity* was threatened by the creation of national identities, the imposition of a single legal code and constitution, and subordination to popular democracy. Mennonite aspects of faith were confronted with the notion of citizenship imposed by the state: “throughout their history...those in power and their officials have insisted that [Mennonites] subject themselves to identities other than those of their own choosing” (Urry 2006;13). In Urry’s view, in light of this notion of citizenship Mennonite history has become something of a “self-sustaining folk tradition,” a paradoxical rhetorical strategy of separatist arguments derived from the tragedies of history, and “assimilative arguments” drawn from the yearning to be good citizens.

As these Anabaptists maintain, the church is set apart from the world. The church as institution is ruled by a “spiritual king” (that is, Jesus Christ, the head of the church), whereas the world is ruled by sinful or “fallen” leaders. As Menno Simons describes the idealized holy Christian church: “Their kingdom is the kingdom of grace, here in hope and after this in eternal life. Their citizenship is in heaven, and they use the lower creations such as eating, drinking, clothing, and shelter, with thanksgiving to the necessary support of their own lives” (1981:109-110). Here Simons evokes the language of citizenship, a vital concept for subsequent generations of migrating Mennonites. However, in Simons’ idealized Christian community, obligation and accountability, or subjectivity, is rendered in relation to an abstract kingdom, one ruled spiritually by Jesus Christ. Simons also extends this metaphor to the realm of time, claiming that Christ’s

kingdom, as opposed to Satan's kingdom, extends eternally after death, and therefore the true home of devout Christians is in heaven.

Most provocatively, perhaps, is how Simons attends to the base needs of the material body – the “lower creations” – that are used necessarily, not passionately, nor for enjoyment (but at least with thanksgiving!). The genealogy and reverberations of this framework for contemporary Mennonites are, in many ways, the most contentious, most troublesome idioms, to reckon with. Simons invokes the biblical concept of “the flesh,” one deeply grounded in a Christian ideology of corruption and the dualism of spiritual and material. The needs and desires of the fleshly body, the material, are understood to be the domain of “the worldly.” As Simons describes members of the True Church:

They daily sigh and lament over their poor, unsatisfactory evil flesh, over the manifest errors and faults of their weak lives. Their inward and outward war is without ceasing... Their fight and struggle is against the devil, world, and flesh all their days, pressing on toward the prize of the high calling that they may obtain it. So they prove by their actions that they believe the Word of the Lord, that they know and possess Christ in power, that they are born of God (1981:110).

In this passage, Simons clearly outlines the struggle that choosing the Christian life entails. True witness to Christ's life of suffering is achieved through action, through the rejection and denial of “the flesh” and “the world.” The notion of the flesh as base, fallen, and corrupt is biblically grounded. Scriptural passages occurring frequently in the writings of early Anabaptists and martyrs include, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11) and

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world [sometimes translated as ‘age’], but be transformed by the renewing of

your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).

Even more to the point is the passage “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?” (James 4:4).

The reverence given such passages indexes their grounding in the Mennonite ethos, yet such idealization frequently meets with consternation and failure when Mennonites must negotiate everyday lives that are lived with bodies moving through the world. The requirements of abstinence from fleshly desires and of the rejection of this world in favour of the next, are mutable in experience, shifting in the variety of contexts and social expectations in which Mennonites have found themselves. For contemporary Mennonites, the rejection of “the flesh” has been widely criticized by women who recognize the deep unease that a failure to acknowledge “the material” can foster (see, for example, Brandt 2007; Klassen 1994; Glendinning 1994; Funk Wiebe 1985).

CONTEXTS OF DEATH

While the metaphors of worlds and homes have implications for material and embodied lives in everyday settings, the authority of such metaphors comes from their abstract power in constructing “home” as a future, and idealized, space. The idea that home is to be found in an *other World* shapes understandings of life and death. Death, in many senses, becomes a “sending” into a true home, out of the World ruled by Satan, and into the World of divine rule. This metaphor, however, is processual, and is embedded – consciously or not – in contemporary medical notions of death and dying, religion, and technology, that anthropologists have been concerned with for decades.

In 1973 Johannes Fabian reviewed the anthropological literature on death, decrying its parochialism while calling for a shift in epistemological orientation to one that saw death as a process and productive construction of reality. Fabian argued that the anthropological literature he surveyed was not about “death,” but about how others die. The influence of Robert Hertz in linking death-related behaviour to the “social order” is also evident in attempts to locate the “universality” of death in a common emotional or cognitive response (Huntington and Metcalf 1987), a preoccupation present in much of the anthropological literature through to the 1980s. Arguments put forth by Gorer (1965), Becker (1973), and Ariès (1974) all, to varying extents, attempt broad theorizing to account for death-related behaviours particularly in Western contexts.

Fabian (1972) asserted that little was written by anthropologists on *death* since the discipline conceived of itself as the study of human behaviour. Death puts an end to behaviour, so anthropologists have studied how others die. Huntington and Metcalf (1987) also point out that anthropology has focused on death-related behaviour, and, as they exemplify, some of the more seminal works draw heavily from psychology and psychoanalysis. Moreover, what is embedded within these arguments is the assumption that death is inherently terrifying; comfort may be provided by religion and tradition, but their lack leaves uncertainty and despair in the face of death.

My first vague interest in a “Mennonite” understanding of death, to the extent that such a concept exists, entered thoughts many miles from my natal home during a trip to southern Angola, where I carried out an ethnography of a rural tuberculosis clinic. Since I had a driver’s licence, I was given the job of driving the robust vehicle used by the clinic as an ambulance, to transport the community health team, and, one evening, as a

hearse. A woman who had died at the clinic was being brought back to her home, accompanied by the eight women relatives who had cared for her during her illness. Apart from the bench at the front of the vehicle where the driver and passenger sat, the vehicle, a hybrid between a van and a pick-up truck, was open at the back, and the woman who had died lay flat, surrounded by her relatives.

As the driver, I was deeply uneasy at my proximity to this dead body. The unfamiliarity of this experience was only surpassed five minutes into the drive when the relatives opened the windows and began to wail and sing in a manner so unearthly that I began to shake. Their voices ebbed and flowed, and I, in my deep state of culture shock, felt entirely bereft: I had no recourse, no knowledge or framework with which to seize and direct my affect, my response. The wailing of these eight women was both an announcement of the dead woman's presence to passers-by on the highway along which we drove and an affective demonstration of loss. Nothing in my realm of experience compared with what was transpiring behind me, and in the days following, I pondered how I, a product of a Mennonite community burdened with the stereotype of being "obsessed" with death, could be so shaken by proximity to a dead body.

In pursuing fieldwork in Mennonite communities years after my trip to Angola, it became clear to me that the relationships between Mennonites and death are complex, fluid and variable. Deep generational shifts framed by social change render "tradition" precarious, and it is clear that an homogenous "Mennonite" view of death and dying does not exist. Yet "Mennoniteness" continues to be enmeshed in the ways that illness is understood in relation to suffering, martyrdom, and Christian witness. All of these concepts are grounded within and performed against ideas of what constitutes The World,

worldliness and home. In the face of illness and death, these Mennonite frames of reference remain compelling, yet flexible, means of accessing meaning and mediating subjectivity – particularly for Mennonites as medical subjects.

My initial research questions focused on the complexities of theological and martyrological understandings of death in the contemporary, medically-informed contexts in which the majority of Mennonites in Canada now die. The context in which Mennonite narratives of illness and death become meaningful is also deeply informed by broader Western constructions of death and dying. These broader Western narratives are themselves folded into Mennonite history in their European genealogies, yet they entangle – because of the Mennonite tendency towards insularity – with Mennonite communities, thought, and ethos in uneven, if significant ways.

There is a cliché that Mennonites are preoccupied with death. This stereotype is, however, problematic in that young Mennonites – generally – seem to have as much or as little interest in death as their non-Mennonite peers, and therefore this “preoccupation” is mutable. Its presence, however, as a sort of peripheral concern does index a “Mennonite relationship with death” as something significant. I spent my childhood summers at my grandparents’ house when my parents were at work, and remember my grandmother turning on the radio at a specific time each day for the funeral announcements, broadcast by the AM station in Steinbach. We were to be quiet (not still, though), as my grandmother sat beside the radio and listened to the languid baritone voice reciting the names of those who had died: “Mary Reimer, née Kroeker, 92, of Blumenort, passed away Tuesday, July 9th at Rest Haven Nursing Home. She is predeceased by...” It was a daily occurrence, a ritual granted the necessary solemnity: no talking, but for the

occasional comment along the lines of “oh Mary Reimer died...” I was always bored, giving these announcements the same attention I would a sermon at church, or the compulsory naps my grandfather would make us take every afternoon.

Novelist Miriam Toews, too, has noted a somewhat Mennonite view of death, painting this phenomenon from the perspective of the hyperbolic eye-rolling adolescent character of her novel, Nomi Nickel. Her novel *A Complicated Kindness* is set in the fictional town of East Village, known in the non-fiction world as Steinbach, and Nomi offers very reactionary opinions about the Mennonites who call East Village home. In the novel, Nomi’s family (her mother, father, and sister Tash) is slowly disintegrating, and Nomi struggles to reconcile the theological imperative of “the town” that, in death, families will be reunited in heaven, and her longing to be present together here, on earth:

The only thing I needed to know was that we were all going to live forever, together, happily, in heaven with God, and without pain and sadness and sin. And in my town that is the deal... It was the one thing I counted on and I couldn’t understand why my own immediate family would make little feints and jabs in directions other than up, up, up to God. Why was Tash so intent on derailing our chances and sabotaging our plans to be together for goddamn ever and why the hell couldn’t my parents see what was happening and rein that girl in? We were supposed to stay together, it was clear to me. That was the function, the ultimate purpose, the entire premise for the existence of the Nickel Family. That we remained together for all eternity. (17)

Nomi’s struggle draws precisely on the tension in the Mennonite ethos: strong community and communal conviction creates deep anxieties about separation. When I spoke with older Mennonites about feelings about death or dying, they described hopes and visions of going to a heaven where they could be reunited with family and friends. Affirmed by chaplains attending the dying, this reunion desire was stronger than the desire to “see Jesus,” or whatever heavenly images various church denominations may provide. In the same way as the funeral announcer on the radio dolefully listed the names

of those that the dead person was “predeceased by...”, discussions around death centre on the reunion, on looking forward to being in the presence of those who have died before. In this way, the past turns to future, and the narrative, fashioned through memory, becomes imagined. This imagined future takes place in another world, another place, equally imagined, but drawn from the past, and from an earthly place.

In their imaginings of heaven, Mennonites I spoke with envisioned worlds not necessarily derived from the biblical images of cities paved with gold, but stylized agricultural imagery: as the narrative goes, Mennonites aren’t really “city” people, after all. Heaven becomes those idealized, most transcendent images of agrarian life, steeped in earthly, sensuous imagery: fertile fields, abundant food, colourful sunsets and gardens, warm and pleasant weather, and the company of beloved family members and friends. Such imagery finds a particular poignancy in an ethos built on the premise that this world and its concomitant materiality should be rejected.

What this suggests, then, is that imagined communities and worlds are built upon familiar places, that what can be imagined in the future is constructed through narratives about the past, but created as idyllic. Such eschatological turns, however, are fraught, and the “imagined” – the potential – is often a discordant substitute for a lived and embodied present and past. Theological assurances of reunion in heaven do not actually mitigate the trauma of separation arising from the loss of loved ones through bodily death or the social ostracism of excommunication, troubling the supposition of home-as-heaven. The transposition of earthly and earthy “home” states to this heaven brings the worlds into a shared present, melding times and narratives, and working as a performance of “togetherness” not as a nation/state, but as a mythic community.

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF DEATH

During my fieldwork with Mennonites, I was fortunate to have conversations with numerous nurses, chaplains, and patients who were situated in health care settings. Yet the very fact that Mennonites can be found in these settings signals precisely the diversity of worlds in which contemporary Mennonites move. Discussions around death, how Mennonites die, and their relationship to death and dying, are inevitably also about subjectivity. Do Mennonites identify as *Mennonite* health care professionals and/or patients? To what extent are nurses “Mennonite”? Can one be a Mennonite nurse, and how might the epistemological orientations of Mennonitism and medical education come to inform one another?

Since the mid-twentieth century, considerable social scientific research and theorizing has been directed toward issues relating to death and dying. The influential work of Becker (1973) draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory in arguing that the fear of death is universal, a significant theme of this literature. According to Becker, this fear provides the motivation for all human activity, the intention of which is to “overcome” death by denying it. This fear (“terror” in Becker’s terms), is a basic anxiety, one that remains entrenched within the unconscious through acts of repression, since its presence in the conscious mind would hinder “normal” functioning in the same way as inadequately expressed sexuality negatively impacts human psychological health.

Gorer (1965), too, emphasizes the connection between death, death-related behaviours like mourning and potential psychosis. Looking specifically at the English context, he equates the “taboo” associated with death in contemporary England with the

attitude toward sexuality in Victorian England. Increasing secularization, he argues, has left the English bereft of ways and means of dealing with death and mourning. Though the initial shock of a death may be recognized socially, the parameters of what Gorer calls “time-limited mourning” require the following of socially proscribed patterns of behaviour, often denying space for mourning and providing no “ritual support” to mourners: “[it] is treated as if it were a weakness, a self-indulgence, a reprehensible bad habit instead of as a psychological necessity” (Gorer 1965; 113). Therefore, if religion and social norms do not help regulate feelings around death, they will be expressed in an unregulated manner, resulting in a “pornography” of death (Gorer 1965).

The historian Phillipe Ariès (1982; 1974) further highlights the role of secularization in transforming Western concepts of death. Ariès also developed the thesis of the “denial of death” in contemporary Western society. The European Middle Ages, he contends, were characterized by a “tame” death, one under the control of religious ritual. The dying and those around them were prepared in advance for death through the natural signs of illness as well as through messages from the other world, and rituals of preparation were enacted by a gathered community, making death public and familiar. In contrast, modern death is invisible, presided over by medicine rather than religion, and there is a reluctance to speak openly about what happens when death occurs. In addition, according to Ariès, the rise of individualism in Western contexts has removed the dying process from the context of community, depriving death of collective significance, undermining “religious” and “traditional” ways of coping, and contributing to the denial of death.

Several authors, including Ariès and Gorer, note the perception that death poses a threat to individual identity is characteristic of modernity, making explicit the “oblivion of extinction” (Prior 2000). Death threatens the individual because of the Western ideological stress on each person’s “unique and unrepeatable biography” (Bloch and Parry 1982:15). In a survey of the academic literature, Prior (2000) traces the development of the distinction between a “sociological perspective” on death and a scientific perspective concerned primarily with mortality patterns and statistics. Prior argues that by scientifically applying numbers to social events, like birth, marriage, death or crime rates, social scientists render the meaning of such phenomena impersonal.

By the mid twentieth century, the study of death had become underpinned by a tension between individual death versus collective continuity, which Prior contends lead to two frames for understanding death: one concerned with statistical assessments of mortality, and another with a humanistic endeavour to understand the “meaning” of death. Therefore, since “official” (statistical) narratives of death are materialist (biological and pathological), there is a proclivity to view death as controllable and even avoidable, since such discourse is embedded within a culture concerned with a search for personal meaning, notions of self-identity, and the fulfillment of the self in this world. Death is constituted as a risk rather than certainty, where health, illness, death, disease, and personal misfortune are the responsibility of the individual (Prior 2000).

This construction of individual identity is also discussed by sociologist Clive Seale (2004), who examines cultural representations of death through an analysis of media representations of dying alone, a form of “bad death.” Seale (2004) demonstrates how the construction of “heroic life trajectories” represents the reflexive formation of an

individualistic form of self-identity. Obituaries, a form of such heroic self-narratives, are a means of retelling and reconstructing personal biographies and crafting self-identity. But obituaries are not usually written by the deceased person themselves, so they are constructions “for” or “of” an individual. Such portrayals, however, are constructed and framed by their appearance in media, linking the character of an illness sufferer with a “moral reputation,” such that dying alone, perhaps despite the intense individualism of the contemporary West, is marked as a “bad death,” understood as a consequence of “bad behaviour” of either the deceased or those who cared for them.

Such projects of the self in relation to death become powerful motivators, and both Mellor and Schilling (1993) and Seale (2004) explicate these motivations as arising fundamentally from a threat to one’s ontological security, either because of the tension between an existential awareness of death’s inevitability and the uncertainty associated with death (Mellor and Shilling 1993), or because the “way” one dies, alone or in company, must be mitigated to maintain security and moral reputation (Seale 2004; Bradbury 1996). Such arguments echo those postulated by Becker (1973) and Gorer (1965), emphasising the fear of death, the need for its denial, and the subsequent impetus to psychological action. Mellor and Shilling (1993), however, formulate this notion not as denial but as “sequestration,” a term that has gained some currency in sociological literature on death. They characterize sequestration as a systematic absence of death from public consciousness. This sequestration thesis also posits that fear of death is universal, a fear that provides the motivation for the “bureaucratized, institutional life in contemporary Western societies” (Hockey et al. 2010; 233).

Tony Walter (1996; 1994) offers a critique of Mellor and Schilling's view that death is sequestered from the public, though he does contend that "death" in the public sphere is impersonal and unrelated to individual private experience. Walter suggests rather that a "revival" of death rather than a denial is evident in contemporary Western contexts. He is among several sociologists who offer significant critiques of the "theory" of a universal denial and fear of death or the view that Western culture is inherently death denying. According to Walter, this revival is taking place within the highly individualistic and secular context of the "problem of modernity," where the public and private spheres of modern life have refigured how death and bereavement are understood. Walter argues that public discourse around death and private experiences of dying and grieving are contradictory, that public discourse cannot make sense of the experience of the individual. A "revival" of death must therefore engender private experience to become part of public discourse.

According to Walter, the value of individualism, a dearth of community, religion, and "tradition" has created a sense of what he terms ontological insecurity which institutions such as the funeral industry and medicine attempt to resolve. When individuals remain uncertain, however, the "private experience" must be invoked. This private experience is constructed as the valuation of a life uniquely lived, the good death as a choice, and the good funeral as a celebration of the unique identity of the deceased. What is problematic in the characterization of private experience in this way is "its extreme subjectivity, its radical centring of everything on the self, which then finds itself denied the shelter of the traditional canopy of religion and the modern canopy of medicine" (Walter 1994; 64).

Arguing that in postmodern Anglophone contexts, death is no longer denied, but is rather undergoing a “revival,” Walter further observes that psychology plays a major role in shaping how the new ideal of a “private” emotional response to death is constructed. While medieval and Reformation Christians “gazed” upon the dying and the dead person’s soul and the Age of Reason with its medical gaze focused upon the corpse, modern medicine (deemed “whole-person” medicine) gazes upon the psyche. For Walter, the postmodern “revival” of death takes two forms, one imposing a new form of death, dying, and grieving in psychological stages, and one which posits that individuals should “do it their own way” (Walter 1994).

Key to the agenda of such a revival has been the work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, who in 1969 proposed a very systematic and influential model for the “appropriate” stages of emotional response in the face of impending death. Such “expert management” of the dying and bereaved through reference to prescribed psychological stages (Walter 1994), like the oversimplification of arguments for the denial of death based in psychological reasoning, have been critiqued significantly, particularly in the sociological literature. Kellehear (1984), for instance, argues against the death-denial theory, problematizing its basis in psychoanalysis. “Denial” as understood from a psychological perspective has lost its meaning in the face of a reductionist tendency to generalize about individuals (and their psyches) in the absence of social contexts. Kellehear argues that though there may be individual responses to death within a society, societies do not deny death but instead organize for it and around it. Ultimately, then, the theory of a universal fear of death is too general to be useful, and the arguments for denial are oversimplified and reductionist (Walter 1994; Kellehear 1984).

In a further critique of the psychological hegemony over popular conceptions of death in the West, Howarth (2007) draws together the concepts of individualization (that ubiquitous phenomenon of post-modernity and also of modernity, if we are to believe Ariès) and the authority of the self as a representation of the attempt to reassert the authority of science through the medium of psychology. In addition to psychology proposing the thesis of death denial as a framework for understanding the relationship between society and mortality, an individualistic perspective has become the means for understanding morality through its focus on emotions and the self (Howarth 2007). What becomes problematic, Howarth argues, is the failure of such a framework to take into account diversity, that “what has been viewed as denial of death might more properly be identified as neglect of marginal experiences and practices surrounding death and dying” (39). This position has also been the basis for critiques against Ariès, including an “arbitrary” focus on individualism that obscures a variety of European social changes (Houlbrooke 1989), and an overgeneralization of the notion of death denial (Walter 1994).

Echoing the arguments of Tony Walter (1996; 1994), Howarth (2007) goes on to demonstrate how a sense of “spirituality” has arisen in the contemporary West, a move to find forms of meaning not based on the materialism of science or the commodification of society. Contemporary sociological (and to some extent anthropological) literature examines some of these attempts at finding new forms of meaning in relation to death, and a corrective to the thesis of denial which “denied” the marginal and the particular. Though the “sequestration thesis” takes a fear of death as innate, Hockey et al. (2010) offer a more nuanced approach, acknowledging that sequestration evokes a sense of

boundaries – spatial, temporal, and social – that characterize the concept of life/death in the West. In this sense, sequestration can be seen as rupture of the margins or boundaries which culture seeks to repair (Hockey et al. 2010; Howarth 2007).

I broached these topics with the nurses, doctors, and health and spiritual care providers I met with who had experience caring for ill and dying Mennonites; significantly, I was met with surprise when I opened conversations with questions relating to medical language, views of the body, and “Mennonite” narratives. I spoke at length with oncology nurses who self-identified as Mennonite, yet did not see themselves encountering anything particularly “Mennonite” in the way they provided care, or in the responses of their patients living with cancer. The medical narrative of “fighting” and “battling” cancer – metaphors supposedly anathema to Mennonite pacifism – was either unremarked upon, or met with “I had never thought of that before...” There was, however, another strongly religious theme that was expressed by Mennonite nurses, a sort of comforting fatalism that evoked God’s will as not causative, but as the agent of mortality. These nurses affirmed each other in their opinion that those patients “with faith” were more accepting of their illness and viewing its trajectory, its effects and affects, as being “in God’s hands.”

The nurses asserted that this orientation allowed these oncology patients to feel they were “not in it alone.” This notion of God’s will particularly in the context of illness, irrupted in the conversations I had with Mennonites who were being treated for cancer or were in remission. Both theological orientation and views of the body were connected to the ways in which the notion of God’s will was made meaningful and cogent. While Mennonite theology embraces a wide spectrum from evangelically-

influenced Christianity to a more “liberal” faith focused on social justice and liberation theology, it is clear that medical narratives and knowledge were not necessarily incommensurable with theological perspectives, but were entangled in complexities of causality, deference to certain epistemologies, and the meaning of suffering and bodily pain.

In the medical context in which most Mennonites now die in Canada, the creation of a liminal state between life and death through technological intervention such as the use of ventilators has meant that families caring for dying loved ones are confronted with complex options framed as life-or-death. In some of these scenarios, families must seemingly shoulder responsibility for “killing” their loved one: whether to stop or start life-sustaining drugs, or mechanical ventilation, for instance. The “paradox of resuscitation” highlights this tension acutely, since death without attempting resuscitation becomes conceived of as “not doing everything possible,” though the effects of resuscitation may leave individuals within this state of liminality, restoring a degree of “aliveness” rather than “life” as before (Chapple 2010).

MEDICAL SUBJECTS AND THE MARTYROLOGICAL

Larry Hirst, one of the chaplains I spoke with at length who has experience in end-of-life care with Mennonites stated clearly, “religion and medicine don’t inform each other.” As he explained further, for the non-religious, “bad things” like illness happen randomly, and for the “old-fashioned,” sickness is seen as God’s will. This attitude then becomes the impetus for engagement with illness, through, as Larry explained to me, the biblical notion of sin found in Genesis. As he explained, in this rendering, the first

people did not do God's will – did not follow God's explicit instruction – and therefore enabled sin to enter the world. They were subsequently cursed with all manner of ill things, including disease and death. In this theological framework, to do God's will is to avoid the wrath of God that has the potential to bring illness and suffering; when illness occurs, however.

The degree to which these specific theological frames of illness are present in Mennonite lives is variable, and perceptions of the causality of illness and disease can certainly not be reduced to the opposition between “random” vs. “old-fashioned.” Further, the complications of technologized medicine and scientific epistemologies have radically challenged theological explanations for the presence of illness. A concept like “sin” as the agent of illness and suffering intersects in uneven ways with medical and biological models of disease, though for Mennonites, the adoption of these medical models, and scientific thinking about the body in general, has been, for the most part, taken place without significant criticism. This adoption, however, has not been unreflective. The narratives that ground Mennonite lives play roles in mediating medical treatments, particularly those decisions around end-of-life care.

The entanglements of God's will and medicine in the context of illness, for instance, were clearly evident in conversations I had with two women, one of whom, Evangeline, was being treated for breast cancer, the other, Sarah, (at the time) in remission. Evangeline, a woman in her late 70s, was very talkative, and had clearly formed opinions on her religious beliefs and how her own experience with cancer had shaped her life. Her apartment, where I met her, was very well-appointed, decorated with precision and upper class sensibilities, and she met me with hair done and wearing make-

up. Evangeline's attention to bodily and domestic appearances was intentional, and she spent a significant amount of time explaining the relationship between salvation and clothing. Evangeline had grown up in the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren church in Steinbach, one of the numerous church offspring of discontent. In this case, the EMBs split off from the Evangelical Mennonite Church (EMC); Evangeline's parents felt the EMCs did not provide them with the assurance of salvation that they needed, particularly through an emphasis on Christ as personal saviour.

This more evangelically-minded orientation figured in much of Evangeline's discussion, and she had particularly vitriolic opinions on what she termed "clothes Christians," those who felt adherence to Christian beliefs meant that bodily adornment is too "worldly," and thus dressed in a consistently unassuming manner. Here, "worldly" is seen to be supple; Evangeline stated with temerity that "Those clothes aren't going to get you into heaven!" Here, she was suggesting that her own embrace of high fashion, décor, and monetary comfort (which many Mennonites would consider worldly) was not problematic for her own theology. She did identify strongly as Mennonite, lamenting particularly the loss of hymn singing. Evangeline also suggested that what she considers a general disregard for the elderly in her home church is the result of losing "Mennonite" values. She was thrilled as I fumbled through the few Low German phrases I knew after her query about whether or not I spoke the language as a "good Mennonite girl."

These "cultural markers" comprised Evangeline's list of Mennonite identifiers, but she stated that her theology was entirely "Christian," a descriptor that neatly separated Mennonite culture from Anabaptist religion. Her theological orientations settled upon the concept of fear in relation to illness. Her diagnosis of breast cancer,

which had spread, at the time of our meeting, to numerous places in her body, came with a sense of fear grounded in the experience of seeing her aunt die of breast cancer at the age of 35, screaming in pain. Not wanting a similar trajectory, Evangeline was afraid of unbearable pain, and she was afraid of dying. This fear, she went on to explain, originated with Satan, yet she clarified her statement by elucidating that the disease itself was not sent by Satan, unlike the fear of dying. “Perfect love casts out fear,” she said with confidence and sincerity. In Evangeline’s view, if one has the assurance of salvation through the blood of Jesus, grace – undeserved, divine assistance – will cast out fear; this assurance will grant the believer access to heaven, and there will be no need to fear death.

As Evangeline explained further, she believes that the course of the illness – the disease and its bodily manifestations – is entirely within God’s hands. Rather than adopting the fatalism of those who share this opinion but “do nothing about it,” Evangeline was clear that within this framework, one must *act*. Though God has willed the progression, course, and manner of the illness, God, in addition, gives medical researchers – doctors, nurses, and health professionals – the *brains* to do medical work, to solve medical problems and to cure cancer. God has gifted these professionals with the skills to cure (or attempt to cure), and the patient must therefore use these gifts as part of the Christian mandate. All therapies recommended by doctors or nurses must be attempted, and in proclaiming the knowledge of doctors as divinely given, Evangeline authorized these medical professionals with power.

While Evangeline’s rendering of her cancer experience was deeply informed by an evangelically oriented faith that asserted one’s life course is controlled the divine, Sarah invoked the notion of what she termed fatalism, but in a rational, pragmatic sense.

Sarah was a “Mennonite by choice,” and in choosing to attend a Mennonite church, she found it at its best, particularly in showing support for her and her family during her rigorous cancer treatment. Sarah had two school age children, and the church she attended was a progressive, urban, Mennonite congregation that was oriented toward social justice issues and held a liberal Anabaptist theology. In attempting to understand the “reason” she had cancer, Sarah stated with a wry smile that she was “smart enough” to realize getting cancer is quite random, that there was nothing she did or did not do that could be considered a causative factor.

Pushing against Larry’s idea that it is mostly the non-religious who choose “randomness” as the explanation for disease causality, Sarah spoke of herself as a person of faith – specifically a Mennonite. However, she made a distinction between what was medical (her illness, and bodily decisions around that illness), and what was religious (the support of a faithful community that tended to the social and emotional aspects of being ill). Her “fatalism,” as she described it, was not so much “this is God’s will” (to be ill, or how the illness progresses) but, as she described, “fatalism that resides in the doctors’ knowledge and ability.” In other words, her “fate” rested in her reliance on the doctors and their knowledge, following instructions and direction for treatment, regardless of how aggressive they may need to be.

Both women’s stories, taken as exemplary, signal a deep respect for the authority of medicine and an attempt to reconcile religious ideas about God’s will and control with medical knowledge. The concept of the will of God plays a central role in both Evangeline’s and Sarah’s examples. The “will of God” indexes a wider narrative about death and dying, and the degree to which any individual can control both these bodily

processes. The Anabaptist narrative of martyrdom and Christian witness makes clear the contemporary resonances of this narrative, complicating it in a new technologically-oriented medical context. How do narratives of pain and suffering, so vital to early Anabaptist theological constructions of virtue and salvation, come to inform the meanings accorded to death for contemporary Mennonites, and how does this traumatic genealogy resonate?

I posed these questions to a number of chaplains working in Mennonite care institutions, and found Larry to be particularly thoughtful on the subject. He postulated, rightly I believe, that his non-Mennonite background afforded him a particularly privileged perspective on Mennonites. As a non-Mennonite and non-community member, Larry was granted access to stories, confessions, and regrets that was perhaps unprecedented. He was seen by some people as a safe listener, one not mired in community politics and gossip, and certainly not entangled in the histories in which the stories take place. His careful theological study and years of caring for aging and dying Mennonites made his opinions and observations astute and practiced. Along with my discussions with Mennonite historians and theologians, my conversations with Larry offered a picture of how a history of persecution and martyrdom comes to inform contemporary views on aging, illness, and dying.

Perhaps the most foundational Anabaptist voice on suffering can be found in the *Martyrs Mirror*. The letters in this collection offer a clear theological vision of the worth of suffering, offering, as one Mennonite theologian put it to me, the distillation of the notion that “I can rejoice that I was worthy of suffering.” While the Biblical authorization for Christian martyrdom is vast,

some more common referents by Anabaptist martyrs in their letters include the teachings of Jesus Christ from the gospel of Matthew 5:10-12:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

And from the book of Revelation, evoking the promise of Christ's return, and divine judgement:

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered for the word of God and for the testimony they had given; they cried out with a loud voice, 'Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?' (Revelation 6:9-10)

While biblical references provide an authorized mode for understanding suffering, persecution, and its bodily and spiritual implications, hymns written by Anabaptists, perhaps more potently than scripture, testify to their systems of belief. The final verse of a so-called "martyr-hymn" from the *Ausbund*, a collection of these hymns, indexes the role of suffering and bodily pain in salvation, success, and Christian witness:

What God-word brings, may we embrace;
 success and suff'ring greet us;
 Confronting evil face to face,
 as scorn and anger meet us.
 For freedom's sake we bend, we break,
 a sign to every nation
 That we have found a solid ground;
 God's word our sure foundation.

(*Hymnal: A Worship Book* 1992; 314)

For the early Anabaptists, suffering took on a distinctly bodily valence. The biblical justification for suffering was an otherworldly reward for the persecution that is inevitable in truly witnessing to a Christian life, and the divine retribution that awaits the persecutors. Contemporary Mennonites are no longer engaging with the bodily dangers of the early Anabaptist movement. Now, interpretations of bodily suffering, illness, and death are entangled with complex constructions of bodies, theology, and medical technologies. As Larry pointed out, however, it is difficult to access how “suffering” is understood: many elderly Mennonites, he explained, “do not complain.”

Yet Larry was careful to clarify that the use of pain medication is readily accepted by Mennonite patients, something echoed by the oncology nurses I talked with. The “pain” of dying, of aging, is caused by an external agent – the disease, a thing beyond one’s own control – and is therefore slotted under the control of God, rather than the result of malicious intent, the realm of the fallen world. The use of medication, however, comes with a caveat. The Mennonites I encountered are concerned to make sure that taking pain medication will not hasten the end of their life. This concern is a thoroughly contemporary one, and it is entirely subjective; to what extent do medical interventions “intervene” in natural life courses, if “natural” and “life” are taken to be neutral objects of analysis? For many older Mennonites, as Christians, the concern is wresting control of lives and deaths from God.

Yet living and dying in institutions – another thoroughly contemporary phenomenon – is difficult, and comes with concomitant complexities for religious Mennonite lives. As Helen Chapple (2010) points out, the anthropological literature on death emphasizes its “containment,” by showing how ritual celebrates and resolves the

paradox of individual discontinuity as opposed to social continuity. Chapple further contends that the literature privileges this perspective by focussing on mortuary practices rather than the process of dying. However, some of the more recent ethnographic literature on the dying body – literature which does indeed take an embodied perspective (Hockey et al. 2010) – demonstrates the complexities of death in a post/neo/modern Western context, where the relationships between the self, person, and the body are negotiated and contested in an institutional and highly medicalized context.

In an effort to situate the body in relation to institutions, Emerick (2000) argues that the “Western” corpse has become a symbolic repository for fears about death, specifically the failure of medicine, theology, and society to prolong life. Aging, dying, and decaying are visible on the corpse, literally embodying this failure. Emerick further suggests that until recently, Christianity has influenced views of the body as tainted, mortal, and unclean. As a result, morality has been embedded within the material object. In contemporary contexts, however, where individuals are increasingly “denied the shelter of the traditional canopy of religion” (Walter 1994; 64), science shapes views of the body, and a bodily “morality” falls increasingly under the purview of scientific/medical hegemony (Emerick 2000).

Mennonite communities in contemporary Canada do not have specifically “Mennonite spaces” for aging and dying, and are enmeshed fully in the public health care system and its concomitant institutions. However, the “moral” and the “material,” as described by Emerick, remain to varying extents “Mennonite” for many in these institutions. Advanced age, as Larry explained, feels to many Mennonites like a holding pattern, perhaps even a liminal space, in which many people reflect upon and anticipate

metaphors of home. The bodily degradation of aging and illness, of pain, though mitigated through medication, is often rendered coherent through theological references, and posed through serious existential questions such as “Is it okay if I want to die?” or “Will I be able to endure this?” The latter question, Larry pointed out, resonates with the Mennonite history of persecution, echoing questions posed by heroic people whose stories are recorded in the *Martyrs Mirror*, whose faith in the concept of *Gelassenheit* and the following of God’s will, enabled them to withstand torture until death.

VISIONS OF HOME

Of particular theological importance is the statement that elderly and ill Mennonites I met frequently made: “I wish Jesus would come back so I don’t have to go through this...” In this statement, there is a tacit acknowledgement of the sheer tedium and agony of pain and suffering, along with the hope for an authoritative (and “ethical”) means of alleviating pain – that the second coming of Jesus would occur and deliver them out of suffering. Here, too, is an encounter with the metaphor of the world, structured through a particularly Christian view that sickness and death came into the world through sin as a result of the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden. The phrase in the Lord’s Prayer asking for “deliverance from evil,” represents a request for deliverance from the sinful world. The greater one experiences engagement with the world, the greater is the need for deliverance from it. My grandfather, an evangelically-minded Mennonite, was a keenly fastidious and obsessed man during his life, “failing” at farming because he could not bring himself to utilize the plethora of chemicals necessary for competitive agribusiness. Chemicals and germs were anathema to him, and he cleaned obsessively and

deliberately. During the progression of his terminal illness, he became increasingly disengaged, sleeping the majority of the time. He uttered at one point, “just get me out of this polluted, dirty, fallen world...”

My grandfather articulated keenly the “two kingdom” theology of the Anabaptists, shared with other Christians, according to which “this” world is under the dominion of Satan and heaven is ruled by Christ. Though my grandfather’s proclivities toward cleanliness – themselves cultural products – foregrounded the concepts of pollution and dirt, the “fallenness” of this world led, in part, to its rejection in favour of heaven by my grandfather and others like him. According to this eschatology, heaven is construed as a “truer” home, one that can simultaneously be the source of comfort – if one can believe in salvation – and tremendous unease, if one doubts and fears damnation. The concept of the true heavenly home intersects with both the material world of everyday life, and the imaginary of an idealized life, one in which the family (part of the ‘earthly home’) is reconstituted after death.

The grounding of “home” in Mennonite consciousness and views of death and dying is therefore potent. Miriam Toews summarizes this view of the true home in heaven in her novel *A Complicated Kindness*, where the teenage narrator recalls her certainty as a young child: throughout the novel, the narrator Nomi, expresses the desire for her immediate family to remain together, even as, one by one, they escape and she is left alone. The longing for familial reunions is certainly echoed in the narratives, images, and idioms of heaven that many Mennonites share. While Larry suggested that a strong desire for a heavenly meeting with Jesus characterizes many Christian visions of an afterlife, the majority of Mennonites he spoke with about death and dying expressed a

longing to reunite not with Jesus, but with family members who had died previously. Further, Larry pointed out that the concerns Mennonites expressed about the possibility of pain medications ending one's life "prematurely" focused significantly on the premature breaking of family connections.

The longing for reunions with deceased family members has striking affective resonance. The elderly Mennonites I spoke with who were in declining health – in the "holding pattern" that Larry described – spoke with great anticipation about "going home," or "getting to see" deceased loved ones again. The images of reunion were also set in familiar, if idealized, settings. While some people I spoke with offered a biblically framed vision of heaven as featuring "streets paved with gold," the majority articulated a more agrarian vision. Frequently, Mennonites described heaven as being like a childhood home in a rural setting: with endless fields of wheat or wildflowers waving in a gentle breeze, a bountiful harvest, and the most ideal and carefree conditions for farm work.

My grandfather, in addition to being a farmer, was a prolific poet, writing folksy rhymes about farm life and family relationships, always concluding with a note about gratitude to God for his many blessings. After he was diagnosed with cancer in 1999, he retired from driving the kindergarten school bus in his home town. This was a job he revered and loved deeply, as evidenced by one of his poems that also reflects an eschatological vision grounded in an idealized expression of his quotidian being-in-the-world, integrating the biblical vision of golden streets into his own world, those roads in "country and town" that he drove every day:

Maybe I would tell a bus driver story,
When I get to the land of glory.
The bus would start and never break down,
The streets would be gold in country and town.
Maybe I'll shuttle angels around,
Where mud ruts and potholes cannot be found.

Among Mennonites, there is frequently a cast of characters in conceptions of heaven, characters also steeped in familiarity and home life. Arrival in heaven is imagined to include reunions with loved ones who have died previously, in a sort of completion – or reconstitution – of the earthly family centred in the home. The nurses and palliative care workers I spoke with mentioned the frequency with which dying patients would call out for loved ones who had died previously. The nurses suggested that their patients were anticipating a “reunion” that was manifesting itself in the deliriums or half-states induced by medications or illness. During the final stages of her illness, my grandmother – at age 76 – moving in and out of such states of consciousness, called out for her mother. In her moments of clarity, my grandmother would also express the deep desire to see her mother again in her vision of heaven, one built upon childhood memories of their home in the Russian steppes, and idealized visions of family members and relationships.

This vision of home also frequently manifests in singing hymns. Many chaplains I spoke with mentioned the significant role this practice plays in end-of-life care. Larry went so far as to suggest that hymn singing is part of a Mennonite “pride in heritage,” where “tradition” becomes more important than the Bible in determining comportment. Heritage, or customs, are as authoritative as scripture, and community is foregrounded over autonomy or individualism. Don, a chaplain at a long-term care facility in Winnipeg remarked that he is more frequently asked to sing with people who are dying or aging in

care homes than to pray with them. Hymns, as affective triggers, offer memories of home and family and reminders of particular relationships – parents or grandparents who “always” sung specific hymns. Relative to prayer, the music that accompanies the words in hymns creates a more potent sensual experience of meaning. Don also told me that he has been present at a number of Mennonite deaths where the person has died while being sung to by their surrounding family and friends, a practice Don describes as an “ushering in” to a next world.²⁰

The notion of heaven as true home is also sometimes problematically used by community members in positions of authority to “discipline” or direct appropriate ways of grieving. Citing biblical passages to emphasis and authorize the narrative of heaven as home, church leaders, ministers, and, at times, chaplains, direct grieving friends and family to re-orient their sense of loss to one of joy; their loved one has “gone home,” and therefore need not be mourned. This narrative of “going to a better place,” while

²⁰ These observations correlate with the anthropological literature on death, which suggests that views of death are inextricably connected to particular cultural contexts. In the West, for example, death is seen as an end – a terminus – embedded within views of individuals as distinct entities with unique and unrepeatable biographies. Personhood is constructed, during life by the self, and in dying and death, by others. Lawton (2000), for instance, argues that you can learn about how a “person” is constituted by looking at how they “end,” while Hallam and Hockey (2001) and Green (2008), for example, show how the “person” is reconstituted in memory and memorialisation. While Hockey et al. (2010) point out that early authors like Hertz and Van Gennep worked at finding a model for transitions between categories (thresholds between living and dead), contemporary ethnographies seem divided into categories bereft of thresholds, either focusing on dying or the dead or memorializing, yet never traversing the liminal states in between to trace the changing constructions of personhood. Interestingly, early anthropological descriptions of funerary ritual and some contemporary ethnographies of death from non-Western settings (Beth Conklin’s 2001 ethnography on mortuary cannibalism is notable in this regard), traverse the thresholds between dying, death, and memorialisation, offering descriptions of shifting constructions of personhood between states of living and dead.

grounded in a historical theology of comfort and hope, can render those “left behind” in *this* world bereft of ways and means to mourn. Sometimes the narrative of heaven as true home is emphasized by church leaders to such an extent that overt displays of sadness or anger (rather than the preferred expressions of rejoicing and praising God for receiving the loved one into heaven), become “issues” of church discipline.

Helen, a chaplain for many years, shared with me over coffee one frigid December day, her thoughts on how the history of martyrdom, which depicts suffering as a certainty or even a necessity, has led to a denial of loss and a regulation of emotion in certain Mennonite contexts. Ideas about suffering and death are caught up in negotiations of power and church leadership, and are increasingly entangled in contemporary Anglo-American Western views of grief, emotion, and the psychologization of dying.

In Miriam Toews’ novel *A Complicated Kindness*, the narrator Nomi, reflects upon her early belief, reified by her Mennonite context that, “The only thing I needed to know was that we were all going to live forever, together, happily, in heaven with God, and without pain and sadness and sin.” Yet her the gradual disappearance of her family members reorients her view of this set heaven-bound script, and Toews deftly, through the direct voice of the adolescent, uncovers the “taken-for-grantedness” of the path to heaven: “I preferred the first story, the one about sacrifice and pain, because it presented opportunities, of being reunited, of being happy again, somewhere in the real world, our family.” (245)

Here Toews’ echoes and elucidates a newer theme among Mennonites, and a shift in metaphorical and embodied understandings of the “world”. While imaginings of

heaven, and their grounding in the very material everyday world of home and family, work powerfully in making death and dying meaningful in Mennonite lives, the effects of such orientations can be rather deleterious. What is particularly clear is that such constructions of the afterlife – and the certainty of going “home” to heaven – are shared to a greater degree by people in older generations of Mennonites than by younger Mennonites, a phenomenon commensurable with secularization. As Nancy Scheper-Hughes points out regarding the conditions that Mennonites, too, now find themselves in: “in the post-human, consumer-oriented context, the ancient perceptions of virtue in suffering and grace in the art of dying can only appear patently absurd. But the transformation of a person into a ‘life’ that must be prolonged or saved at any cost has made life into the ultimate commodity fetish” (Scheper-Hughes 2004; 157).

As John Howard Yoder, a prominent (though troubling) Mennonite theologian, asks questions of contemporary Mennonites of the Canadian prairies, he delves deep into the issue of engagement with the world as opposed to a disregard for the present world resulting from belief in a “better” heavenly one, at once drawing on Anabaptist theology and an uncomfortable history of Mennonite colonialism. How “at home in the world” have Mennonites become and what is at stake in movement towards the highly technologized medical prolongation of life “at any cost” (Chapple 2010; Kaufman 2005)?

In a discussion on self-identity and death in contemporary Western social life, Mellor and Shilling (1993) offer three characteristics of modernity which frame the discussion of death: a particular view of the self, an increasing tendency to identify the self with the body, and a decrease in the “scope” of the sacred. Mellor and Shilling also continue the arguments of Ariès, Gorer, and Becker in suggesting that the

“desacralization” of society leaves a perilous amoral void where individuals, decontextualized from traditional or cultural communities, must establish and maintain personal values.

While the shifts occurring in Mennonite ethos and praxis around death, dying, and illness may appear to signal the presence of an “amoral void,” Mennonite movement is not without agency. Indeed, it is precisely because this movement occurs within the context of a key instability in Christian life – that is, Incarnational living – that the meaning accorded to death and illness becomes an important site of contestation. As Hockey et al. (2010) suggest, material culture, particularly that surrounding death and dying, can be a starting point to examining how human experience may be embedded within time, space, and place, in relation to both the body and objects. I would further this argument by suggesting that the concept of materiality, and how it is, for Mennonites, constructed as worldly or of “the world” can illuminate how Mennonites negotiate the conundrums of living in the world but not of it. For Mennonites, the material is a slippery medium. Bodies, “as part and parcel of technical, political, and social processes,” (Biehl et al 2007), evoke, for Mennonites, the martyrological past, the immediacy of bodily illness, and the possibility of a future fulfillment of “home.” Because the biological is concerned with the materiality of life, it is significantly in the medical realms and worlds that the concepts of materiality, bodies, and a theology that equates “worldliness” with moral imperatives are contested. As Pamela Klassen notes, worldly lines are usually “arbitrarily but meticulously drawn” in and around Mennonite bodies (Klassen 1994; 237).

Larry, one of the chaplains I spoke with suggested rather provocatively that part of “what is at stake” in being at home in this world, is monetary prosperity. Many Mennonites are now so inured to and integrated into post-modern consumerism/late capitalism that their desire for and success at achieving wealth creates an ambivalence towards the notion of home as heaven²¹. The systems, institutions, and structures enabling Mennonites to become prosperous and wealthy citizens have destabilized eschatological notions of a heavenly home, and reoriented “the world” to become meaningfully rich in material gains and the collection of capital. As Hockey et al. (2010) point out, “the materialities of place, things and bodies that are lived through in practice; the social hierarchies that rest upon and within the dispositions of institutions; and the affordances of the body itself, its material scope or capacity, can all be recruited to particular systems of power” (8).

RELIGIOUS/ETHNIC

The lure of “worldly” power and material gain has been a constant throughout Russian Mennonite experience, with often disastrous results: the publication of the *Martyrs Mirror* as a rebuke of worldliness, and the dissolution and destruction of Mennonite colonies during the Russian Revolution, are, perhaps, the most potent examples. The fabulous wealth and privilege of Mennonites in Canada produces a new visibility, and Mennonites now – again – contend with the conundrums of visibility and invisibility, public and private. These become discussions about identity, and despite a

²¹ The (sometimes problematic) relationship between Mennonites and economics is taken up by Perry Bush in his 2009 article “‘If God were a Capitalist, the Mennonites Would be his Favourite People’: Economics, Mennonites, and Reflections on the Recent Literature”

trend away from “identity” to ‘post’/after identity movements²² in academic writing on Mennonites, “identity” over and over again led my conversations with Mennonites who were not themselves scholars or church leaders to questions about a bifurcation of religion and ethnicity. Indeed, the frequency of this bifurcation deserves consideration: why, when the church considers “ethnicity” anathema to the growth of the church, as a excluding those who may join “by choice,” and when scholars move on to theoretical arguments beyond “identity,” do so many Mennonites use “ethnic” and/or “religious” to describe themselves as Mennonite?

Further, these labels of identification are not limited to Mennonites as Christians: as Norget et al. (2017:18) point out, in so-called postsecular contexts, Catholics may refer to themselves variously as non-practicing, lapsed, cultural, or ethnic Catholics. Such labels, the authors write, suggest “that Catholicism is open to identifications that index aspects of personhood beyond religious beliefs – kinship, territoriality, ethnicity, belonging – identifications that remain variously distanced, critical, and uncertain with regard to Catholicism’s key propositional content.”

Similarly, for Mennonites, struggles over identification and identity signify a negotiation around a nexus of theology, martyrdom, and subjectivity. For instance, conversations around melancholy, depression, shame, and mental health inevitably became intimately connected with questions of who is a Mennonite? Am I a Mennonite? What has that “cultural” legacy meant to the development of “mental health issues”? How can I be a person if I am not a Mennonite? To be sure, the question of who Mennonites “are,” is one posed *ad nauseam* on every website and promotional pamphlet

²² See, for example, the 2015 volume *After Identity: Mennonite Writing in North America*, edited by Robert Zacharias.

for any organization, group, museum, or tourist site associated with Mennonites. Many of these productions explain why some Mennonites are “visible” – with their distinctive dress, mode of transportation, and agricultural tendencies – and others are not: “Today you won’t recognize most Mennonites by how they dress” says one pamphlet.

To simplify these existential conundrums and questions, instructional materials like websites and tourist pamphlets usually delineate the categories of religion and ethnicity: one can be baptized into the Mennonite church, and/or trace one’s genealogical and ancestral lineage back to the original Anabaptists of the Protestant Revolution. This distinction is a rather curious and recent phenomenon, with origins in the scholarly literature that attempts precisely to theorize Mennonite identity. Indeed, in part the categories of “religious” and “ethnic” Mennonites *are* scholarly and political constructs. As Rob Zacharias, a Mennonite literary scholar explained to me, there is a distinct difference in the classification of “Mennonite literature” between the US and Canada: American Mennonite literature is seen as “religious writing,” while Canadian Mennonite literature is categorized as “ethnic writing.”

Zacharias contends that this difference is the result of a push for Ethnic Writing in Canada during the 1960s and 70s, as a characteristic of the national project of Canadian multiculturalism. Rudy Wiebe wrote his critically-acclaimed novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many* in the 1960s, and as the most widely read publication by a Mennonite author about Mennonites, it was subsumed under the “ethnic” umbrella, and set the precedent for Mennonite writing that followed. While many of these authors offered critical appraisals of Mennonite life, many also viewed this new categorization as an opening, a space available for movement to and from new worlds.

While these distinctions between ethnicity and religion can be problematic, they nevertheless have become useful, and frequently repeated, articulations for many Mennonites. Ethnicity and religion become loci of identification, indices of belonging. The distinction is not without tension, however. During conversations in fieldwork with Mennonite pastors, the subject of the distinction between religion and ethnicity seemed to arise almost inevitably. Over coffee, I asked one pastor if he thought a person could be Mennonite and not go to church. He responded, “You mean be ethnically Mennonite but not religiously?” I said I supposed so. Shaking his head he explained that there is really only one Mennonite “culture,” and that is “church culture.” To be Mennonite is to be a person of faith of the Anabaptist tradition, and ethnic identifications – things like language, food, genealogy, and surnames – only serve to create divisions within the church, he said. Ethnicity works only to designate people as “insiders” or “outsiders” in the Mennonite faith, with authorization to insider status given by such ethnic markers. What of those people who are “Mennonite by choice?” he asked. “They are Mennonite also, and not because they enjoy eating certain foods, or speak Low German.” In his view, the Mennonite church should be inclusive and markers of ethnicity create exclusion.

While this particular pastor had a passion for the Mennonite Church as an institution, and therefore felt that the growth of the church was at stake in dividing religion and ethnicity, some scholars reject these categories in favour of other theories. One such scholar, in looking at negotiating sexual identity, suggests that Mennonites are a performatively constituted community in so far as individuals identify themselves as part of that community and performatively constitute that which allows them to be

Mennonite. She rejects the labelling of Mennonites as an ethno-religious community, as it gives primacy to the ethnic and religious discourses in understanding the construction of identity and community, and asks: “Is it primarily through interacting with the discourses of ethnicity and religion that one can ensure their ‘passing’ as Mennonite?” (Dueck 2010).

While Dueck may reject the “ethno-religious” label, the fact that these terms continue to be in popular usage among Mennonites suggest that the terms remain vibrant and meaningful. The question could then be, why *do* these discourses enable someone to ‘pass’ as Mennonite? Ethnic and religious ‘subjects’ are identities that seem to fit most comfortably for many Mennonites, particularly those attempting reconciliation with the institutional structures that authorize certain narratives, figures, and affects as “good,” “virtuous,” and theologically orthodox.

Many Mennonite voices are echoed in Nomi’s, the narrator of Miriam Toews’ novel *A Complicated Kindness*, when she says “I want to be nine again and be told, Nomi: someday you’ll be gone, you’ll be dust, and then even less than dust. Nothing. There’s no other place to be. This world is good enough for you because it has to be. Go ahead and love it. (Menno was wrong)” (209) Here Nomi conjures the Anabaptist notion of home-as-heaven, but troubles it, rejecting the concept of an afterlife in favour of loving the world in the present: the world becomes more immediate, and the means of gathering in it shifts: these shifts, these responses, to the reformulation and reframing of what the world is, becomes generative of new forms of Mennonite life. It takes on a sense of immediacy, as the title of a volume of essays by Di Brandt (2007) so evocatively suggests: “*so this is the world and here I am in it.*”

CONCLUSION



Figure 6.1 – Mennonite Central Committee Relief Sale, New Hamburg, Ontario: May, 2016. (Author)

The photograph above was taken in May, 2016 at the Mennonite Central Committee Relief Sale in New Hamburg, Ontario. Such sales raise money for the relief, development, and peace work that MCC does around the world; sales are held over different weekends in the US and Canada – from Ontario to British Columbia (Mennonite

Central Committee 2016). I attended the Sale held every September (until recently) in Morris, Manitoba since I was a teenager, and the one in New Hamburg held in May for the five years since I moved to Ontario. These sales generate, across North America, millions of dollars annually, particularly at the auctions. Quilts made by Old Order Mennonites in Ontario, for instance, have fetched up to \$30,000 at auction. Wealthy Mennonites show their (humble) generosity by donating at these events, or purchasing quilts. Wealthy Torontonians, too, are known to spend freely on these “authentic” cultural items.

Particular churches are in charge of certain food booths; Breslau Mennonite Church – particularly its youth – prepare the strawberry pies for sale, while Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Church is in charge of the Saturday morning breakfast. Old Order Mennonites prepare and serve apple fritters and tea balls (deep fried dough dipped in sugar), while Low German Mennonites (recently moving to Canada from Mexico) fry up and serve rollkuchen (more deep fried dough) and watermelon. An enduring favourite, evidenced by its perennially long queues, are the spring rolls prepared by the Laotian and Hmong Mennonite Churches of Kitchener-Waterloo. All time is voluntary, and every single penny goes to Mennonite Central Committee – a point that some volunteers shared with me as somewhat vexing. A little “investment” into the infrastructure, along with the logistical and administration costs of running an event like this might just raise even *more* money, they suggested. The pride in announcing the negligible overhead costs generally wins out.

What is most special about these gatherings, however, is how this particular event draws the breadth and variety of Mennonites that reside in Canada, brought together by

the motivation to support the work of a global relief agency whose *modus operandi* comes from the invocation of Menno Simons: “True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant....” The religious impetus of the work of MCC is not necessarily foregrounded at the sale, however. Its diverse attendance, from the women in coverings who volunteer their quilts to be sold for thousands of dollars, to the young, queer, non-church affiliated Mennonites who come for the tea balls that they can only get once a year, suggests there may be common values at play that link disparate Mennonites: a commitment to social justice, understanding global networks of connection where we may unfairly benefit at the expense of others, and working communally to benefit those who live under oppression. It is best understood through the MCC phrase: “Living simply so that others may simply live.”

The photograph shown above was taken during the quilt auction in the hockey arena where they are displayed. It was the 50th anniversary of the New Hamburg sale, and to commemorate the occasion, a break was taken during the auction to have a short speech on the history of the sale, and (in Mennonite fashion) to get everyone to stand and sing a hymn, “Praise God from whom all Blessings Flow,” a commonly sung hymn for those occasions when the blessings provided from God need to be acknowledged.

On one side of me, sitting in the bleachers, sat my father, visiting from Manitoba. On the other, my partner, a Swiss Mennonite woman from Kitchener. We all stood to sing, and the resonance of the voices in harmony in that community hockey arena was absolutely affecting. On the final note, I looked to either side of me, and both my father and partner were moved to tears by the joy and power of communal harmony, of *communitas* as Victor Turner might suggest. It was a performance that encompassed a

vitality and cohesion; somehow, from across provinces, we knew the melody (or at least how to read music), and were buffeted by a communal venture of emotional resonance. My father is a man of strong faith and a believer in the necessity of church community in his life; my partner and I, though having spent the Sunday mornings of our childhoods in Mennonite churches, no longer attend regularly, or find vitality in Christian ritual and life, though we were all, that day, moved by that hymn: by its sheer power, its history, and the connection it gave us all to those who share a history, who knew that song.

In a sense, I write this vignette as an elegy: for the Morris Relief Sale, which is no longer run because of a dearth of volunteers: an event in which “every single penny” goes to MCC cannot run without this volunteerism after all. The volunteers for the Morris sale come primarily from large and still populous rural churches, and it is many of these churches who have recently become independent from larger Mennonite conferences and, sometimes, from MCC itself. The most recent issue over which schisms are developing (nothing new in the history of Mennonite churches) has to do with the degree of “acceptance” of queer Mennonites: Can they be married partners? Pastors or church leaders? Members even?

There is an increasing urban/rural chasm, reflecting, in part, the political tone of the times; an entrenchment into left or right-wing camps: conservative or liberal. While a resolution was passed in the most liberal Canadian Mennonite conference to allow individual churches to decide for themselves on whether to allow queer members to marry, some congregations (primarily rural), felt a sense of disillusionment with the conference and its leadership, seen as unable to push a “bible-first” agenda that calls sin, sin, and condemns queer relationships as such. In Manitoba, these rural churches are

large and generous, and the conference-run programs (camps and educational institutions, archives and resource centres) are imperilled, not to mention peripheral programming like the MCC Relief Sales.

The divide between the groups advocating for “inclusion” and those who maintain the church should take a firm stand on rejecting sinful behaviour (as “homosexual” behaviour is interpreted as) seems to be growing wider, despite a strong desire from (some) church leaders to find a place of respectful disagreement. Here, for example, is a letter to the editor of the conference periodical *The Canadian Mennonite* following the publication of an article celebrating the inaugural marriage of two men in a Mennonite church. In the letter, the writer seeks a return to “Godly” existence, and a path driven by the “spirit of the age”:

Is this ‘marriage’ fulfilling the desires of the Spirit or the desires of the sinful nature, as spoken of in Romans 8:5-11? I fear that the direction of this whole discussion of human sexuality is driven by the spirit of the age, rather than the Spirit of God... Are we seeking acceptance by God or by our society? I personally found acceptance by God and other believers after I repented of my self-pleasing lifestyle and surrendered my heart and body to Christ. Is it possible that our national and area churches have indeed discovered a more ‘enlightened’ way? I choose to continue to support the ‘biblical and better way.’ (*Canadian Mennonite* 2015 19:6)

Such is the level of hurt, betrayal, entrenchment, and passion in these debates, however, that a struggle over biblical interpretation seems to be a rather unsubstantial reason, particularly with a church history that has weathered the storms of interpretation often. Like the role that women may play in church, or the necessity of head coverings, the discussion of “homosexuality” is based on the interpretation (in, like all Mennonite groups, a democratic, communal mode) of particular biblical injunctions. Yet unlike these other discussions, the issue of what to do with homosexuality in relation to the

church has reached a feverish pitch. It is, as one Mennonite friend of mine put it, as if it really has nothing to do with theology at all: it is, as she postulated, about sex/sexuality/the flesh, and therefore something threatening to the point of being unresolvable. Not only that, the discussion and pushback puts the flesh – and the most intimate, secretive, and taboo aspects of it – into focus, uncovering what some believe is best left hidden.

And so, once again, the world and its boundaries are invoked to shape Mennonite lives. The desire to “call sin, sin” and condemn it as such places “sin” in the realm of the fallen world, where secular influence (accepting sin in the form of homosexuality) sets up the church as a place of righteous indignation, set aside from “the world” and maintaining the true principles of Christian faith as interpreted from the bible. As I have discussed, however, the world is a capricious concept, and is deployed in strategic ways: the policing the boundaries of “worldliness” through theological ideals and proscribed behaviours has, for some, resulted in traumatic and injurious disciplinary practices, and a negation of personhood and subjectivity. Indeed, these practices parallel a wider Christian legacy: as Talal Asad (1993) has written regarding the genealogy of Christianity within Western academia, the emergence of the Christian self turns on the Christian institution’s undeniable ability to discipline and punish. The Mennonite self, as a Christian self, turns too on its capacity for discipline, and the critiques of how authority and power are wielded in specific ways are evident throughout the previous pages.

The responses to, and location of, the structures of power and authority (i.e. the exogamous violence of persecutors subsequently turned endogamous) are varied, as are the affects they produce and who can speak about and to them. The responses to such

displays of power, along with the responses *to* those responses can be both injurious and life-giving. There is, of course, not a single, definitive Mennonite perspective on the world, and the mutability of this concept and responses to it has resulted in a wide variety of Anabaptist ascetic and lived practices. These practices, taken together, can be seen to result in Mennonite community as a “perspective *on* the world” rather than being a “thing *in* it,” as (Brubaker, 2002:174) terms it.

Yet, for many Mennonites, the “irresolvable tension between abstraction and the inescapability of material and social mediations” that Webb Keane (2007:322) calls the “anxious transcendence” of the modern subject, come to be seen in a new light: the affects and mediation of suffering become psychologized, and bodies, under the authority of medicine, come to be subject to new discourses. The work that psychological and medical language does, positions Mennonites utilizing such discourses into negotiating a new subjectivity, a personhood able to move into new worlds. This offers a way of negotiating between the historical narrative of trauma, theologies of martyrdom and salvation and how they are remembered, and a world that provides the language to assess these uncomfortable states and a potential means to alleviate them. It also allows Mennonites to understand themselves as subjects and persons in a new age.

In a context with such a diversity of means of modes of being “Mennonite,” the core Anabaptist edict to “be in the world, but not of the world” takes a dizzying array of forms. What, precisely, is “the world”? Much like the question of what, exactly, constitutes, “community,” the question of what, exactly, constitutes The World can perhaps best be understood in emergent terms, where the world, and worldly things,

become mutable and inchoate, deployed strategically to mitigate the most vexing of Christian paradoxes, living the Incarnation.

As I have discussed, Magdalene Redekop identifies the creative potential that arises from the tension between the martyr story, the fact of survival, and the unease of perhaps failing to be martyred during a time of persecution and suffering, as central to the rise of a vigorous literary output from Mennonite communities (particularly in Manitoba) in the last several decades. As both writers of public stories about Mennonites and “Mennonite themes,” and as (often) self-described Mennonites themselves, authors like Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, and David Bergen to cite a few, are producing narratives that generate particular affects, and means to subjectivity. Mennonite literature, poetry, film, and art itself as a complex artefact or cultural production that both reproduces historic narratives, and creates new narratives and orientations to modernity. These literary texts, therefore, have helped to create the notion of “community” and its meanings that Mennonites are now considering. In my conversations with Mennonites, they referred to these artistic representations to articulate anything from condemnation to affirmation of the content of the novels and, by extension, the moral qualities of the authors themselves.

These comments were illustrative of the ways Mennonites engage with the public at large, authenticity, and self-expression; in short, with the products of modernity. The ways in which Mennonites contend with these “publics” identifying as Mennonite reveal how community continues to be enacted, how and when it is deployed to signal affinity, and how the religious justification for this community is negotiated against, through, and with new modes and discourses concerning community, individuality, and the self. These works of literature as products of modernity (those specifically that deal most

overtly about mental health, the violence of Mennonite communities, and the paradox of power within Mennonite thought and theology), both create a public account of Mennonites, and inform how Mennonites understand themselves in relation to this account.

While a psychological and medical modernity requires a particular subject for its deployment, it is not an authority wholly given deference to by Mennonites. Like the mutability and variability of a concept like “worldliness,” not all Mennonites defer to the knowledge offer by medical and psychological practitioners. In other words, the capture of the modern is not uniform, nor is it, in the cases of many health care practitioners with whom I spoke, necessary “visible.” What, then, to do with the martyrologies of Mennonite forebearers; the stories of trauma that get told by some, and remain internalized by others? Can Mennonites, as Grace Kehler (2011) asks, turn survival into celebration rather than deferring joy and “home” to an afterlife, while living in an unfinished history of persecution and suffering? And at the same time, who is it, exactly, who might benefit from “making us seem happy”?

It is this uncertainty, this living within something unfinished, that becomes generative of particular ways of being, and it is in these emerging and processual negotiations that “the ongoing trajectories of persons show us the existential elements in social and individual experience: subjects are themselves unfinished and unfinishable.” (Biehl et al. 2007; 15) As previously mentioned, the notion of imagined communities proposed by Benedict Anderson has struck a chord with Mennonite scholars for capturing this emergence. In thinking specifically about Mennonite community, Rob Zacharias (2013:12) draws on Anderson to suggest that rather than being a concept that includes

“ethnic, religious, nationalist, or other manifestations,” community might be better understood not “as grounded in particular conceptual terrain but to stress that such a question is part of the debate that unfolds across the literature.”

Indeed, it is this “unfolding” that Mennonite poet and essayist Julia Kasdorf (2001:xi) writes of when she reflects upon all her scholarly and creative inquiries into Amish and Mennonite culture and history as an “attempt to negotiate an authorial identity without either abandoning my home community altogether or becoming silenced by it.” These attempts, she offers, were put in relief when an essay she wrote, published in a denominational magazine, received a letter from “an alarmed female reader” suggesting Kasdorf, rather than choosing the dubious vocation of “writer” should enjoy the pleasures of being a wife and mother. This response showed me that the problem I was trying to solve was not as theoretical as it seemed; it had a sex and a family and a memory.” (Kasdorf xi)

This “sex and family and memory” as Kasdorf describes is what constitutes the materiality of existence, the world. The Christian life in relation to this world and a distant God is rife with paradox, and it is the responses to these paradoxes that are particular generative of Mennonite ways of mitigating and mediating this challenge. To navigate the new and changing social categories, worlds, and discourses that shape and continue to shape contemporary Mennonite contexts requires the act of holding on and letting go – binding and loosing to use an Anabaptist trope. While the conditions that Anabaptists have encountered may be new, it remains a valuable question to ask, in these encounters, “how people value life and relationships and ‘enact the possibilities they envision’ (Rosen 2003:x) for themselves and for others?” (Biehl et al 2007; 8).

As Norget et al. (2017:16) point out in their definitive introduction to the volume on the Anthropology of Catholicism, the focus on the Christian capacity for “discipline and punish” that Asad describes, may beget other capacities within Christianity. Speaking specifically about Catholicism’s rigour throughout the centuries, Norget et al. suggest the need for anthropologists to also “be attuned to its capacity for toleration.” The same may be said of Anabaptism and Mennonites: despite schism, rigidity, an uneven and injurious deployment of power and authority, these traditions retain a vibrancy and toleration of “the world” that is not easily shaken.

What is lost and what is gained in the negotiation of Christian life, in shifting subjectivities, in choosing new discourses of affect, in attending to new orientations, in the desire for healing and reparation to traumas remembered and forgotten, and in preparing the body for death? These are some of the questions that lie at the heart of the discussion concerning Mennonites and the struggle to live with the paradoxes of Christianity in a secular age. I, too, have asked these questions of my own Mennonite inheritance, coming to see the practice of critique and questioning as a means of generating new relationships, actions, and understandings.



Diane Enns, a Russian Mennonite scholar, also writes of her own “inheritance,” of the legacy of insecurity about her own voice in challenging the moral authority of Mennonite thought and action – something that no longer held any “content” for her, yet continued to “haunt.” This inheritance, she writes, is a paradox. In describing the Russian Mennonite community and its legacy of trauma, she writes of this paradox: “The very experiences that might lead a community to moralism and exclusivity, perhaps even hypocrisy and racism, are those that enable a revaluation of our notions of community

and ethics” (Enns 2010; 188). In positioning Mennonites at the cusp of ethical choice, Enns suggests that this paradox, too, becomes generative: Mennonites are well positioned to ask critical subjective questions when encountering new experiences, enact the possibilities they may envision, and, as Anabaptists always have done, define what it is that constitutes the world.

APPENDIX A – Certificate of Ethics Clearance

MREB Clearance Certificate

Page 1 of 1

		<p>McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB) c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca</p> <p>CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH</p>	
Application Status: New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/>		Project Number: <input type="text" value="2013 138"/>	
TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:			
Cultural Change in the Russian Mennonite Community: The Intersection of Biomedicine with Traditional Beliefs about Illness, Suffering, and Death			
Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
E. Badone	Anthropology	23395	badone@mcmaster.ca
Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
R. Plett	Anthropology	905-522-8365	plettra@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB:			
<input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification.			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification.			
<input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below.			
COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.			
[Empty text area for comments and conditions]			
Reporting Frequency:		Annual: <input type="text" value="Jun-28-2014"/>	Other:
Date: <input type="text" value="Jun-28-2013"/>		Chair, Dr. B. Detlor 	

APPENDIX B – McMaster Research Ethics Board Application



McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)

FACULTY/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE/STAFF

APPLICATION TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

[Behavioural / Non-Medical]

Date:	Application Status: New [x] Change []	Protocol #:
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Helpful Hints Mouse over bold blue hypertext links for help with completing this form.

Please refer to the McMaster University < [Research Ethics Guidelines and Researcher's Handbook](#) >, prior to completing and submitting this application.

If you have questions about, or require assistance with, the completion of this form, please contact the Ethics Secretariat at ext. 23142, or 26117 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

HOW TO SUBMIT:

If you are submitting hard copies of your typewritten application send this form and all accompanying material in duplicate (2 copies) to the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

If submitting by e-mail, send your typewritten application plus attachments, and forward the original signed signature page to the **Ethics Secretariat, Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS), Room 305 Gilmour Hall, ext. 23142, ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca**.

If you intend to change a previously cleared protocol, please submit the “< [Change Request](#) >” form.

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Study Titles: (Insert below)

TITLE: Cultural Change in the Russian Mennonite Community: The Intersection of Biomedicine with Traditional Beliefs about Illness, Suffering, and Death
(a): Title: (If different from above i.e. the grant title.)

2. Investigator Information: This form is not to be completed by < [Faculty of Health Science researchers](#) > .

	Full Name	Department & or name of university if different from McMaster	telephone number(s) & Extension	E-mail address (Address you regularly use)
Principal Investigator*				
Co-Investigator(s) <i>(Insert additional rows as required.)</i>				
Research Assistants or Project Coordinators*				
Student		Anthropology	905 522-	plettra@mcmaster.ca

Investigator(s)*	Rebecca Plett		8365	
Faculty Supervisor(s)*	Ellen Badone	Anthropology	23395	badone@mcmaster.ca

*Faculty and staff, information should be inserted above the black bar in this table. Student researcher and faculty supervisor information should be inserted below the black bar in this table.

3. **Start dates and end dates:** (Contact the Ethics Secretariat at X 23142 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca for urgent requests.)

(a) What is the date you plan to begin recruiting participants or obtain their permission to review their private documents?

(b) What is the estimated completion date for data collection with human participants?

4. Indicate the location(s) where the research will be conducted. Move your mouse over this [Helpful Hint >](#) for more information on foreign country or school board reviews. If you are conducting research in a **foreign country or countries** please contact the Ethics Secretariat at X 23142 or 26117 for further information on possible additional requirements:

- (a) McMaster University
- (b) Community Specify Site(s) Steinbach and Winnipeg, Manitoba
- (c) Hospital Specify Site(s)
- (d) Outside of Canada Specify Site(s)
- (e) School Boards Specify Site(s)
- (f) Other Specify Site(s)

5. Other Research Ethics Board Clearance

(a) Are researchers from outside McMaster also conducting this research? If yes, please provide their information in Section 2 above. Yes No

No

(b) Has any other institutional Research Ethics Board cleared this project? Yes No

(c) If Yes to (5b), please complete the remainder of this application form and provide a copy of the ethics clearance certificate /approval letter.

(d) Please provide the following information:

<p>Title of the project cleared elsewhere</p> <p>Name of the other institution:</p> <p>Name of the other board:</p> <p>Date of the other ethics review board's decision:</p> <p>Contact name & phone number for the other board:</p>

(e) Will any other Research Ethics Board(s) or equivalent be asked for clearance? Yes No
If yes, please provide the name and location of board(s).

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6. Research Involving Canadian Aboriginal Peoples i.e., First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Check all that apply)

(a) Will the research be conducted on Canadian Aboriginal lands? Yes No

(b) Will recruitment criteria include Canadian Aboriginal identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup in the study? Yes
 No

(c) Will the research seek input from participants regarding a Canadian Aboriginal community's cultural heritage, artifacts, traditional knowledge or unique characteristics? Yes
 No

(d) Will research in which Canadian Aboriginal identity or membership in an Aboriginal community be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data? Yes
 No

(e) Will interpretation of research results refer to Canadian Aboriginal communities, peoples, language, history or culture? Yes
 No

If you selected "Yes" for any of the above 5 questions (6.a-6.e) please note that the TCPS (Chapter 9) requires that researchers shall offer the option of engagement with Canadian Aboriginal communities involved in the research. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>. For advice regarding the application of the new TCPS guidelines for conducting research with Canadian Aboriginal people please contact Karen Szala-Meneok at X 26117 or szalak@mcmaster.ca

(f) Please describe the nature and extent of your engagement with the Aboriginal community(s) being researched. The nature of community engagement should be appropriate to the unique characteristics of the community(s) and the research. The extent of community engagement should be determined jointly by the researchers and the relevant communities. Include any information/advice received from or about the Aboriginal community under study. ***The TCPS notes that, "although researchers shall offer the option of engagement, a community may choose to engage nominally or not at all, despite being willing to allow the research to proceed. If your study will be conducted with several Aboriginal communities or sub-groups, please use headings to organize your information.***

ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any documents that support how community engagement has been or will be established such as letters of support, where appropriate.

N/A

(g) Has or will a research agreement be created between the researcher and the Aboriginal community? Yes No

If **Yes**, please provide details about the agreement (e.g., Will it be written or verbal etc.?) below.

N/A

ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any written research agreements, if applicable. See the MREB website for a sample customizable research agreement <https://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> or visit the CIHR website <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>

(h) Are you seeking a waiver of the community engagement requirement? (A waiver may be granted if the REB is satisfied that, Aboriginal participants will not be identified with a community or that the welfare of relevant communities will not be affected by the research.) Yes No

In order to mitigate this possibility, I will make it clear to all potential participants that participation is entirely voluntary. I will also provide potential participants who are family members or friends with a graceful excuse to decline. For example, I will tell these individuals that I know they are very busy and may not have time to participate, and that even if they don't decide to participate I will undoubtedly have sufficiently large number of participants. I will tell them they should not feel obligated to take part in my study simply because of our relationship.

(b) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) as a result of or being connected to this study? **Yes**
 No

(ii) If **Yes**, please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally).

N/A

(c) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s), if applicable.

None

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS AND HELPFUL TIPS (Please read first):

*Please be as **clear** and **concise** as possible. Keeping in mind that your protocol will be read by reviewers who may not be specialists in your field, **please avoid technical jargon**. Feel free to use headings, bullets and bolding to organize your information. Content boxes on this application expand.*

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

10. Rationale

For the proposed research, please describe the *background* and the *purpose* concisely and in lay terms, as well as any overarching research questions or hypotheses to be examined. ***Please do not cut and paste full sections from your research proposal.***

Background:

The Russian Mennonites who immigrated to Canada beginning in the 1870s have a long history of living in isolated and closed-off communities. With increasing assimilation into mainstream Canadian society, however, many Russian Mennonites are engaging with the “world” outside such communities. Russian Mennonites are not “horse-and-buggy” Mennonites, but have adopted all aspects of modern technology. As a result, however, this group faces tensions between long-held religious understandings of what constitutes “home” – this world or heaven. My research project seeks to broadly trace cultural change among Russian Mennonites by focusing on perspectives on illness and death. Specifically, I will analyze cultural change in the context of Mennonite history and theology which valorize suffering, death as a return to one’s real home in heaven, and even martyrdom for one’s faith. Practices around, and understandings of, death have particular salience for Mennonites for whom martyrdom became a theological imperative – a way of living in the most Christ-like way. This can be seen in the importance of funerals for the community as a social gathering, and death, illness, and funeral planning as common topics of conversation, especially for older Mennonites. Further, because unlike some other Mennonite groups, Russian Mennonites have incorporated themselves into Canadian society to a greater extent than others, the use of biomedical

("Western") treatment for serious illness has become normative in their communities.

Purpose:

This being the case, my research asks to what extent does a history of martyrdom and a theology of suffering intersect with biomedical models of illness and death – models that seek to deny suffering and frame death as a medical failure. This question becomes particularly important in cases of individuals who are diagnosed with or dying from cancer since medical views of cancer are often metaphorically framed in violent and militaristic language. Biomedical treatments for cancer are often compared to a battle which individuals are compelled to "fight" in order to survive. Such metaphors and language contradict Mennonite theological teachings which emphasize pacifism and advocate surrender to death as a way entering the presence of God in heaven, one's true home.

Site:

My project will therefore involve participant observation fieldwork and interviews with terminally ill Mennonites in the Steinbach area, their families, caregivers, health care providers, and religious leaders. Steinbach is a small city in south eastern Manitoba, and is the administrative centre for the area. It was settled by Russian Mennonites in the 1870s on land offered by the Canadian government to European settlers. The population of Steinbach remains primarily Russian Mennonite, a group of Mennonites who have "modernized" to a greater extent than other Mennonite groups, and are not distinguished by particular dress or resistance to technological innovation.

11. Methods

Describe sequentially, and in detail, the methods to be used. Include all data collection procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, focus groups, lab experiments, participant observation, surveys, physical assessments etc. —*this is not an exhaustive list*). Include information about who will be conducting the research, how long it will take, where data collection will take place, and the form in which the data will be collected (e.g., computer responses, handwritten notes, audio/video/photo recordings etc.). If your study will be conducted with several sub-populations or progress and expand in successive phases, please organize your information using sub-headings.

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of all questionnaires, interview guides (i.e., list of questions), test or data collection instruments. These and other documents should be identified as appendices (e.g., Appendix A or 1) and should accompany this application rather than being pasted into it. Please click this link for samples: ["Tips and Samples"](#) and the "How to Unpack the Methods" worksheet.

This project will be based on standard methods of ethnographic research in the discipline of anthropology. Researchers in cultural anthropology (ethnographers) engage in participant observation, a fieldwork method based on social relationships between individuals and the ethnographer, in which the ethnographer assumes the position of a student or apprentice who learns through participating in everyday activities with community members and observing social life. This participant observation component of my research is essential because it will provide the broad social and cultural context for my specific research questions that deal with attitudes toward illness, suffering, biomedicine, and death.

Following the general methodology of participant observation, this study will involve several specific tasks. From August 2013 to the end of December 2013 I will reside in the Steinbach area where I will participate in many aspects of community life including doing shopping at local stores, volunteering at the local museum, and participating in recreational activities. Because of my Russian Mennonite background, I already know many people in Steinbach, and I expect that I will have no trouble integrating into the community. I also plan to attend church services, funerals, and accompany community palliative care nurses on home visits. I will accompany family members when they visit relatives who are hospitalized and volunteer with local volunteers who provide support to families with members suffering from cancer.

In addition to this participant observation fieldwork, I will carry out semi-structured, open-ended interviews with three groups of individuals:

- Mennonite individuals suffering from cancer or in remission and their family members (Please see **Appendix A** for examples of the types of questions that will be used as the basis for interviews with Mennonites with cancer)
- Health care providers (primarily doctors and nurses working in the area of palliative care), (Please see **Appendix B** for examples of the types of questions that will be used as the basis for interviews with health care providers)
- Religious leaders in the community. (Please see **Appendix C** for examples of the types of questions that will be used as the basis for interviews with Mennonites with cancer)

These interviews will be informal and semi-structured, and will last approximately 60-90 minutes, or however long a participant may choose to talk. It is commonly the case in anthropological research, that participants talk as long as they wish in an interview, and/or restart the conversation at a later time. I will follow this methodology in my interviews.

I also plan to use another anthropological method, the collection of life histories from some community members. I will do this through interviews with consenting individuals. I will not use a questionnaire format; instead, I will give participants the opportunity of focusing on aspects of their lives that they consider most important or useful for me to know based on their understanding of my research. I will start the life history interviews with “conversation starters.” Examples of conversation starters are provided in **Appendix D**.

Both interviews and life histories will be held in a place that is comfortable and convenient for the participant and at a time of their choosing.

I hope to use an audio recorder for some aspects of this research, specifically life histories. However, because I find the use of an audio recorder disrupts the relationship between the ethnographer and participant, I will in most cases use hand written fieldnotes during interviews to record information. Before starting interviews or life histories, I will ask participants' permission to audio record and/or take hand written notes. I will also write daily fieldnotes about my ethnographic work and observations – a standard practice in anthropology.

Please see Section 26 for references to publications on ethnographic methodology.

12. Secondary Use of Identifiable Data (*e.g. use of personally identifiable data of participants contained in records that have been collected for a purpose other than your current research project*):

(a) Do you plan on using identifiable data of participants in your research for which the original purpose that data was collected is different than the purpose of your current research project?
 Yes No

If **Yes**, please answer the next set of questions:

(b) Do you plan to link this identifiable data to other data sets? Yes No

If **Yes**, then please describe:

N/A

(c) What type of identifiable data from this data set are you planning to access and use?
 Student records (please specify in the box below)

- Health records/clinic/office files (please specify in the box below)
 Other personal records (please specify in the box below)

N/A

(d) What personally identifiable data (e.g., name, student number, telephone number, date of birth etc.) from this data set do you plan on using in your research? Please explain why you need to collect this identifiable data (i.e., justify why each item is required to conduct your research).

N/A

(e) Describe what agreement you have, or will have, in place with the owner of this data to allow you to use this data for your research. **ATTACHMENTS: Ensure you provide the MREB Ethics Secretariat with a copy of this agreement.**

N/A

(f) When participants first contributed their data to this data set, were there any known preferences expressed by participants at that time about how their information would be used in the future? Please explain.

N/A

(g) What is the likelihood of adverse effects happening to the participants to whom this secondary use of data relates? Please explain.

N/A

(h) Will participants whose information is stored in this data set (which you plan to use for secondary purposes) consent to your use of this data? Please explain.

N/A

13. Experience

What is your experience with this kind of research? Include information on the experience of all **individual(s)** who will have contact with the research participants or their data. **For example, experience could include your familiarity with the proposed methods, the population(s) and/or the research topic or issues.**

I grew up in southern Manitoba within the Mennonite community, and understand the important role that funerals play within the community. It is my experience that dying, illness, and death are topics of everyday conversation in the Russian Mennonite community.

Further, building on my previous research experience I have developed the level of sensitivity required to deal with discussions on serious health issues and emotionally charged topics. I have conducted participant-observation fieldwork at a rural clinic with individuals suffering from tuberculosis in south-western Angola for my Master's thesis which I completed at the University of

Manitoba in 2009. In addition to participant-observation ethnographic methodology, I conducted interviews with tuberculosis patients at the clinic site, as well as with nurses and physicians on staff there.

After completion of my MA, I was employed for 2 years as a research coordinator for a qualitative study at the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba where I conducted semi-structured interviews with families with adolescents with chronic illness, and their health care providers. Many of these adolescents had cancer, so I have previous experience conducting interviews on this topic. As a result of my MA and employment experience, I have had the opportunity to do qualitative research on topics related to my proposed doctoral project in both Canadian and cross-cultural contexts. I feel that I can be sensitive to, and respectful of, the emotional and physical needs of my respondents during my doctoral fieldwork.

14. Participants

Please describe:

- (a) the number of participants required for this study
 (b) any salient characteristics (e.g., age, gender, location, affiliation, etc.) ***If your study will be conducted with several sub-groups please use headings to organize your description of the characteristics for each group of participants.***

My participant observation ethnography will be carried out with the broader Russian Mennonite community in the Steinbach area. As is standard anthropological practice, there will be no formal recruitment process for this component of the research. In addition to participant observation, I hope to carry out approximately 50 semi-structured interviews or life histories with 3 groups:

- Russian Mennonites with serious illness,
- health care providers
- religious leaders.

All interview and life history participants will be adults competent to give informed consent. Attempts will be made to interview approximately equal numbers of men and women, of various ages over 18 years.

15. Recruitment

Please describe:

- (a) how each type of participant will be recruited
 (b) who will recruit participants
 (c) the relationship (if any) between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student; manager-employee, family member, student peers, fellow club members, no relationship etc.)
 (d) any permission you have or intend to obtain, for your mode of recruitment (if applicable)

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of any posters, advertisements letters, flyers, and/or email messages etc. to be used for recruitment. Please click this link for samples: [“Tips and Samples”](#) and the [“How to Unpack the Recruitment Details”](#) worksheet.

Since I grew up in southern Manitoba within the Mennonite community that is the focus of this study, I have established initial contact with community members in preparation for this research. In establishing contact with the community through informal conversations, I encountered several people who have expressed interest in participating in the project. My initial participants will thus be individuals with whom I have already established relationships in a non-research setting. These include individuals from the 3 participant groups: individuals with serious illness, health care providers, and religious leaders.

In order to prevent potential participants from feeling obligated or coerced to participate because of their relationship with me, I will make it clear to all potential participants that participation is

entirely voluntary. I will also provide potential participants who are family members or friends with a graceful excuse to decline. For example, I will tell these individuals that I know they are very busy and may not have time to participate, and that even if they don't decide to participate I will undoubtedly have a sufficiently large number of participants. I will tell them they should not feel obligated to take part in my study simply because of our relationship.

I will provide all potential participants with a recruitment brochure (**Appendix E**) that introduces myself, explains the research project and methods, and provides my contact information. If, having read the brochure, individuals choose to be interviewed, I will ask them to contact me and we will arrange a convenient time and location to meet.

I plan to recruit further participants through informal snowball sampling, a standard qualitative method, as participants introduce me to their families and friends and others in their social networks. If introduced to other potential participants through snowball sampling, I will explain that they are under no obligation to participate, nor should they feel coerced into doing so in order to please the people that have provided the introductions. Since in the general ethnographic participant observation part of this research I will be talking informally to a very large number of Steinbach residents, it is likely that many people will suggest potential participants.

16. Compensation

	Yes
No	
(a) Will participants receive compensation for participation?	[]
[x]	
Financial	[]
Other (specify)	[]
[]	

(b) If yes was answered for any of the above choices, please provide details.

There will be no formal compensation for participation. However, in line with ethical norms for anthropological fieldwork, I will try to reciprocate informally by, for example, treating participants to a beverage if we meet for an interview in a café, or bringing a small gift such as flowers if participants invite me to their home.

(c) If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with their compensation?

N/A

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

17. Possible Risks

(a) Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

- i.) Physical risk (including any bodily contact or administration of any substance)? [] Yes [x] No
- ii.) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset)? [x] Yes [] No
- iii.) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and / or reputation)? [x] Yes [] No

iv.) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those the participants might encounter in their everyday life?

Yes No

(b) If you checked **yes** for any of questions **i – iv** above, please describe the risk(s) in the space below.

Russian Mennonites often introduce topics such as death, illness, and religious beliefs into everyday conversation. I recognize that these topics are sensitive and emotionally charged, and that some participants may be psychologically upset during interviews or fieldwork conversations or may feel that their privacy is at risk. However, since it is common practice to discuss these topics in the Mennonite community, in my estimation the risks are not greater than those that the participants might encounter in their everyday lives.

(c) Management of Risks: Describe how each of the risks identified above will be managed or minimized. Please, include an explanation regarding why alternative approaches cannot be used.

I will endeavor to be tactful and sensitive during my conversations and interviews with participants. If I notice that a participant seems emotionally upset, I will stop the interview, express my concern for the individual, and remind them that they may skip any questions they find too difficult to answer. I will also remind them that they are under no obligation to discuss any topic that is emotionally upsetting and that they may withdraw from the study at any point in time with no consequences. I will also provide participants with contact information for grief counselors or social workers if they feel that would be helpful (see **Appendix I** for list).

(d) Deception: Is there any deception involved in this research?

Yes No

i.) If deception is to be used in your methods, describe the details of the deception (including what information will be withheld from participants) and justify the use of deception.

N/A

ii.) Please describe when participants will be given an explanation about why deception was used and how they will be debriefed about the study (for example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research). **ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of the written debriefing form or script, if applicable.**

N/A

18. Possible Benefits

Discuss any potential benefits to the scientific community/society that justify involvement of participants in this study. (**Please note: benefits should not be confused with compensation or reimbursement for taking part in the study.**)

Scientific Benefits:

This project aims to further and enrich existing ethnographic scholarship on Russian Mennonites. Specifically, while there is a significant body of historical literature on Russian Mennonites, there is little scholarly work done on the intersections between religion, identity, illness, and Canadian society among contemporary Russian Mennonites. In initial discussions, members of the Mennonite community have expressed considerable interest in this study, particularly as it relates to notions of identity, history, and suffering – common themes in Mennonite discussions. Finally, by attending to the changes in Mennonite understandings of illness and death, I hope to shed light on the meanings of illness and death in a larger Canadian context.

Benefits to Participants:

Based on conversations I have had with community members, and the interest they have expressed in this project, I believe that the Mennonite community will welcome the opportunity to participate in a research project that will help to preserve Mennonite cultural heritage, and highlight their distinctive identity. I expect that people will see my research as valorizing contemporary Mennonite culture and ways of life.

SECTION D – < THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS >**19. The Consent Process**

(a) Please describe how consent will be documented. Provide a copy of the Letter of Information and the consent form (if applicable) to be used.

Click the blue link above <THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS> for the McMaster REB recommended sample Letter of Information/Consent Form. The letter of Information/consent form should be written at the appropriate [reading level](#). See the “Guide to Converting Documents into Plain Language” found in the “samples and tips section: of the MREB website.

If a written consent form will not be used to document consent, please explain why and describe the alternative means that will be used. While oral consent may be acceptable in certain circumstances, it may still be appropriate to provide a Letter of Information to participants about the study.

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide cop(ies) of the Letter of Information and Consent form(s) or the content of any oral or telephone script(s) that will be used in the consent process for each of your study populations (if applicable).

Oral Consent:

Based on my previous fieldwork experience, I would prefer to use oral consent in most cases for this research project. As the TCPS 2 states on page 140, “under a variety of circumstances, signed written consent is not appropriate in qualitative research”. I believe “there are valid reasons for not recording consent through a signed written consent form” in this project for several reasons (pg. 140):

1. The topics I will be discussing are deeply significant and emotionally charged, and I believe that using a lengthy bureaucratic and legalistic consent form would be insensitive, especially given that some of my participants may be elderly and/or frail and unable to concentrate on reading and understanding a formal consent form.
2. Within Mennonite communities there has sometimes been a mistrust of academics who are seen as elitist. A formal letter of information and consent offers a concrete signifier of the “academy” that may be off-putting or intimidating to participants, and would create a distance between them and myself.

In lieu of a more formal letter of information and consent, I plan to explain my research thoroughly through use of my recruitment brochure (**Appendix E**) and an oral script (**Appendix F**) so that there is “mutual understanding of the project goals and objectives between the participants and the researcher” (TCPS 2 pg. 140). In all cases, consent will be documented using a consent log (**Appendix G**).

Written Consent:

The only categories of participants for whom I will use a formal letter of information and consent are health care providers and religious leaders. My relationships with these categories of participants will be more formal and distanced, and therefore I do not feel that use of a letter of information and consent will be an impediment to developing rapport. See **Appendix H** for the letter of information and consent to be used with health care providers and religious leaders.

(b): Please describe the process the investigator(s) will use to obtain informed consent, including who will be obtaining informed consent. Describe plans (if any) for on-going consent.

Only I will be obtaining informed oral consent.

20. Consent by an authorized party

If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent. **ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent.**

N/A

21. Alternatives to prior individual consent

If obtaining written or oral documentation of an individual participant's consent prior to start of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process. **ATTACHMENTS: Please provide any Letters of Information and or Consent Forms.**

N/A

22. Providing participants with study results

How will participants be able to learn about the study results? (e.g., mailed/emailed brief summary of results in plain language; posting on website or other appropriate means for this population).

I will provide participants with my contact information allowing them to request a summary of my research results when my dissertation is complete (expected completion date is December 2015). I will do this through several means. Every interview participant will receive a recruitment brochure (**Appendix E**) with my contact information on it. Health care professionals and religious leaders will also receive the Letter of Information and Consent (**Appendix H**) with my contact information on it. I will also provide participants with my McMaster University cards as needed.

23. Participant withdrawal

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Describe the procedures which will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

Prior to the start of each interview or life history session, I will remind participants that they can withdraw at any point during the interview. Further, I will remind them that they do not need to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. I will also explain that they can decide to withdraw after the interview at any point up to August 1, 2015 when I expect to have a completed draft of my dissertation. If a participant expresses the desire to stop an interview or withdraw, I will respect this decision and stop the interview.

b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences which withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have on the participant's compensation or continuation of services (if applicable).

If a participant expresses the desire to stop an interview or life history session, or withdraw from the research, I will ask them if they wish me to avoid using the information they have provided. If so, I will destroy any notes and audio recordings made during the interview, and not use any of the participant's information in my dissertation or publications. There will be no consequences for the participant as a result of withdrawal.

c) If the participants will not have the right to withdraw from the research, please explain.

N/A

24. SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Confidentiality concerns the protection, privacy and security of research data. Consult the Data Security Checklist at <http://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> for best practices to secure electronic and hard copy versions of data and study documents.

(a) Will the data you collect be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members?

[x] Yes []
No

If **No**, then explain why not, and describe what steps you be put in place to advise participants that data will not be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members.

N/A

(b) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure that the data you collect in your research will be kept protected, private, and secure from non-research team members. In your description, explain who will have access to the data and what data security measures will be put in place during data transfer and data storage.

I will store fieldnotes and audio recordings in a locked container in my personal office at my residence in Steinbach, Manitoba, to which only I will have access. Digital data including typed fieldnotes and copies of audio recordings will be stored in password-protected files on my password-protected computer. When not in use, this computer will be stored in my personal office, locked when I am not present.

(c) Will the research data be kept indefinitely or will it be deleted after a certain time period? Please explain. In your answer, describe why you plan to keep data indefinitely or not. If deleting data after a certain time period, explain why you chose the time period you did. Describe how participants will be informed whether their data will be deleted or not.

It is common practice within cultural anthropology to keep fieldnotes and audio recordings or transcripts indefinitely since these data are understood to be valuable records of a culture at a particular historical moment, and provide the basis for future professional publications. I will safeguard my fieldwork materials by storing them in a locked cabinet and in password-protected files on my password-protected computer.

Anonymity concerns whether participant identities are made known or not. The anonymity promised to participants can be different during different stages of research (i.e., during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings).

(d) Describe the extent to which participant identities will be made known in each of the following activities: during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings. In your description, explain what steps or procedures you plan to put in place to keep participant identities unknown in each of those activities.

At all stages of the research project, efforts will be made to protect participant anonymity. However, owing to practical considerations, the degree of anonymity may vary at different stages of the research.

Recruitment: I plan to be as discreet as possible during my fieldwork, and will not indiscriminately reveal to community members that other community members are participating. However, since snowball sampling will be used, the identities of some participants will be known to some other participants.

Data Collection: I plan to be as discreet as possible and to avoid revealing the identities of research participants to other community members during the data collection phase. However, inevitably family members and friends are likely to learn that I have interviewed specific individuals since the Mennonite community is small and closely-knit. Under no circumstances will I share identifiable personal information from one participant with other research participants.

Data Storage: In most cases I will use pseudonyms for individuals or refer to participants in a general way in my fieldnotes and in transcripts of audio recordings. In some cases, particularly in life histories, participants may wish to be identified by their actual name either because they do not feel that their information needs to be kept private or because they want to contribute to the preservation of Mennonite history and culture and are proud to do so using their own name. I will endeavour to respect their request. However, I will explain to these individuals that using their real names may compromise the confidentiality of others who wish to remain unidentified. In such cases, I will be obligated to use pseudonyms for all individuals concerned. I will further exercise care with quotes so that I do not directly or indirectly identify participants who have not opted for attribution.

Dissemination: In most cases I will use pseudonyms for individuals or refer to participants in a general way in my dissertation and in any future publications. As noted above, in some cases, participants may wish to be identified by their actual name either because they do not feel that their information needs to be kept private or because they want to contribute to the preservation of Mennonite history and culture and are proud to do so using their own name. I will endeavor to respect their request. However, I will explain to these individuals that using their real names may compromise the confidentiality of others who wish to remain unidentified. In such cases, I will be obligated to use pseudonyms for all individuals concerned. I will further exercise care with quotes so that I do not directly or indirectly identify participants who have not opted for attribution.

Following standard anthropological practice, I will continue to build on the information from this PhD study, using it as the basis for an ongoing program of research on the topic of Russian Mennonites. Thus, qualitative information contained in life histories or interviews that is not specifically related to the current research project may be used in future research projects and publications.

SECTION F -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH**25. Adverse Events, Change Requests and Annual Renewal view**

- a) **Adverse events** (Unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) must be reported by faculty researcher or supervisor to the REB Secretariat (Ethics Office – Ext. 23142) and the MREB Chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days after they occur.
See: https://reo.mcmaster.ca/policies/copy_of_guidelines#12-0-adverse-events
- b) **Changes:** To obtain clearance for a change to a protocol that has already received ethics clearance, please complete the “< **Change Request** >” form available on the MREB website or by clicking this link. Such changes may not begin before they receive ethics clearance.
- c) **Ethics clearance is for only one year.** The minimum requirement for renewed clearance is the completion of a “Renewal/Project Completed” form at least 1 month in advance of the annual report to process the renewal. In this section please indicate whether any additional monitoring or review is appropriate for this project. ***PLEASE NOTE: It is the investigator's responsibility to complete the Annual Project Status Report that is sent each year by email 8 weeks in advance of the anniversary of the original ethics clearance. Otherwise, ethics clearance will expire and the Research Ethics Board is obliged to notify Research Finance who in accordance with university and funding agency regulations will put a hold on funds.***

26. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

(Use this section or an additional page if more space is required to complete any part of this form, or if there is any other information relevant to the project which you wish to provide to the Research Ethics Board.)

Here are some recent publications on methodology in cultural anthropology:

Bernard, H. Russell. 2011. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

DeWalt, Kathleen M. and Billie R. DeWalt. 2011. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Fife, Wayne. 2006 *Doing Fieldwork: Ethnographic Methods for Research in Developing Countries*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

27. POSTING OF APPROVED PROTOCOLS ON THE RESEARCH ETHICS WEBSITE

- a) Effective January 1, 2006, it is the policy of MREB to post a list of cleared protocols on the Research Ethics website. Posted information usually includes: title, names of principal investigators, principal investigator department, type of project (i.e. Faculty; PhD; Masters, Undergraduate etc.)
- b) You may request that the title be deleted from the posted information.
- c) Do you request that the title be eliminated from the posted information? [] Yes [x] No

- d) The ethics board will honour your request if you answer **Yes** to the above question **27 c)** but we ask you to provide a reason for making this request for the information of the Board. You may also use this box for any other special requests.
- e) < [List of MREB Cleared Protocols](#) > < [List of Undergraduate SREC Cleared Protocols](#) >

Supporting Materials Checklist:

Instructions:

Please complete the following checklist to identify and describe the supporting materials submitted with your protocol.

- When supplying supporting materials, ensure that they are properly labeled (e.g., “Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teachers”) and referenced in your protocol (e.g., “The interview guide for teachers – see Appendix C – is...”).
- Do not cut and paste your supporting materials directly into the application form; submit each as a separate appendix.
- If you have multiple supporting materials of the same type (e.g., multiple letters of information – each targeted to a different population), list each supporting material on a separate row in the checklist (i.e., add a new row to the table).

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study <i>(Insert X below)</i>	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol <i>(Insert X below)</i>	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol <i>(e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)</i>
Recruitment Materials			
Study Information Brochure			
Video/audio recording that explains study details			
Participant Screening Form			
Recruitment Advertisements			
Recruitment Poster			
Recruitment Script - Verbal/Telephone			
Recruitment Script - Email (direct to participant)			
Recruitment Script - Email (From holder of participant’s contact information)			
Recruitment for follow-up interview			
Snowball Recruitment script			
Reminder/thank you/ card/script/email			
Appreciation Letter/certificate - For Participants			
Other			
Informed Consent Materials			
Consent Log (to record oral consent)			
Oral/Telephone Consent Script			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Participants			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Parent			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Guardian or Substitute Decision Maker			
Letter of Information & Assent Form - Minors			
Online survey brief information/consent and implied consent buttons			
Letter of Support for Study			
Research Agreement			
Other			
Data Collection Materials			
Information Sharing/Data Access/Transfer Agreement (for secondary use of data)			
Demographic form - Participant’s			
Instructions for participants			
Interview Guide - (Questions for face to face, telephone, Internet/email interview)			
Interview Guide - Questions for Focus Groups			
Questionnaire or Survey questions & instructions			

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study <i>(Insert X below)</i>	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol <i>(Insert X below)</i>	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol <i>(e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)</i>
(Paper and pencil or online formats)			
Rating Scales/inventories/Assessment Instruments			
Role-play/simulation scripts			
Stimuli used to elicit responses			
Images (photos, diagrams etc.) depicting instruments, equipment, exercises etc.			
Other			
Deception Materials			
Deception Study - Debriefing Letter & post debriefing consent form			
Deception Study- Debriefing script – verbal			
Other			
Confidentiality Materials			
Confidentiality Oath/ Agreement			
Confidential Study Code Key Log			
Other			
Materials for previous review by other REBs			
Application form –Other REBs (Original)			
Application form – Other REBs (Revised)			
Communication between REB & researcher (letters, emails, faxes etc.)			
Clearance Certificate (Other REBs)			
Other			
Other Supporting Materials			
Compensation Log			
List of support services for participants			
Participant Appreciation - letter, script, email or certificate etc.			
Researcher Training Certificates			
Scientific Licenses			
Other			

< SECTION G – SIGNATURES >

28. Faculty or Administrative Staff Researcher Assurance:

“I confirm that I have read the < [McMaster University Research Ethics Guidelines and Faculty Handbook](#) >, and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines.

Signature of Faculty or Staff Investigator PLEASE TYPE/PRINT NAME HERE Date

29. Graduate or Undergraduate Research Assurance:

For graduate or undergraduate student research where:

the supervisor is the primary supervisor for a dissertation, thesis or major research paper:

Or

the supervisor is not the primary supervisor, and where the research is not for a dissertation, thesis or major research paper (e.g., independent study, experiential learning etc.):

“I confirm that I have read the < [McMaster University Research Ethics Guidelines and Faculty Handbook](#) >, and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines.

“I have read the application and proposal and deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and I agree to provide the necessary supervision of the student(s) and to make myself available should problems arise during the course of the research.”

Signature of Faculty Supervisor PLEASE TYPE/PRINT NAME HERE Date

Signature of Student PLEASE TYPE/ PRINT NAME HERE Date



McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB)
FACULTY/GRADUATE/UNDERGRADUATE/STAFF

APPLICATION TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
[Behavioural / Non-Medical]

Date:	Application Status: New [x] Change []	Protocol #:
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[Helpful Hints](#) Mouse over bold blue hypertext links for help with completing this form.

Please refer to the McMaster University [< Research Ethics Guidelines and Researcher's Handbook >](#), prior to completing and submitting this application.

If you have questions about, or require assistance with, the completion of this form, please contact the Ethics Secretariat at ext. 23142, or 26117 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

HOW TO SUBMIT:

If you are submitting hard copies of your typewritten application send this form and all accompanying material in duplicate (2 copies) to the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

If submitting by e-mail, send your typewritten application plus attachments, and forward the original signed signature page to the **Ethics Secretariat, Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS), Room 305 Gilmour Hall, ext. 23142, ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca**.

If you intend to change a previously cleared protocol, please submit the "[< Change Request >](#)" form.

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Study Titles: (Insert below)

TITLE: Cultural Change in the Russian Mennonite Community: The Intersection of Biomedicine with Traditional Beliefs about Illness, Suffering, and Death
--

(a): Title: (If different from above i.e. the grant title.)
--

2. Investigator Information: This form is not to be completed by [< Faculty of Health Science researchers >](#).

	Full Name	Department & or name of university if different from McMaster	telephone number(s) & Extension	E-mail address (Address you regularly use)
Principal Investigator*				
Co-Investigator(s) <i>(Insert additional rows as required.)</i>				
Research Assistants or Project Coordinators*				
Student Investigator(s)*	Rebecca Plett	Anthropology	905 522-8365	plettra@mcmaster.ca
Faculty		Anthropology	23395	badone@mcmaster.ca

Supervisor(s)*	Ellen Badone			
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*Faculty and staff, information should be inserted above the black bar in this table. Student researcher and faculty supervisor information should be inserted below the black bar in this table.

3. **Start dates and end dates:** (Contact the Ethics Secretariat at X 23142 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca for urgent requests.)

(a) **What is the date you plan to begin recruiting participants or obtain their permission to review their private documents?**

(b) **What is the estimated completion date for data collection with human participants?**

4. Indicate the location(s) where the research will be conducted. Move your mouse over this [Helpful Hint >](#) for more information on foreign country or school board reviews. If you are conducting research in a **foreign country or countries** please contact the Ethics Secretariat at X 23142 or 26117 for further information on possible additional requirements:

- (a) McMaster University
- (b) Community Specify Site(s) **Kitchener-Waterloo, Niagara area, Ontario**
- (c) Hospital Specify Site(s)
- (d) Outside of Canada Specify Site(s)
- (e) School Boards Specify Site(s)
- (f) Other Specify Site(s)

5. Other Research Ethics Board Clearance

(a) Are researchers from outside McMaster also conducting this research? If yes, please provide their information in Section 2 above. Yes No

No

(b) Has any other institutional Research Ethics Board cleared this project? Yes No

(c) If **Yes** to (5b), please complete the remainder of this application form and provide a copy of the ethics clearance certificate /approval letter.

(d) Please provide the following information:

<p>Title of the project cleared elsewhere</p> <p>Name of the other institution:</p> <p>Name of the other board:</p> <p>Date of the other ethics review board's decision:</p> <p>Contact name & phone number for the other board:</p>

(e) Will any other Research Ethics Board(s) or equivalent be asked for clearance? Yes No
If yes, please provide the name and location of board(s).

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6. Research Involving Canadian Aboriginal Peoples i.e., First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Check all that apply)

(a) Will the research be conducted on Canadian Aboriginal lands? Yes No

(b) Will recruitment criteria include Canadian Aboriginal identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup in the study? Yes No

(c) Will the research seek input from participants regarding a Canadian Aboriginal community's cultural heritage, artifacts, traditional knowledge or unique characteristics? Yes
 No

(d) Will research in which Canadian Aboriginal identity or membership in an Aboriginal community be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data? Yes
 No

(e) Will interpretation of research results refer to Canadian Aboriginal communities, peoples, language, history or culture? Yes
 No

If you selected "Yes" for any of the above 5 questions (6.a-6.e) please note that the TCPS (Chapter 9) requires that researchers shall offer the option of engagement with Canadian Aboriginal communities involved in the research. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>. For advice regarding the application of the new TCPS guidelines for conducting research with Canadian Aboriginal people please contact Karen Szala-Meneok at X 26117 or szalak@mcmaster.ca

(f) Please describe the nature and extent of your engagement with the Aboriginal community(s) being researched. The nature of community engagement should be appropriate to the unique characteristics of the community(s) and the research. The extent of community engagement should be determined jointly by the researchers and the relevant communities. Include any information/advice received from or about the Aboriginal community under study. ***The TCPS notes that, "although researchers shall offer the option of engagement, a community may choose to engage nominally or not at all, despite being willing to allow the research to proceed. If your study will be conducted with several Aboriginal communities or sub-groups, please use headings to organize your information.***

ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any documents that support how community engagement has been or will be established such as letters of support, where appropriate.

N/A

(g) Has or will a research agreement be created between the researcher and the Aboriginal community? Yes No

If Yes, please provide details about the agreement (e.g., Will it be written or verbal etc.?) below.

N/A

ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any written research agreements, if applicable. See the MREB website for a sample customizable research agreement <https://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> or visit the CIHR website <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>

(h) Are you seeking a waiver of the community engagement requirement? (A waiver may be granted if the REB is satisfied that, Aboriginal participants will not be identified with a community or that the welfare of relevant communities will not be affected by the research.) Yes No

If Yes, please provide the rationale for this waiver request in the space below.

N/A

busy and may not have time to participate, and that even if they don't decide to participate I will undoubtedly have sufficiently large number of participants. I will tell them they should not feel obligated to take part in my study simply because of our relationship.

(b) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) as a result of or being connected to this study? Yes
 No

(ii) If **Yes**, please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally).

N/A

(c) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s), if applicable.

None

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS AND HELPFUL TIPS (Please read first):

Please be as **clear** and **concise** as possible. Keeping in mind that your protocol will be read by reviewers who may not be specialists in your field, **please avoid technical jargon**. Feel free to use headings, bullets and bolding to organize your information. Content boxes on this application expand.

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

10. Rationale

For the proposed research, please describe the *background* and the *purpose* concisely and in lay terms, as well as any overarching research questions or hypotheses to be examined. **Please do not cut and paste full sections from your research proposal.**

Background:

The Russian Mennonites who immigrated to Canada beginning in the 1870s have a long history of living in isolated and closed-off communities. With increasing assimilation into mainstream Canadian society, however, many Russian Mennonites are engaging with the “world” outside such communities. Russian Mennonites are not “horse-and-buggy” Mennonites, but have adopted all aspects of modern technology. As a result, however, this group faces tensions between long-held religious understandings of what constitutes “home” – this world or heaven. My research project seeks to broadly trace cultural change among Russian Mennonites by focusing on perspectives on illness and death. Specifically, I will analyze cultural change in the context of Mennonite history and theology which valorize suffering, death as a return to one's real home in heaven, and even martyrdom for one's faith. Practices around, and understandings of, death have particular salience for Mennonites for whom martyrdom became a theological imperative – a way of living in the most Christ-like way. This can be seen in the importance of funerals for the community as a social gathering, and death, illness, and funeral planning as common topics of conversation, especially for older Mennonites. Further, because unlike some other Mennonite groups, Russian Mennonites have incorporated themselves into Canadian society to a greater extent than others, the use of biomedical (“Western”) treatment for serious illness has become normative in their communities.

Purpose:

This being the case, my research asks to what extent does a history of martyrdom and a theology of suffering intersect with biomedical models of illness and death – models that seek to deny suffering and frame death as a medical failure. This question becomes particularly important in cases of individuals who are diagnosed with or dying from cancer since medical views of cancer are often metaphorically framed in violent and militaristic language. Biomedical treatments for cancer are often compared to a battle which individuals are compelled to “fight” in order to survive. Such metaphors and language contradict Mennonite theological teachings which emphasize pacifism and advocate surrender to death as a way entering the presence of God in heaven, one’s true home.

Site:

My project will therefore involve participant observation fieldwork and interviews with terminally ill Mennonites in the Kitchener-Waterloo and Niagara areas, their families, caregivers, health care providers, and religious leaders. Russian Mennonite immigrants began to arrive in Canada the 1870s, while a significant immigrant population settled in areas surrounding Kitchener-Waterloo in Ontario in the 1950s, joining the established Swiss Mennonite and Amish population. The cities of Kitchener-Waterloo and Ste. Catharines continue to have large Russian Mennonite populations, and both areas function as administrative centres for national Mennonite church organizations, as well as centres of education and heritage.

11. Methods

Describe sequentially, and in detail, the methods to be used. Include all data collection procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, focus groups, lab experiments, participant observation, surveys, physical assessments etc. —*this is not an exhaustive list*). Include information about who will be conducting the research, how long it will take, where data collection will take place, and the form in which the data will be collected (e.g., computer responses, handwritten notes, audio/video/photo recordings etc.). If your study will be conducted with several sub-populations or progress and expand in successive phases, please organize your information using sub-headings.

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of all questionnaires, interview guides (i.e., list of questions), test or data collection instruments. These and other documents should be identified as appendices (e.g., Appendix A or 1) and should accompany this application rather than being pasted into it. Please click this link for samples: [“Tips and Samples”](#) and the “How to Unpack the Methods” worksheet.

This project will be based on standard methods of ethnographic research in the discipline of anthropology. Researchers in cultural anthropology (ethnographers) engage in participant observation, a fieldwork method based on social relationships between individuals and the ethnographer, in which the ethnographer assumes the position of a student or apprentice who learns through participating in everyday activities with community members and observing social life. This participant observation component of my research is essential because it will provide the broad social and cultural context for my specific research questions that deal with attitudes toward illness, suffering, biomedicine, and death.

Following the general methodology of participant observation, this study will involve several specific tasks. From August 2013 to the end of December 2013 I will reside in the Steinbach area where I will participate in many aspects of community life including doing shopping at local stores, volunteering at the local museum, and participating in recreational activities. Because of my Russian Mennonite background, I already know many people in Steinbach, and I expect that I will have no trouble integrating into the community. I also plan to attend church services, funerals, and accompany community palliative care nurses on home visits. I will accompany family members when they visit relatives who are hospitalized and volunteer with local volunteers who provide support to families with members suffering from cancer.

In addition to this participant observation fieldwork, I will carry out semi-structured, open-ended

interviews with three groups of individuals:

- Mennonite individuals suffering from cancer or in remission and their family members (Please see **Appendix A** for examples of the types of questions that will be used as the basis for interviews with Mennonites with cancer)
- Health care providers (primarily doctors and nurses working in the area of palliative care), (Please see **Appendix B** for examples of the types of questions that will be used as the basis for interviews with health care providers)
- Religious leaders in the community. (Please see **Appendix C** for examples of the types of questions that will be used as the basis for interviews with Mennonites with cancer)

These interviews will be informal and semi-structured, and will last approximately 60-90 minutes, or however long a participant may choose to talk. It is commonly the case in anthropological research, that participants talk as long as they wish in an interview, and/or restart the conversation at a later time. I will follow this methodology in my interviews.

I also plan to use another anthropological method, the collection of life histories from some community members. I will do this through interviews with consenting individuals. I will not use a questionnaire format; instead, I will give participants the opportunity of focusing on aspects of their lives that they consider most important or useful for me to know based on their understanding of my research. I will start the life history interviews with “conversation starters.” Examples of conversation starters are provided in **Appendix D**.

Both interviews and life histories will be held in a place that is comfortable and convenient for the participant and at a time of their choosing.

I hope to use an audio recorder for some aspects of this research, specifically life histories. However, because I find the use of an audio recorder disrupts the relationship between the ethnographer and participant, I will in most cases use hand written fieldnotes during interviews to record information. Before starting interviews or life histories, I will ask participants' permission to audio record and/or take hand written notes. I will also write daily fieldnotes about my ethnographic work and observations – a standard practice in anthropology.

Please see Section 26 for references to publications on ethnographic methodology.

12. Secondary Use of Identifiable Data (*e.g. use of personally identifiable data of participants contained in records that have been collected for a purpose other than your current research project*):

(a) Do you plan on using identifiable data of participants in your research for which the original purpose that data was collected is different than the purpose of your current research project?

Yes No

If **Yes**, please answer the next set of questions:

(b) Do you plan to link this identifiable data to other data sets?

Yes No

No

If **Yes**, then please describe:

N/A

(c) What type of identifiable data from this data set are you planning to access and use?

Student records (please specify in the box below)

Health records/clinic/office files (please specify in the box below)

Other personal records (please specify in the box below)

N/A

(d) What personally identifiable data (e.g., name, student number, telephone number, date of birth etc.) from this data set do you plan on using in your research? Please explain why you need to collect this identifiable data (i.e., justify why each item is required to conduct your research).

N/A

(e) Describe what agreement you have, or will have, in place with the owner of this data to allow you to use this data for your research. **ATTACHMENTS: Ensure you provide the MREB Ethics Secretariat with a copy of this agreement.**

N/A

(f) When participants first contributed their data to this data set, were there any known preferences expressed by participants at that time about how their information would be used in the future? Please explain.

N/A

(g) What is the likelihood of adverse effects happening to the participants to whom this secondary use of data relates? Please explain.

N/A

(h) Will participants whose information is stored in this data set (which you plan to use for secondary purposes) consent to your use of this data? Please explain.

N/A

13. Experience

What is your experience with this kind of research? Include information on the experience of all **individual(s)** who will have contact with the research participants or their data. **For example, experience could include your familiarity with the proposed methods, the population(s) and/or the research topic or issues.**

I grew up in southern Manitoba within the Mennonite community, and understand the important role that funerals play within the community. It is my experience that dying, illness, and death are topics of everyday conversation in the Russian Mennonite community.
--

Further, building on my previous research experience I have developed the level of sensitivity required to deal with discussions on serious health issues and emotionally charged topics. I have conducted participant-observation fieldwork at a rural clinic with individuals suffering from tuberculosis in south-western Angola for my Master's thesis which I completed at the University of Manitoba in 2009. In addition to participant-observation ethnographic methodology, I conducted interviews with tuberculosis patients at the clinic site, as well as with nurses and physicians on staff

there.

After completion of my MA, I was employed for 2 years as a research coordinator for a qualitative study at the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba where I conducted semi-structured interviews with families with adolescents with chronic illness, and their health care providers. Many of these adolescents had cancer, so I have previous experience conducting interviews on this topic. As a result of my MA and employment experience, I have had the opportunity to do qualitative research on topics related to my proposed doctoral project in both Canadian and cross-cultural contexts. I feel that I can be sensitive to, and respectful of, the emotional and physical needs of my respondents during my doctoral fieldwork.

14. Participants

Please describe:

- (a) the number of participants required for this study
 (b) any salient characteristics (e.g., age, gender, location, affiliation, etc.) ***If your study will be conducted with several sub-groups please use headings to organize your description of the characteristics for each group of participants.***

My participant observation ethnography will be carried out with the broader **Russian Mennonite community in the Kitchener-Waterloo and Niagara areas**. As is standard anthropological practice, there will be no formal recruitment process for this component of the research. In addition to participant observation, I hope to carry out approximately 50 semi-structured interviews or life histories with 3 groups:

- Russian Mennonites with serious illness,
- health care providers
- religious leaders.

All interview and life history participants will be adults competent to give informed consent. Attempts will be made to interview approximately equal numbers of men and women, of various ages over 18 years.

15. Recruitment

Please describe:

- (a) how each type of participant will be recruited
 (b) who will recruit participants
 (c) the relationship (if any) between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student; manager-employee, family member, student peers, fellow club members, no relationship etc.)
 (d) any permission you have or intend to obtain, for your mode of recruitment (if applicable)

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of any posters, advertisements letters, flyers, and/or email messages etc. to be used for recruitment. Please click this link for samples: [“Tips and Samples”](#) and the [“How to Unpack the Recruitment Details”](#) worksheet.

Since I grew up within the Mennonite community and have connections with family and friends in the area, I have established initial contact with community members in preparation for this research. In establishing contact with the community through informal conversations, I encountered several people who have expressed interest in participating in the project. My initial participants will thus be individuals with whom I have already established relationships in a non-research setting. These include individuals from the 3 participant groups: individuals with serious illness, health care providers, and religious leaders.

In order to prevent potential participants from feeling obligated or coerced to participate because of their relationship with me, I will make it clear to all potential participants that participation is entirely voluntary. I will also provide potential participants who are family members or friends with

participants might encounter in their everyday life?

Yes No

(b) If you checked **yes** for any of questions **i – iv** above, please describe the risk(s) in the space below.

Russian Mennonites often introduce topics such as death, illness, and religious beliefs into everyday conversation. I recognize that these topics are sensitive and emotionally charged, and that some participants may be psychologically upset during interviews or fieldwork conversations or may feel that their privacy is at risk. However, since it is common practice to discuss these topics in the Mennonite community, in my estimation the risks are not greater than those that the participants might encounter in their everyday lives.

(c) Management of Risks: Describe how each of the risks identified above will be managed or minimized. Please, include an explanation regarding why alternative approaches cannot be used.

I will endeavor to be tactful and sensitive during my conversations and interviews with participants. If I notice that a participant seems emotionally upset, I will stop the interview, express my concern for the individual, and remind them that they may skip any questions they find too difficult to answer. I will also remind them that they are under no obligation to discuss any topic that is emotionally upsetting and that they may withdraw from the study at any point in time with no consequences. I will also provide participants with contact information for grief counselors or social workers if they feel that would be helpful (see **Appendix I** for list).

(d) Deception: Is there any deception involved in this research?

Yes No

i.) If deception is to be used in your methods, describe the details of the deception (including what information will be withheld from participants) and justify the use of deception.

N/A

ii.) Please describe when participants will be given an explanation about why deception was used and how they will be debriefed about the study (for example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research). **ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of the written debriefing form or script, if applicable.**

N/A

18. Possible Benefits

Discuss any potential benefits to the scientific community/society that justify involvement of participants in this study. (**Please note: benefits should not be confused with compensation or reimbursement for taking part in the study.**)

Scientific Benefits:

This project aims to further and enrich existing ethnographic scholarship on Russian Mennonites. Specifically, while there is a significant body of historical literature on Russian Mennonites, there is little scholarly work done on the intersections between religion, identity, illness, and Canadian society among contemporary Russian Mennonites. In initial discussions, members of the Mennonite community have expressed considerable interest in this study, particularly as it relates to notions of identity, history, and suffering – common themes in Mennonite discussions. Finally, by attending to the changes in Mennonite understandings of illness and death, I hope to shed light on the meanings of illness and death in a larger Canadian context.

Benefits to Participants:

Based on conversations I have had with community members, and the interest they have expressed in this project, I believe that the Mennonite community will welcome the opportunity to participate in a research project that will help to preserve Mennonite cultural heritage, and highlight their distinctive identity. I expect that people will see my research as valorizing contemporary Mennonite culture and ways of life.

SECTION D – [< THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS >](#)

19. The Consent Process

(a) Please describe how consent will be documented. Provide a copy of the Letter of Information and the consent form (if applicable) to be used.

Click the blue link above <THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS> for the McMaster REB recommended sample Letter of Information/Consent Form. The letter of Information/consent form should be written at the appropriate [reading level](#). See the “Guide to Converting Documents into Plain Language” found in the “samples and tips section: of the MREB website.

If a written consent form will not be used to document consent, please explain why and describe the alternative means that will be used. While oral consent may be acceptable in certain circumstances, it may still be appropriate to provide a Letter of Information to participants about the study.

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide cop(ies) of the Letter of Information and Consent form(s) or the content of any oral or telephone script(s) that will be used in the consent process for each of your study populations (if applicable).

Oral Consent:

Based on my previous fieldwork experience, I would prefer to use oral consent in most cases for this research project. As the TCPS 2 states on page 140, “under a variety of circumstances, signed written consent is not appropriate in qualitative research”. I believe “there are valid reasons for not recording consent through a signed written consent form” in this project for several reasons (pg. 140):

1. The topics I will be discussing are deeply significant and emotionally charged, and I believe that using a lengthy bureaucratic and legalistic consent form would be insensitive, especially given that some of my participants may be elderly and/or frail and unable to concentrate on reading and understanding a formal consent form.
2. Within Mennonite communities there has sometimes been a mistrust of academics who are seen as elitist. A formal letter of information and consent offers a concrete signifier of the “academy” that may be off-putting or intimidating to participants, and would create a distance between them and myself.

In lieu of a more formal letter of information and consent, I plan to explain my research thoroughly through use of my recruitment brochure (**Appendix E**) and an oral script (**Appendix F**) so that there is “mutual understanding of the project goals and objectives between the participants and the researcher” (TCPS 2 pg. 140). In all cases, consent will be documented using a consent log (**Appendix G**).

Written Consent:

The only categories of participants for whom I will use a formal letter of information and consent are health care providers and religious leaders. My relationships with these categories of participants will be more formal and distanced, and therefore I do not feel that use of a letter of information and consent will be an impediment to developing rapport. See **Appendix H** for the letter of information and consent to be used with health care providers and religious leaders.

(b): Please describe the process the investigator(s) will use to obtain informed consent, including who will be obtaining informed consent. Describe plans (if any) for on-going consent.

Only I will be obtaining informed oral consent.

20. Consent by an authorized party

If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent. **ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent.**

N/A

21. Alternatives to prior individual consent

If obtaining written or oral documentation of an individual participant's consent prior to start of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process. **ATTACHMENTS: Please provide any Letters of Information and or Consent Forms.**

N/A

22. Providing participants with study results

How will participants be able to learn about the study results? (e.g., mailed/emailed brief summary of results in plain language; posting on website or other appropriate means for this population).

I will provide participants with my contact information allowing them to request a summary of my research results when my dissertation is complete (expected completion date is December 2015). I will do this through several means. Every interview participant will receive a recruitment brochure (**Appendix E**) with my contact information on it. Health care professionals and religious leaders will also receive the Letter of Information and Consent (**Appendix H**) with my contact information on it. I will also provide participants with my McMaster University cards as needed.

23. Participant withdrawal

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Describe the procedures which will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

Prior to the start of each interview or life history session, I will remind participants that they can withdraw at any point during the interview. Further, I will remind them that they do not need to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. I will also explain that they can decide to withdraw after the interview at any point up to August 1, 2015 when I expect to have a completed draft of my dissertation. If a participant expresses the desire to stop an interview or withdraw, I will respect this decision and stop the interview.

b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences which withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have on the participant's compensation or continuation of services (if applicable).

If a participant expresses the desire to stop an interview or life history session, or withdraw from the research, I will ask them if they wish me to avoid using the information they have provided. If so, I will destroy any notes and audio recordings made during the interview, and not use any of the participant's information in my dissertation or publications. There will be no consequences for the participant as a result of withdrawal.

c) If the participants will not have the right to withdraw from the research, please explain.

N/A

24. SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Confidentiality concerns the protection, privacy and security of research data. Consult the Data Security Checklist at <http://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> for best practices to secure electronic and hard copy versions of data and study documents.

(a) Will the data you collect be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members?

[x] Yes []
No

If **No**, then explain why not, and describe what steps you be put in place to advise participants that data will not be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members.

N/A

(b) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure that the data you collect in your research will be kept protected, private, and secure from non-research team members. In your description, explain who will have access to the data and what data security measures will be put in place during data transfer and data storage.

I will store fieldnotes and audio recordings in a locked container in my personal office at my residence in **Hamilton, Ontario** to which only I will have access. Digital data including typed fieldnotes and copies of audio recordings will be stored in password-protected files on my password-protected computer. When not in use, this computer will be stored in my personal office, locked when I am not present.

(c) Will the research data be kept indefinitely or will it be deleted after a certain time period? Please explain. In your answer, describe why you plan to keep data indefinitely or not. If deleting data after a certain time period, explain why you chose the time period you did. Describe how participants will be informed whether their data will be deleted or not.

It is common practice within cultural anthropology to keep fieldnotes and audio recordings or transcripts indefinitely since these data are understood to be valuable records of a culture at a particular historical moment, and provide the basis for future professional publications. I will safeguard my fieldwork materials by storing them in a locked cabinet and in password-protected files on my password-protected computer.

Anonymity concerns whether participant identities are made known or not. The anonymity promised to participants can be different during different stages of research (i.e., during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings).

(d) Describe the extent to which participant identities will be made known in each of the following activities: during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings. In your description, explain what steps or procedures you plan to put in place to keep participant identities unknown in each of those activities.

At all stages of the research project, efforts will be made to protect participant anonymity. However, owing to practical considerations, the degree of anonymity may vary at different stages of the research.

Recruitment: I plan to be as discreet as possible during my fieldwork, and will not indiscriminately reveal to community members that other community members are participating. However, since snowball sampling will be used, the identities of some participants will be known to some other participants.

Data Collection: I plan to be as discreet as possible and to avoid revealing the identities of research participants to other community members during the data collection phase. However, inevitably family members and friends are likely to learn that I have interviewed specific individuals since the Mennonite community is small and closely-knit. Under no circumstances will I share identifiable personal information from one participant with other research participants.

Data Storage: In most cases I will use pseudonyms for individuals or refer to participants in a general way in my fieldnotes and in transcripts of audio recordings. In some cases, particularly in life histories, participants may wish to be identified by their actual name either because they do not feel that their information needs to be kept private or because they want to contribute to the preservation of Mennonite history and culture and are proud to do so using their own name. I will endeavour to respect their request. However, I will explain to these individuals that using their real names may compromise the confidentiality of others who wish to remain unidentified. In such cases, I will be obligated to use pseudonyms for all individuals concerned. I will further exercise care with quotes so that I do not directly or indirectly identify participants who have not opted for attribution.

Dissemination: In most cases I will use pseudonyms for individuals or refer to participants in a general way in my dissertation and in any future publications. As noted above, in some cases, participants may wish to be identified by their actual name either because they do not feel that their information needs to be kept private or because they want to contribute to the preservation of Mennonite history and culture and are proud to do so using their own name. I will endeavor to respect their request. However, I will explain to these individuals that using their real names may compromise the confidentiality of others who wish to remain unidentified. In such cases, I will be obligated to use pseudonyms for all individuals concerned. I will further exercise care with quotes so that I do not directly or indirectly identify participants who have not opted for attribution.

Following standard anthropological practice, I will continue to build on the information from this PhD study, using it as the basis for an ongoing program of research on the topic of Russian Mennonites. Thus, qualitative information contained in life histories or interviews that is not specifically related to the current research project may be used in future research projects and publications.

SECTION F -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH**25. Adverse Events, Change Requests and Annual Renewal view**

- b) **Adverse events** (Unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) must be reported by faculty researcher or supervisor to the REB Secretariat (Ethics Office – Ext. 23142) and the MREB Chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days after they occur.
See: https://reo.mcmaster.ca/policies/copy_of_guidelines#12-0-adverse-events
- b) **Changes:** To obtain clearance for a change to a protocol that has already received ethics clearance, please complete the “< **Change Request** >” form available on the MREB website or by clicking this link. Such changes may not begin before they receive ethics clearance.
- c) **Ethics clearance is for only one year.** The minimum requirement for renewed clearance is the completion of a “Renewal/Project Completed” form at least 1 month in advance of the annual report to process the renewal. In this section please indicate whether any additional monitoring or review is appropriate for this project. ***PLEASE NOTE: It is the investigator’s responsibility to complete the Annual Project Status Report that is sent each year by email 8 weeks in advance of the anniversary of the original ethics clearance. Otherwise, ethics clearance will expire and the Research Ethics Board is obliged to notify Research Finance who in accordance with university and funding agency regulations will put a hold on funds.***

26. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

(Use this section or an additional page if more space is required to complete any part of this form, or if there is any other information relevant to the project which you wish to provide to the Research Ethics Board.)

Here are some recent publications on methodology in cultural anthropology:

Bernard, H. Russell. 2011. *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

DeWalt, Kathleen M. and Billie R. DeWalt. 2011. *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.

Fife, Wayne. 2006 *Doing Fieldwork: Ethnographic Methods for Research in Developing Countries*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

27. POSTING OF APPROVED PROTOCOLS ON THE RESEARCH ETHICS WEBSITE

- f) Effective January 1, 2006, it is the policy of MREB to post a list of cleared protocols on the Research Ethics website. Posted information usually includes: title, names of principal investigators, principal investigator department, type of project (i.e. Faculty; PhD; Masters, Undergraduate etc.)
- g) You may request that the title be deleted from the posted information.
- h) Do you request that the title be eliminated from the posted information? [] Yes [x] No

- i) The ethics board will honour your request if you answer **Yes** to the above question **27 c)** but we ask you to provide a reason for making this request for the information of the Board. You may also use this box for any other special requests.
- j) < [List of MREB Cleared Protocols](#) > < [List of Undergraduate SREC Cleared Protocols](#) >

Supporting Materials Checklist:

Instructions:

Please complete the following checklist to identify and describe the supporting materials submitted with your protocol.

- When supplying supporting materials, ensure that they are properly labeled (e.g., “Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teachers”) and referenced in your protocol (e.g., “The interview guide for teachers – see Appendix C – is...”).
- Do not cut and paste your supporting materials directly into the application form; submit each as a separate appendix.
- If you have multiple supporting materials of the same type (e.g., multiple letters of information – each targeted to a different population), list each supporting material on a separate row in the checklist (i.e., add a new row to the table).

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study <i>(Insert X below)</i>	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol <i>(Insert X below)</i>	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol <i>(e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)</i>
Recruitment Materials			
Study Information Brochure			
Video/audio recording that explains study details			
Participant Screening Form			
Recruitment Advertisements			
Recruitment Poster			
Recruitment Script - Verbal/Telephone			
Recruitment Script - Email (direct to participant)			
Recruitment Script - Email (From holder of participant’s contact information)			
Recruitment for follow-up interview			
Snowball Recruitment script			
Reminder/thank you/ card/script/email			
Appreciation Letter/certificate - For Participants			
Other			
Informed Consent Materials			
Consent Log (to record oral consent)			
Oral/Telephone Consent Script			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Participants			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Parent			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Guardian or Substitute Decision Maker			
Letter of Information & Assent Form - Minors			
Online survey brief information/consent and implied consent buttons			
Letter of Support for Study			
Research Agreement			
Other			
Data Collection Materials			
Information Sharing/Data Access/Transfer Agreement (for secondary use of data)			
Demographic form - Participant’s			
Instructions for participants			
Interview Guide - (Questions for face to face, telephone, Internet/email interview)			
Interview Guide - Questions for Focus Groups			
Questionnaire or Survey questions & instructions			

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study <i>(Insert X below)</i>	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol <i>(Insert X below)</i>	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol <i>(e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)</i>
(Paper and pencil or online formats)			
Rating Scales/inventories/Assessment Instruments			
Role-play/simulation scripts			
Stimuli used to elicit responses			
Images (photos, diagrams etc.) depicting instruments, equipment, exercises etc.			
Other			
Deception Materials			
Deception Study - Debriefing Letter & post debriefing consent form			
Deception Study- Debriefing script – verbal			
Other			
Confidentiality Materials			
Confidentiality Oath/ Agreement			
Confidential Study Code Key Log			
Other			
Materials for previous review by other REBs			
Application form –Other REBs (Original)			
Application form – Other REBs (Revised)			
Communication between REB & researcher (letters, emails, faxes etc.)			
Clearance Certificate (Other REBs)			
Other			
Other Supporting Materials			
Compensation Log			
List of support services for participants			
Participant Appreciation - letter, script, email or certificate etc.			
Researcher Training Certificates			
Scientific Licenses			
Other			

< SECTION G – SIGNATURES >

28. Faculty or Administrative Staff Researcher Assurance:

“I confirm that I have read the < [McMaster University Research Ethics Guidelines and Faculty Handbook](#) >, and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines.

Signature of Faculty or Staff Investigator PLEASE TYPE/PRINT NAME HERE Date

29. Graduate or Undergraduate Research Assurance:

For graduate or undergraduate student research where:

the supervisor is the primary supervisor for a dissertation, thesis or major research paper:

Or

the supervisor is not the primary supervisor, and where the research is not for a dissertation, thesis or major research paper (e.g., independent study, experiential learning etc.):

“I confirm that I have read the < [McMaster University Research Ethics Guidelines and Faculty Handbook](#) >, and I agree to comply with the conditions outlined in the Guidelines.

“I have read the application and proposal and deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and I agree to provide the necessary supervision of the student(s) and to make myself available should problems arise during the course of the research.”

Signature of Faculty Supervisor PLEASE TYPE/PRINT NAME HERE Date

Signature of Student PLEASE TYPE/ PRINT NAME HERE Date

APPENDIX C – Interview Questions

List of Interview Questions: Religious Leaders

1. What does it mean for you to be Mennonite?
2. How has Mennonite history shaped a sense of being Mennonite? What do you know about Mennonite history? How do you feel about this heritage?
3. Do you think being Mennonite makes one different from other Canadians/Christians? In what ways/why not?
4. How would you describe your religious and/or spiritual beliefs? Do you think that being Mennonite is necessarily tied to these beliefs?
5. Have you seen a sense of “Mennoniteness” shaping how people deal with illness?
6. In what ways do you see illness as being related to a theology of suffering? How might this relationship be different for Mennonites versus other Christians/Canadians?
7. How do you assist/counsel/walk with those with serious illness? What do you talk to them about?
8. What is your experience with end-of-life care/palliative care/hospice care? Do you do any bereavement support for families or patients? What do these programs entail?
9. What has your experience been with planning funerals?
10. Do you think Mennonite funerals are different than others? In what ways/why not?
11. Do you think Mennonites think about death differently than others?

**List of Interview Questions:
Health Care Providers**

1. What does it mean for you to be Mennonite?
2. How has your Mennonite history shaped you? What do you know about Mennonite history? How do you feel about this heritage?
3. Do you think being Mennonite makes you different from other Canadians/Christians? In what ways/why not?
4. How would you describe your religious and/or spiritual beliefs? Do you think that being Mennonite is necessarily tied to these beliefs?
5. Do you think that being Mennonite has influenced how you practice medicine?
6. Do you feel how you practice medicine is consistent with the way you live your life or do you find places where there is tension between them?
7. In what ways do you see parallels or tensions between a “biological” view of the body and a “religious” view?
8. Do you think there is a “Mennonite” way of understanding the body? Do you understand your patient’s bodies in a certain way because you are Mennonite? Do you see your Mennonite patients understanding them a certain way?
9. How do you as a Mennonite understand illness and suffering with illness? Would this be a different perspective than, say, a non-Mennonite health care provider?
10. How do you as a Mennonite understand death? Would this be a different perspective than, say, a non-Mennonite health care provider?
11. Do you see any differences between Mennonite and non-Mennonite patients in the ways they relate to you as a health care provider? How they understand their illness/diagnosis? How they may deal with terminal illness?

**List of Interview Questions:
Participants with Cancer**

1. What does it mean for you to be Mennonite?
2. How has your Mennonite history shaped you? What do you know about Mennonite history? How do you feel about this heritage?
3. Do you think being Mennonite makes you different from other Canadians/Christians? In what ways/why not?
4. How would you describe your religious and/or spiritual beliefs? Do you think that being Mennonite is necessarily tied to these beliefs?
5. Do you think that being Mennonite has influenced how you've dealt with illness?
6. Was your illness experience consistent with the way you live your life?
7. Did your illness experience change you? Did it change how you felt about your body?
8. What does illness mean to you?
9. What does cancer mean to you? What were you told by medical professionals about it? Has it differed from how you've experienced being ill prior to the cancer diagnosis?
10. What was it like to be diagnosed? What is/was it like to live with illness?
11. What does 'home' mean to you? Has it changed because of illness?
12. What do you wish your funeral to look like? What have your experiences been with other funerals you've attended? Would you want your funeral to be like, say, your grandparents' funerals?

 APPENDIX D – Letter of Information and Consent



Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

DATE: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Cultural Change in the Russian Mennonite Community: The Intersection of Biomedicine with
Traditional Beliefs about Illness, Suffering, and Death

Student Investigator:

Rebecca Plett
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Faculty Supervisor:

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Purpose of the Study

You are invited to take part in this study on Russian Mennonite perspectives on illness and death, which I am carrying out as part of the research for my PhD dissertation at McMaster University. By focusing on illness and death, I want to look at cultural change among Russian Mennonites, specifically because Mennonite history and theology have valorized suffering, death as a return to one's real home in heaven, and even martyrdom for one's faith. Also, since Russian Mennonites have integrated into Canadian society to a greater extent than other Mennonite groups, most Russian Mennonites use biomedical ("Western") treatment for serious illness. I am hoping to learn how Mennonite history and a theology of suffering shapes how Mennonites experience serious illness and understand death. I'm especially interested in finding out how these experiences and understandings compare with medical understandings of illness and death.

What will happen during the study?

Between the beginning of August and the end of December 2013, I will be residing in the Steinbach area where I will participate in many aspects of community life including shopping at local stores, volunteering at the local museum, and participating in recreational activities. I also plan to attend church services, funerals, and accompany community palliative care nurses on home visits. I will accompany family members when they visit relatives who are hospitalized and volunteer with local volunteers who provide support to families with members suffering from cancer.

I also hope to carry out interviews with Mennonite religious leaders. These interviews will last approximately one hour, and will take place in a location that you choose. With your permission, I will take hand written notes during the interview. I will be asking you questions such as What does it mean for you to be Mennonite? How has Mennonite history shaped a sense of being Mennonite? What do you know about Mennonite history? Have you seen a sense of "Mennoniteness" shaping how people deal with illness?

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts: understand that the subject matter of my research can be highly personal and emotionally charged. It is very possible that you may feel uncomfortable talking about illness, death, and religion. If this is the case, it is important for you to understand that you do

not need to answer any questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. In addition, you can withdraw from (stop taking part in) the study at any time during our interview or afterwards, up until August 2015 when I hope to have the final draft of my dissertation complete. As described below, I will take several steps to protect your privacy. You might also feel that your privacy is at risk or you may worry about how others will react to what you say.

Potential Benefits

Although this study will not benefit you directly, I hope to learn more about how notions of identity, history, and religion have shaped how Russian Mennonites understand and experience illness and death, and how these understandings are changing with modernization. Further, I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help provide insight into the meanings of illness and death in a larger Canadian context.

Confidentiality

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified unless you specify otherwise. I will be as discreet as possible and avoid revealing the identities of research participants to other community members. Under no circumstances will I share identifiable personal information from one participant with other research participants.

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy; I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. I will use pseudonyms (alternate) names for everyone in the study except for those who wish to be identified.

However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell, and, since the Mennonite community in Manitoba is small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make, or compromise the confidentiality of others who wish to remain unidentified. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, and you find that I am asking questions in an interview that you do not want to answer, or that make you uncomfortable, you can choose to skip those questions. Also, if you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the study for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the interview or up until approximately August 1, 2015 when I expect to have completed a draft of my dissertation. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any information you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise.

Information about the Study Results

I expect to have this study completed by approximately December 2015. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

Rebecca Plett
Email: plettra@mcmaster.ca
Tel: (905) 522-8365

You may also contact my faculty supervisor at:

Email: badone@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Rebecca Plett of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately August, 2015
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address: _____

OR

Please send them to this mailing address: _____

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.



DATE: _____

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

Cultural Change in the Russian Mennonite Community: The Intersection of Biomedicine with Traditional Beliefs about Illness, Suffering, and Death

Student Investigator:

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Faculty Supervisor:

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Between the beginning of August and the end of December 2013, I will be residing in the Steinbach area where I will participate in many aspects of community life including shopping at local stores, volunteering at the local museum, and participating in recreational activities. I also plan to attend church services, funerals, and accompany community palliative care nurses on home visits. I will accompany family members when they visit relatives who are hospitalized and volunteer with local volunteers who provide support to families with members suffering from cancer.

I also hope to carry out interviews with Mennonite health care providers (primarily doctors and nurses working in the area of palliative care). These interviews will last approximately one hour, and will take place in a location that you chose. With your permission, I will take hand written notes during the interview. I will be asking you questions such as do you think that being Mennonite has influenced how you practice medicine? Do you think there is a "Mennonite" way of understanding the body? How do you as a Mennonite understand death? Would this be a different perspective than, say, a non-Mennonite health care provider?

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

I understand that the subject matter of my research can be highly personal and emotionally charged. It is very possible that you may feel uncomfortable talking about illness, death, and religion. If this is the case, it is important for you to understand that you do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. In addition, you can withdraw from (stop taking part in) the study at any time during our interview or afterwards, up until August 2015 when I hope to have the final draft of my dissertation complete. As described below, I will take several steps to protect your privacy. You might also feel that your privacy is at risk or you may worry about how others will react to what you say.

Potential Benefits

Although this study will not benefit you directly, I hope to learn more about how notions of identity, history, and religion have shaped how Russian Mennonites understand and experience illness and death, and how these understandings are changing with modernization. Further, I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will help provide insight into the meanings of illness and death in a larger Canadian context.

Confidentiality

You are participating in this study confidentially. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified unless you specify otherwise. I will be as discreet as possible and avoid revealing the identities of research participants to other community members. Under no circumstances will I share identifiable personal information from one participant with other research participants.

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy; I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. I will use pseudonyms (alternate) names for everyone in the study except for those who wish to be identified.

However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell, and, since the Mennonite community in Manitoba is small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make, or compromise the confidentiality of others who wish to remain unidentified. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, and you find that I am asking questions in an interview that you do not want to answer, or that make you uncomfortable, you can choose to skip those questions. Also, if you decide to be part of the study, you can stop (withdraw), from the study for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the interview or up until approximately August 1, 2015 when I expect to have completed a draft of my dissertation. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any information you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise.

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CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Rebecca Plett of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately August, 2015
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to this email address: _____

OR

Please send them to this mailing address: _____

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

APPENDIX E – Script for Verbal Consent

Script for Verbal Consent

Hello. My name is Rebecca Plett, and I am conducting interviews about changing Mennonite understandings of illness and death. I'm conducting this as part of my PhD research at McMaster University's Department of Anthropology in Hamilton, Ontario, and I'm working under the direction Dr. Ellen Badone of McMaster's Department of Anthropology.

I'm inviting you to do a one-on-one interview that will take about 60-90 minutes, or however long you want to talk with me. I'll ask you questions about your experiences of illness, and how being Mennonite has shaped them. What I'm planning to do then is use the information I learn through this study in my dissertation and potential publications.

I understand that the subject matter of my research is highly personal and emotionally charged. It is very possible that you may feel uncomfortable talking about illness, death, and religion. If this is the case, it is important for you to understand that you do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to or that make you feel uncomfortable. You can also withdraw from (stop taking part in) the study at any time during our interview or afterwards, up until August 2015 when I hope to have the final draft of my dissertation complete.

It's also important for you to know that I will keep the information you tell me during the interview confidential. This means that I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified to others. I'll do this by using pseudonyms (alternate) names for everyone in the study, except for those who do wish to be identified.

It's also important to remember that we are often identifiable through the stories we tell, and, since the Mennonite community in Manitoba is small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make. So I want you to keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

I will be the only person who will have access to the notes I take during the interview, and they will be kept in my possession. The information you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet where only I will have access to it, and the information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study is complete, an archive of the data, without identifying information, will be maintained as the basis for future publications.

Here are the most important points about voluntary participation that you need to know:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary.
- You don't need to feel obligated to participate because you know me, or the person that suggested you might be interested in participating
- I know you may be very busy, so I understand if you don't have time to participate, and I'm sure I'll get lots of participants
- If you do participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even part-way through the interview for whatever reason, or up until approximately August 2015.
- If you decide to stop participating, there will be no consequences to you.
- If you decide to stop I will ask you how you would like us to handle the data collected up to that point.
- This could include returning it to you, destroying it or using the data collected up to that point.
- If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.
- If you have any questions about this study or would like more information you can call or email me (provide McMaster University card with my contact information)

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administration, Development & Support
(ROADS) E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I would be happy to send you a short summary of the study results when I finish writing a draft of my dissertation. So if you'd like a summary, let me know what would be the best way to get this to you.

- Do you have any questions or would like any additional details?
- Do you agree to participate in this study knowing that you can withdraw at any point with no consequences to you?

APPENDIX F – Recruitment Brochure

About the Researcher

I am currently a PhD student in the Department of Anthropology at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. I have a Masters degree in Anthropology from the University of Manitoba, where my research centred on women with tuberculosis at a clinic in rural Angola. My current research focuses on Russian Mennonite experiences with illness in the Canadian context.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study or would like to participate, please contact Rebecca Plett by phone:

(905) 522-8365

Email:

plettra@mcmaster.ca

Or by mail:

Rebecca Plett
Department of Anthropology
McMaster University
1280 Main St. West
Hamilton, ON
L8P 4L8

The results of this study will be available in 2015. You can contact the researcher by email if you would like to receive a copy.

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact the McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat.

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c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
McMaster University
1280 Main St West
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My faculty supervisor, Dr. Ellen Badone, can be reached at (905)525-9140 ext 23395 or badone@mcmaster.ca

McMaster University

Cultural Change in the Russian Mennonite Community: The Intersection of Biomedicine with Traditional Beliefs about Illness,



Research Investigator
Rebecca Plett

Doctoral Student
Department of Anthropology
McMaster University
Hamilton, ON

McMaster University

About this Project

This is a study of Russian Mennonite perspectives on illness and death, which I am carrying out as part of the research for my PhD dissertation at McMaster University. I will be carrying out participant-observation ethnographic fieldwork between the beginning of August and the end of December 2013.

In addition, I will carry out interviews with community members, health care providers (primarily doctors and nurses working in the area of palliative care), Mennonite religious leaders and chaplains, and with individuals suffering from cancer and other serious illnesses and their family members. These interviews will last approximately one hour, and will take place in places chosen by the participants. I will take hand written notes during the interviews. I also plan to collect life histories from some community members.

Participant's Role

Individuals are invited to tell me about their experience of illness and how being Mennonite shapes this experience. I would also like to know about your religious faith and Mennonite background, and how you feel this has shaped your life.

Individual interviews as well as life histories with a few individuals will be conducted. Interviews will follow a general guideline, but will be open-ended in order to follow discussion topics as they arise during the interview. Interviews will be approximately 60-90 minutes in length, depending on the availability of the participant/s.

Our interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon quiet and comfortable location. With the permission of participants, I will take hand written notes during interviews. Some interviews may be audio recorded with the permission of participants.

Confidentiality

All records of my observations, notes on individual interviews and conversations will be kept private and will only be available to my supervisor and supervisory committee. These records will be used only for research purposes and will be kept in secure storage. I will use pseudonyms in all publications, and no one will be identified by name in this study unless they specifically request that I use their actual name.

If at any time local residents feel uncomfortable with my taking observations and notes at local events, they are welcome to let me know and I will make every effort to respect their privacy.

If there are any questions that participants feel uncomfortable answering or that they would prefer not to answer they may skip over that section or stop the interview. Participation in this research is completely voluntary and participants can decide to withdraw from this study at any time up until August 2015 when a draft of my dissertation will be complete.

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