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## **'We are growing Belize': modernisation and organisational change in the Mennonite settlement of Spanish Lookout, Belize**

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**Abstract:** This article addresses the entrepreneurial and organisational activities of a specific Mennonite group in Belize called the Kleine Gemeinde community of Spanish Lookout. Building upon Christian beliefs, agricultural skills and a strong working ethos, this group was able to build up a stable, local economic network. The authors suggest that their collective resistance against other social groups and their day-to-day strictness lead to processes of 'selective modernity'. As we make clear in this chapter, the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites identity contains elements of ethnicity and partial exclusion based upon religious motives. The relative successful economic progression of this group is a sign of both their working ethos inspired by their religious background, and their will to progress and expand.

**Keywords:** religious organisation; selective modernity; family networks; Mennonite community.

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## 1 Introduction

The Mennonites settlements are in the middle of a process of selective modernity which is leading to a visible role on the Belizean economic and entrepreneurial market. From its early beginnings, the Mennonites enclosed significant differentiations concerning religious principles, ideas and opinions (Urry, 1989). The Mennonites originate from the Anabaptist movement of the Protestant reformation in Europe during the first half of the 16th century (Everitt, 1983; Redekop 1989). The term 'Anabaptist' stands for 're-baptiser', which means that this religious group believed that adults should be baptised based on their choice to follow Christ. In contrast to the then popular approach that children should be baptised soon after birth, the Anabaptists thought that the basis of faith must be a conscious rational decision. The Anabaptists were convinced that a clear distinction was needed between church and government. Therefore, they rejected the authority of a civil/religious government, demanding to baptise children, swear oaths and join military service, because they felt that the scripture suggested a different approach to a life of faith (Ryman, 2004). Hostile reactions from the more established churches, to these practices led to persecution. In the 18th and 19th century, the Mennonite migrated from Western Europe to areas like Northern America and Russia where they could live in a relatively isolated manner and where they mainly lived as farmers (Dyck, 1993; Loewen 2001; Redekop, 1989; Scott 1996). Later, in the 20th century, the Mennonites moved on to countries in Latin America like Paraguay and Bolivia for several reasons (Dana and Dana, 2007; Hedberg, 2007).

In March 1958, eight years before British Honduras received the right to an internal self-government, a group of 680 Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites arrived to settle at the banks of the Belize River at the present site of Spanish Lookout [Higdon, (1997), p.30; Quiring (1961); Sawatzky (1971)]. The first years of the Mennonites in Belize were difficult and full of new experiences. The description Koop, a prominent Mennonite member with interest in history, gives in his book *The Pioneer Years in Belize* provides a dramatic picture:

“after a weary and tiring journey, they arrived on the southern bank of the Belize River at the present side of Spanish Lookout’s southern edge. Neither bridge or ferry awaited them. On the northern bank of the river was a dark and forbidding jungle with its strange noises and smells. Underneath the dense bush, giant snakes and jaguars made their home. The apprehensive settlers may had thoughts akin to those of the Children of Israel in Numbers 14:3: ‘Why did the Lord bring us to this land to allow us to fall by the sword (tropical diseases)? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Would it not have been better for us to return to Egypt?’” [Koop, (1991), p.vii]

Literature tells us that a Mennonite is first of all to be a member of a community, a tiny part of an integrated whole. In small settlements like in Belize, these Christians labour

and worship together and have little contact with people outside their settlement. This, they believe, is according to God's plan. One of the Mennonites' strongest basic beliefs is their separation from society. Referring to the Bible, they state that they are to be 'strangers and pilgrims' in the world. This implies that all activities should result in better service to their God. Also, the aspect of *Gelassenheit* is reflected in the selective participation in processes of modernity. The Mennonite internal system is organised around congregation, which are the basic social and religious unit beyond the extended family.

Communities or congregations with common rules and discipline "participate in the same conference, which is an organisational unit held together by a biannual meeting of ordained leaders" [Kraybill and Bowman, (2001), p.68]. In an analysis of the agricultural system of the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites in Spanish Lookout in Belize, Hall (1980, p.325) mentions some cultural factors, which explain the economic success of this community and its organisations. These factors are group cohesion, homogeneity, pervasive religion, a high degree of social organisation, a self-sufficient economy, and a low threshold for migration. Ever since their arrival in 1958, all Mennonite settlements in Belize locate themselves on the edge of or even outside the society. For example: inside their settlement the Mennonite speak a language called 'low German'. With outsiders they speak English or Spanish. Language is an instrument to exclude oneself from society. Nevertheless, more than 40 years after their arrival in Belize the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites of Spanish Lookout are economically one of the most successful communities in Belize.

The *Kleine Gemeinde* community has evolved from an isolated group of families dependent on subsistence agriculture and logging, into a more complex economy with commercial agriculture and agribusiness as its primary engines of growth (Higdon, 1997). Peculiar in this case is that an ethnic/religious group, which, culturally, acts in a rather isolated way inside the multi-ethnic society of Belize, would be capable of establishing such a strong economic position in this country. In this chapter, we want to address the relationship between the Mennonite's way of being careful with cultural and organisational changes and their perspective on modernity. In connection, viewing this religious group as an organisation, our story also deals with (collective) identity. It is the Mennonite struggle to remain a socially isolated group, but at the same time to be successful entrepreneurs. Literature on Amish-Mennonite groups in America provides us with examples of a selective adaptation and a dynamic process of isolation and strictness, which enables individual Mennonites to retain their ethnic and religious identity while simultaneously adapting to economic pressure (Kraybill, 1989). According to Weber (2002), who wrote about the Mennonites as a protestant 'sect', members of these communities practice a strict avoidance of 'the world'. An alternative concept, proposed in this chapter, to explain the dynamics of the Belizean Mennonites is 'selective modernity' in relation to their entrepreneurship, which would possess community and settlement dynamics departing from a differential appropriation of Western influence and values.

In fact, the Mennonites are commonly regarded as the economic motor of Belize. This is especially true for the Mennonites of Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek. This observation has served as the starting point for our fieldwork, data collection and analyses. Throughout this chapter, we will interpret the significance of the success of the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites entrepreneurial organisation and organisational changes in

Spanish Lookout and address their struggle to hold foot as a pure religious community by creating a specific position in a multi-ethnic post-colonial context.

## **2 Selective modernity in relation to Mennonite entrepreneurship: a theoretical investigation**

In social-cultural debates, the process of modernisation, including capitalism, industrialism and the growth of rational organisations and institutions, appears to be inevitable. These aspects of modernity influence personal life and give rise to questions of identity. “Modernity is a post-traditional order, in which the question, ‘How shall I live?’ has to be answered in day-to-day decisions about how to behave, what to wear, what to eat – and many other things - as well as interpreted within the temporal unfolding of self-identity” [Giddens, (1991), p.14]. However, these individual choices can also constitute a form of collective identity. This type of identity building can make the power of entrepreneurial and organisational instruments into a form of collective resistance against other social groups [Castells, (2001), pp.6–12]. In the case of the Mennonite settlements in Belize, the collective identity is one of the basic elements of their economic existence. Trust and recognition inside the Mennonite settlement and more specific the church community are fundamental aspects to create a collective identity. “The cohesive Mennonite community (the village) is designed to care for its members. There is mutuality of recognition; regular and mutual affirmation and certification. The Old Colony Mennonite village becomes a hallowed place” [Driedger, (2000), p.72]. Driedger points out that trust and recognition inside the Mennonite settlement and more specific the church community are based on fundamental elements out of the past which are continuous transplanted from one location to another.

Generally speaking, all Mennonite communities want to be ‘pure’ congregations, in the sense of being members of a blameless conduct. To develop this line of thought, and following Miller, we “...would also expect that local congregations that reassert distinctive historical features will out-perform less distinctive congregations within the same denomination, even if they do not become independent of the parent church” [Miller, (2002), p.443]. This is in accordance with Simmel’s investigation on social conflicts, which states that conflict is admitted to cause or modify interest groups, unifications, and organisations. However, conflict can be a way of achieving some kind of internal unity and understanding of identity (Simmel, 1964). Such conflicts may be caused by external tensions, but also by internal fragmentation or segregation. To avoid such self-defeating processes, restrictions and enforcement mechanisms on for example smoking, drinking, eating and other potentially private activities are compelled within strict religious communities to keep members in line (Iannaccone, 1994). In fact, these processes can be seen as normative, cultural control mechanisms (Kunda, 1992), which are based on questions about ‘purity’.

In the first place, ‘purity’ is a question of pure religious identity. This religious identity is connected with the discourse about the concepts of ‘church’ and ‘sect’. The question raised here is whether a specific religious group should be seen as part of a church or be marked as a sect. “The ideal-typical ‘sect’ might be defined as a religious organization with a highly committed, voluntary, and converted membership; a separatist orientation; an exclusive social structure; a spirit of regeneration; and an attitude of ethical austerity and demanding asceticism. The ideal-typical ‘church’ would have its

own complex list of attributes: birth-based membership; inclusiveness and universalism; hierarchical structures; an adaptive, compromising stance vis-a-vis the larger society; and so forth" (Iannaccone, 1994). We want to stress that these definitions fail, in a sense, to analyse communities or even settlements like the Belizean Mennonites, because theoretical literature and empirical studies about communities and settlements like the Mennonites provides a more complex picture and offer insight into a non-ideal, mixed-type case. For the Mennonite tradition-oriented communities, the primary social unit is not the individual but a redemptive church community. Therefore, instead of individual rights and personal achievements, they are committed to obedience, self-denial, and the authority of the church (Kraybill and Bowman, 2001). In practice, the church leaders become some kind of 'guardians' of the internal religious values. The bishop, for instance, has the power to excommunicate members of the congregation (Roessingh and Plasil, 2006).

In the second place, 'purity' is also a matter of social identity and organisational continuity. In the case of the Mennonites, the organisational trust is in the hands of the church and the individual members are closely connected to each other by means of community and family ties. It is not only this social system which guarantees organisational continuity, but also the commitment of the individuals to the collective history and ethnic identity. And this commitment especially creates a basis for their organisational change and entrepreneurial power. "Behind the stories of Mennonite businesses and businesspeople lie tales of individual and collective struggles: the struggle to reconcile the accumulation of personal wealth with responsibilities to the collective good; the struggle to reconcile the autonomy and self-interests of the individual with a traditional submission to group authority; the struggle with individualism and commitment" [Redekop et al., (1995), p.4].

Generally speaking, religious organisational commitment has specific features including a minimal professional staff and mostly volunteer workers, with a low financial compensation and a community structure, which limits the need for professional workers and which constitutes a source of credibility (Miller, 2002). One can also see that in communities where much of the church financing and administration is in the hands of laymen, these laymen constitute an instrumental elite. The lay elite exerts power over the communities instrumental activities like building infrastructures and houses [Etzioni, (1967), p.108]. Lower participants can be highly integrated into the organisational collectivity – potential informal leaders are recruited for formal organisational positions and can become full-time leaders (Roessingh and Smits, 2010a). In other words, the participants in the community offer their time, their organisational animation and financial commitment. This is not to say that the lay elite is shaped according to arbitrary decisions. It is the church, whose leadership is organised around three roles: bishop, minister and deacon, that plays a key role in the selection and appointment of trustworthy people. These people then become representative servants of God for the community (Roessingh and Plasil, 2006). This is in line with Weber's idea of the concept of calling: "It follows that work in a calling is also affected by this aim, and hence this-worldly work stands in service to the community as a whole" [Weber, (2002), p.63]. It is not only service to the local community, but also to other 'sister' communities which may be located at other places in the country and even abroad. These communities are highly inter-connected by means of social, religious and business networks.

In other words, their social, religious and business networks reaffirm the Mennonite collective identity. Their social networks help the Mennonites to form joint business

ventures, long-time business relationships based on trustworthiness, because they provide useful information about the individual's reliability and creditability (Roessingh and Smits, 2010b). Networks have been founded to make important contributions to entrepreneurial firms (Shaw 1999; Granovetter 1992; Arnoldus 2002; Dana and Dana 2007). They provide entrepreneurs with accurate information and tactics. In this chapter, networks are seen as connections between Mennonite agricultural related firms and business entrepreneurs. These networks are part of the social environment of the Mennonite communities. It is likely that the solidarity between the firms in this network is identical to the solidarity in the social networks of the Mennonites.

### **3 A Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite history**

The Kleine Gemeinde separated from the Molotschna church community, which was founded in South Russia in 1804. In 1812, a young minister by the name of Klaas Reimer opposed to the contributions of the Mennonites in Russia to the Russian Government in the war against Napoleon (Plett, 1999). "Finding little response in the church, he began meeting separately with like-minded members in 1812, and by 1814 they were organised as a separate group. The others mockingly called this conservative minority group the Kleine Gemeinde (small church), a name which the group itself soon accepted fully as indeed indicating the true nature of the faithful church in a hostile world" [Dyck, (1993), 179]. In 1874, the Kleine Gemeinde migrated to Manitoba, Canada as a response to the pressure of the Russian Government to gain more influence on the Mennonite schools and the fear that young Mennonite men would have to fulfil military service. In 1948, the Kleine Gemeinde left Canada for Chihuahua and Durango in Mexico to avoid the total integration of their school system with a larger Canadian educational programme (Reimer, 1949). This integration of their educational system into a 'worldly' one was seen as a direct threat for the Mennonites social and religious identity and formed a major reason to leave this country.

The disappointment of meeting yet another unwilling government confronted the Mennonites in Mexico with a dilemma. Because the Mexican Government proclaimed its intention to incorporate the Mennonites into a national social security system, some of the Mennonites made the decision to move on. Ten years after their migration to Mexico the Kleine Gemeinde and some other Mennonite groups moved away from Mexico to British Honduras (Driedger, 1958; Sawatzky, 1971). This move, however, was also caused by internal tensions between members of the community and church leaders [Redekop, (1969), pp.22–23]. Among other things, this behaviour is the reason that the Mennonites are also known as 'the roaming people'.

The Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites migration was the result of an agreement made on the 16th December 1957 between the Government of British Honduras and a delegation of the Quellen Colony in Chihuahua and Durango in Northern Mexico. In this agreement, the Government of British Honduras granted to the Mennonites among other privileges (British Honduras Gazette, 1958):

- “- the right to run their own Churches and schools, with their own teachers, in their own German language, according to their own religion;
- the privilege of affirming with the simple 'yes' or 'no' instead of making oaths in or out of the courts;

- the right to administer and invest the estates of their own people, especially those of widows and orphans, in their own 'Trust System', called the 'Waisenamt', according to their own rules and regulations;
- exemption from any social security or compulsory system of insurance".

In turn the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites agreed among other things to (British Honduras Gazette, 1958):

- “- bring into British Honduras capital investment in cash and kind amounting to five hundred thousand dollar more or less British Honduras currency;
- produce food not only for themselves but also for local consumption and for export market”.

Both parties, the Mennonites and the Government of British Honduras, had their reasons for this agreement. When we look at the history of this migration process it is obvious that the basic motives of the Mennonites have always been ideological and religious. The colonial Government of British Honduras did have more practical reasons to stimulate the migration plans of the Mennonites. Around 1946 British Honduras had a total population of 59.220 which increased to 90.505 in 1960 [Bolland, (1986), p.40]. In the late 1950s, the situation in British Honduras was very complicated. Local political leaders, like the former Prime Minister of Belize George Price, were overtly demanding autonomy within the British Colonial Empire. Next to this internal claim, the ever-lasting dispute over the territorial rights between Belize and Guatemala was intensified. The inside situation of British Honduras was very fragile and the country was depending on the outside support of Great Britain on all levels. “One problem facing the independence movement was a profound economic dependence on colonial authorities for capital, imported food supplies and manufactured goods. The colony had a small population, and only a few farmers engaged in subsistence agriculture” [Hidgon, (1997), p.27]. The government therefore acknowledged that skilled farmers were required to make the rough tropical forest suitable for cultivation and stock-breeding and to establish a commercial agricultural sector in the country. George Price, who was the Member for Natural Resources of the Government of British Honduras in 1957, stated that:

“One reason for encouraging them, was that the Mennonites are good farmers and since Belize had a small population and an excess of land, I thought it would be a good idea to introduce modern techniques of agriculture in our traditional ways.” [Shaw, (1987), p.13].

However, the choice of the government was criticised because they preferred white European Mennonites over black West Indians (Daily Clarion, 1958). Nevertheless local newspapers and political leaders agreed that the need of agriculture products for the local market was evident. A Belize Billboard commentator wrote:

“One community of the Mennonites will, we understand, begin their settlement on land purchased by them for some half million dollar. This illustrates two important points. First that the Mennonites are no paupers who are likely to become charges of the state, and secondly it is a sign of the high value placed on agricultural land by the Mennonites. This is an important demonstration in a country where the people place little value on agriculture. The Mennonites obviously mean to make agriculture a paying business in British Honduras.” (Belize Billboard, 1958)

#### **4 The Context of the Mennonite Settlements in Belize: Die Stillen im Lande?**

The country that they entered at the time was British Honduras. On 21 September 1981, this former British colony has become independent. This date marked the formal end of a process of independence that took 17 years. In 1964, British Honduras received the right to an internal self-government and in 1973 the name of the country was changed into Belize. Nowadays, with an area of 22,965 km<sup>2</sup> and approximately 300,000 inhabitants, Belize is one of the smallest and most under-populated countries in Central America (Belizean Government, 2007). The country has a multi-ethnic population consisting of, among others, Mestizos, Creoles, Garifuna, Maya's, East Indian and Chinese (Roessingh, 2001). According to the census of 2000, 3.6% of Belize's inhabitants are Mennonites – which comes down to 8,276 people on a total in 2000 of 232,111 inhabitants. However, the 2000 census indicates that there are 9,497 religious Mennonites (4.1%) in this multi-religious country (Central Statistical Office, 2000). The difference between the percentages of ethnic and religious Mennonites is at least something that requires an explanation. In practice, Mennonite identity turns out to be a dual concept. The ethnic identity of the Mennonites is based on a combination of shared assumptions on life values, life style and ideologies. The Mennonites share their common descent from Western Europe, especially the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany.

This specific background is shown in the different kinds of denomination in which the lineage of the background is reflected. The Old Order Mennonites, whose name does not refer to a specific group, have their roots in Switzerland and South Germany. The Old Colony Mennonites and the *Kleine Gemeinde*, who live in Belize, have their origin in the Netherlands and the northern parts of Germany [Dyck, (1993), pp.305–312]. The Mennonites share socially relevant cultural characteristics, like their Anabaptist background, their cultural and social repertoires, and their 'white' phenotypic features. The Mennonites have a common coding system of attitudes and behaviour, which can be found in concepts like the principle of 'Gelassenheit', or the submission to the will of God (which results in values like obedience, humility and simplicity), and the system of the 'Ordnung', that contains common rules and discipline.

In an article he wrote on the interaction between the Mestizo and Maya population in Western Belize with the Mennonite community of Spanish Lookout, Jantzen (1987) notes that this interaction was not only based on work relationships and business transactions but was also rooted in faith. Some Mestizo and Maya people turned to the Anabaptist religion of the Mennonites. This way their religious identity became a Mennonite one but this does not mean that they have been accepted as ethnic Mennonites. Their roots are not in Western Europe, their features are not like the ethnic Mennonites and they do not speak Low German, the internal language. Although the Low German language is vanishing in the daily conversation of the people in Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek (Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd 2005; Roessingh and Smits 2010a), it is still the language of their religion. The dual concept of Mennonite identity is based on ethnicity and partial exclusion.

Even in this mosaic of cultural and ethnic diversity it is rather striking to come across Mennonites. Men from the Old Colony community wear blue denim overalls or jeans with plain coloured shirts, black shoes and caps or straw cowboy hats. The women of this community are expected to wear bonnets or a shawl on their heads and dresses, which is a sign of simplicity and modesty, possibly with an apron. Clothes and artefacts, are

important outward signs of internal attitudes, which can be interpreted as a sign of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). As a result of this strong symbolic capital Belizeans often consider the Mennonite settlements as one of a kind. But in practice there is no uniformity. Inside the different settlements in Belize, strong controversial opinions exist of the way one should interpret the bible. The consequence is the possibility of fragmentation between and inside the Mennonite settlements. There are some Mennonite settlements which are rather isolated with a strong inward focus. They are very careful in picking out people they interact with and with whom they trade. However, other Mennonite settlements have more interactions with other people of the society. In practice, there is no uniformity (Roessingh, 2007). First of all, there are 12 Mennonites settlements with different numbers of inhabitants in Belize as shown in the table below.

**Table 1** Mennonite settlements in Belize

Inhabitants	Less than 100	100–500	500–1,000	1,000–2,000	2,000–2,500
Settlements	Pine Hill, Pilgrimage Valley, Richmond Hill	Lower Barton Creek, Upper Barton Creek, Springfield	Blue Creek, Indian Creek	Spanish Lookout	Shipyard, Little Belize

This differentiation and lack of uniformity does not mean that there is no basic connection between the settlements. The fact that there are differences is related with the notion of (collective) identity, social conflicts, and the will to be a pure community, as we discussed before. In practice, individual families have relatives in other settlements. Basically because of ideological differences, economic problems or shortage of ground, families have migrated to other places. Because of this most Mennonite settlements are interrelated on some level. In spite of these kinship relationships, there are three main streams to which the different church communities in Belize belong, namely the conservative Amish Mennonite communities, the traditional Old Colony or Altkolonier Mennonites and the progressive church communities like the Kleine Gemeinde and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC). The distinction between these three main streams is based on the level of restrictions on the use of technological innovation in the agricultural machinery. “A case in point, which has become the crux of serious controversy among the Altkolonier, is the use of modern rubber-tired tractor. The proscription against them has its roots back in 1916 when Altkolonier leaders in Manitoba and Saskatchewan [both in Canada] agreed to ban the automobile forever and to arrest technological innovation in agricultural machinery at the then existing level. This meant that the farm tractor, which by then was fairly common, would be tolerated, but pneumatic tires are banned because, so the argument goes, they make the tractor equivalent to an automobile” [Sawatzky, (1971), p.352].

In practice, this means that the conservative Mennonites, who ban any form of modernisation, work with horsepower and if necessary, hire a tractor with driver. The traditional Mennonites use tractors but have a ban on pneumatic tires. When they go to the market to sell their furniture they rent a car and driver. The progressive Mennonites do not have a ban on technological innovation, they use automobiles and all kind of modern machinery in their farm and farm related businesses.

#### 4.1 *The conservative settlements*

Richmond Hill used to be a very small conservative settlement in the Orange Walk District in the northern part of Belize. A group of Old Colony Mennonites from Alberta, Canada established this settlement in 1958. The inhabitants “soon began to break up, however, and by the early 1970s some members of this group had bought land in Shipyard, some had returned to Canada and some had moved with other dissatisfied Belizean Mennonites to Bolivia and Paraguay” [Everitt, (1983), p.83]. Richmond Hill is a good example of the way these people seek for land in countries where they are able to live according to their own rules. But when the circumstances do not live up to their religious prescriptions or farming abilities, they abandon their homestead and move on.

Another very small Mennonite settlement is Pilgrimage Valley in the Cayo District. The 2000 census indicates that there are now only 21 inhabitants in this settlement (Central Statistical Office, 2000). It was founded in 1965 by a mixed group of ten Amish and Old Order families from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Arkansas and Ontario [Sawatzky, (1971), p.363]. Although this settlement never really got to the level of expansion, the interesting thing about these Mennonites is the fact that they had a ‘different kind of background’. Beside that they were Old Order and not Old Colony; there was also the influence of the Amish which makes this group special. One thing is clear; this settlement never came to the point where it was possible to create a stable existence. “Consequently, several families moved to the more remote settlements at Barton Creek or they returned to North America” [Everitt, (1983), p.89]. The question arises what role was played by this conservative group in the religious notions of the other settlements in this area, especially that of the Upper Barton Creek settlement.

The Mennonites of Upper and Lower Barton Creek, Springfield in the Cayo District and Pine Hill in The Toledo District are also conservative in their lifestyle. “Their reasons for migrating to this quite isolated area are many and varied, but they are basically conservative and dislike association with other Mennonites in Belize, Mexico and Canada who have become too worldly “ [Everitt, (1983), p.89]. A deacon in Springfield reconfirmed that he did not recognise the Kleine Gemeinde of Spanish Lookout as Mennonites because they were too worldly in the eyes of the Springfield community members.

In 1969, the settlement of Upper Barton Creek was established. Three men and their families were very important in the process of founding this settlement. Two of them came from Pilgrimage Valley and one from Spanish Lookout (Schneider, 1990). In 1973, Lower Barton Creek followed. Mennonite families from all over Belize composed both settlements. Springfield and Pine Hill are settlements, which were founded because of the land shortage in the Barton Creek area. Like the Lower Barton Creek and Pine Hill settlements, the Upper Barton Creek and Springfield Mennonites are connected by family ties. This connection is: “a result of the population growth of Upper Barton Creek and in-migration of Lower Barton Creek families and proof of its stability as a unique cultural entity and agricultural success. The decision to seek new land for a daughter community [namely Springfield, which was established in 1996] came about gradually after the influx of additional families. Quite simply, there is nowhere for Upper Barton Creek to expand the occasional small parcel notwithstanding. With so many youth coming onto age and young couples in need of land, it became necessary to purchase another large tract, preferably a minimum of one thousand acres” (Nippert, 1994). One of the striking features of these Mennonites is their beard. This may be a very strange point to discuss.

But one of the characteristics of the Mennonites is their appearance. Most of the Mennonites in Belize do not have beards, except the Barton Creek and Springfield Mennonites. Following Kraybill and Bowman (2001), the Mennonites do not wear beards with which they distinguish themselves from Anabaptist, like the Amish and the Brethren. A Springfield bishop explained that their beard originated in Russia to distinguish from the Russian soldiers and did not indicate, as suggested by the researchers, any influence of the Amish.

#### *4.2 The traditional settlements*

Little Belize, which is a traditional Old Colony community, is located in the Corozal District in the northern part of the country and originated out of the Shipyard settlement in the Orange Walk District. In fact there is a kind of connection between Shipyard, Little Belize and Indian Creek, which is also situated in the Orange Creek District. In 1958, a group of Old Colony Mennonites established Shipyard. This group lived according to their traditional lifestyle. In the course of time migrants from other places, like Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek, who disagreed with what they interpreted as the increasing worldliness and modernisation, settled in Shipyard (Roessingh and Plasil, 2006). Because of land shortage, but also because of the fear for non-traditional incursions upon their culture, many of the more 'conservative' traditional Mennonites from Shipyard began to move to a new established settlement, called Little Belize, around 1979 (Everitt, 1983). The expansion of Little Belize has been remarkable. Together with Shipyard, Little Belize is the largest Mennonite settlement in the country. At the end of the eighties another settlement was started for the mushrooming younger generation of Shipyard, called Indian Creek. All three settlements are the offspring from the Old Colony Mennonites and characterised by their tradition-based lifestyle which is symbolised through their horse and buggy transportation, their ban on rubber wheels for tractors and the power of the church leader (Roessingh and Plasil, 2006).

Shipyard, Little Belize and Indian Creek are Old Colony Mennonite based settlements where the influence of modernity is integrated bit by bit. Nonetheless the Old Colony Mennonites protect their religious values and try to live according to their traditional farming systems. Shipyard has for some years now, in contrast to for instance Springfield, been confronted with an internal religious schism. The progressive EMMC, which has its headquarters in Manitoba (Canada) and a church in Blue Creek have slowly started to enter the Shipyard settlement. The Old Colony Mennonites of Shipyard do not accept people who are member of this church. They avoid them because they are excommunicated from the Old Colony church.

Most Old Colony Mennonites are embedded in transnational networks. These networks are mainly based on ideological religious exchange and family visits. For the Shipyard Mennonites these networks includes brother communities in Canada, USA, Mexico and Bolivia. Because of a lifestyle which is also based on interaction with people from outside the settlement and a more differentiated agricultural related entrepreneurial system, the Old Colony Mennonites of Shipyard are more visible on the Belizean marked then for instance the Springfield Mennonites. Interesting is what role the internal religious differentiation will have on the possibilities for social and economic changes inside the settlement in the future.

### 4.3 *The progressive settlements*

Together with Spanish Lookout, the Blue Creek settlement in the Orange Walk District is regarded as more progressive Mennonite settlements in Belize. The Shipyard and Blue Creek Mennonites are from the same background in Mexico. Originally, it was the intention of these Old Colony Mennonites to establish one settlement, Blue Creek, in 1958. But from the beginning there were problems between two sections in this settlement. Although both sections of this Old Colony church community lived according to their traditional lifestyle there were disagreements about the way one should use agricultural systems and machinery in this tropic area. The more 'conservative' traditional Mennonites decided to start a new settlement and founded Shipyard. Nonetheless more traditional orientated Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites from Spanish Lookout migrated not only to Shipyard but also to Blue Creek, where they founded their own Kleine Gemeinde church. Increasingly modern technology began to play an important role in the Blue Creek settlement (Roessingh and Smits, 2010a, 2010b). Economically this settlement prospered. In the course of time the basic structures of the Old Colony church vanished and were replaced by the EMMC, which came over from Canada (Roessingh and Smits, 2010a).

The Spanish Lookout settlement, in the Cayo District, is also known as a progressive Mennonite settlement. Like Blue Creek, the EMMC has also settled itself in Spanish Lookout. The EMMC is seen as an even more progressive church than the Kleine Gemeinde church. In practice, this means that there is some disturbance in the settlement because the inner relations and structures are at stake (Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd, 2005). Nonetheless, the Kleine Gemeinde church is still dominant and the most influential in this settlement (Roessingh and Mol, 2008). In the introduction, we mentioned that the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of Spanish Lookout are regarded as one of the economically most successful church communities of Belize. Of course there is always the question of how to decline successful. For the conservative Mennonites it will mean something different from what the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites will attribute to it. The best way to show the differences and the different position of a conservative and a progressive settlement might be to show the contrast of the road in-use.

### 4.3 *The contrast between two settlements*

The inhabitants specific religious backgrounds have consequences for the features of the settlements. One of the most eye-catching features for an outsider for instance is the construction of the roads to the settlements. The differences in the quality of the road in-use, as part of the new infrastructure to be built and in the use of cars and farm tractors are signs of different religious identities. The way a settlement like Spanish Lookout, in which the progressive Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites are living, gives a totally different picture than the settlements of the Upper Barton Creek and the Springfield settlement of the conservative Amish Mennonites do.

Visitors to Spanish Lookout have three roads to enter the settlement. Two of them are bumpy, dusty and not paved. The third road is paved all the way, which was constructed and paid for by the Spanish Lookout Mennonite Road Committee. One road, which is the short cut, passes a hand-operated ferry. After a couple of kilometres, the entrance to Spanish Lookout is amazing. A beautiful valley with the most well paved road of Belize, connecting the southern part of the village with the northern end. The whole sight gives

an impression of an area, which one associates, with the Midwest of Northern America. The wooden houses are in a good state and nice looking. Around the houses one can see short cleaned gardens, large sheds for farming machinery, big chicken-farms, fields with corn, red kidney beans and sorghum. On the paved road tractors, pickups and four-wheel driven land rovers are passing by.

The road to Upper Barton Creek and Springfield is dusty, bumpy and unpaved. But once one enters the village the road has become a cart track. These conservative Amish Mennonites use horse drawn wagons. The small farms lie scattered between the hillsides of the Maya Mountains. The houses are small and modest. The fields are more like horticultural land. In contrast to Spanish Lookout, Barton Creek and Springfield look tranquil.

The Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of Spanish Lookout are progressive in their acceptance of technology. They own tractors, trucks, caterpillars, automobiles and they use electricity. Mennonites from places like Upper Barton Creek and Springfield on the other hand are not allowed to use machinery or electricity. Horsepower drives the sawmill in Springfield, which is owned by the people of the settlement.

## **5 A struggle to stay pure: entrepreneurial behaviour and organisational power of Spanish Lookout**

'We are growing Belize' is the slogan on a sign of Reimers Feed Mill beside the main road through Spanish Lookout. This sign is a symbol of the entrepreneurship of the Mennonites of Spanish Lookout. We're growing Belize. It claims an image of self-confidence and even organisational power. However, when the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites came to Belize they were far from self-confidential.

They entered a world, which was very different from Canada and Mexico. In the introduction, Koop (1991) describes that the first settlers had a hard time. There was much uncertainty about the future and their position in this new homeland. From the moment the Mennonites settled in Belize, some families moved back to Mexico or even Canada. Internal fragmentation caused removal to other settlements in the country.

The Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites had 'some advantages' compared to some of the other church communities who migrated to Belize. Most of the church communities in Belize migrated around 1870 from the southern part of Russia (the present day Ukraine) to Canada and the United States. From this group some started to move to Mexico around 1920. The Kleine Gemeinde settled in Mexico around 1948. The fact that the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites stayed in Canada for a longer period reflected in some internal changes. This original conservative church community started to adopt "new farm methods and produced new products as dictated by their perspective physical environments and regional markets and required by their aim to secure a familiar standard of living and obtain the resources to pass the farm onto the next generation" [Loewen, (1993), p.264].

It seems that the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites are farmers with the capacity to use their internal organisation to adapt and transform outside circumstances into a level that enables the church community and the household economic unit (the family) to exist (Penner et al., 2008). Of course changes do take place in Spanish Lookout, but intrinsic moral rules are deeply rooted in the way the Mennonites accept these changes. Aspects and elements out of their past are used and integrated in a conscientious way to keep

structure in their system. These aspects and elements are based on the link between the family and kinship networks, the church as a moral hub, the collective way of farming and the accurate type of entrepreneurship. All these aspects are mutually connected with their religious identity in the Weberian sense. An aspect, which requires some special attention because it is related to the collective way of farming and everything farming is about, is the subject of land and land resources. Although Belize is the most under-populated country in Central America, there are rules and limitations in land resources. The government keeps this matter under its administration and jurisdiction. In practice, this means that farmers do not have free access to land. Little Belize, Indian Creek and Springfield are settlements which, for one reason, are established because of the need of farming land. The Mennonites in Spanish Lookout have also been in need for land. Since 1988, their land expansion has been progressive. The internal system of land tenure for the members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church is based on a communal property. This means that a farmer is a kind of 'partial' owner. He can make his own farming plan and produce the crops or keep the animals he chooses. But nonetheless he is depending on the cooperative with whom he trades to approve of the amount of production. The farmer is entitled to bequeath or to rent his property to his children. Otherwise he has to sell his property to one of the other church members. The organisational power of this system is based on the control of the community lay elite on the resources and the ability to distribute land to the church members without losing land and production.

Poultry has always been one of the elements of the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonite agriculture business, next to other farming activities. "An early emphasis on poultry has led to one of the most visible and economically important aspects of Spanish Lookout agriculture. From modest beginnings, the complex of hatchery, feed mills, and broiler-killing plant has grown to dominate the colony and has greatly expanded these products availability in Belizean markets. Nearly every colonist [*Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonite] is somehow involved in selling eggs, raising broilers, or preparing or marketing poultry products" [Jantzen, (1989), p.667]. This is in line with our empirical findings, which show a stable growth in chicken production of the Spanish Lookout Community. The growth of the broilers is especially important, because it indicates the entrepreneurial and organisational power of the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites in the Belizean chicken industry. In other words, the Mennonites provide Belize with chicken meat, which is one of the main sources of protein in the country. "From very modest beginnings in the early 60s these businesses have grown to a dominant position in their respective areas in the economy of Belize" [Snider, (1980), p.21]. From the beginning, the chicken industry was a niche in the market the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites entered. As a consequence, the Belizean inhabitants became independent of expensive, imported chicken meat. "This broiler business is conducive to the corn raising business on Spanish Lookout. The corn farmers were able to feed a portion of the crop to their broilers or sell it to farmers who had broilers operations. This double advantage was a real boost for the hard-pressed frontier farmers" [Koop, (1991), p.67]. This entrepreneurial behaviour was exactly the reason why the Belizean government was willing to welcome this group: to enrich the country with farming relating business activities. Besides this, it is a sign of their organisational power, which is reconfirmed by the way they organise their church community and settlement internally.

The organisational committee chart at the end of this chapter, which shows the intentional organisational routines, is an indication of the rationalisation of settlements organisational processes. The different committees are headed by lay-members of the

Spanish Lookout settlement – the so-called instrumental elite. In particular, it is the Land Chairman and, more specifically the Zoning Committee members who, besides building barns for hogs, cattle and other agricultural purposes, are responsible for the chicken industry infrastructure like buildings and chicken coops. This infrastructure is part of the settlement as a whole. However, it is the individual farmer and the broiler cooperative 'Quality Poultry Products', which are responsible respectively for the chicken production on a local level and the distribution countrywide. The Farmer Trading Center, also headed by a Mennonite cooperative committee like the Quality Poultry Products, plays a major role in the financial funding and guarantees continuity in process.

The process runs as follows. The individual farmer grows the chickens and sells them to the Quality Poultry Products cooperative. This cooperative has three functions. First of all it has a processing function in the sense that it prepares the chickens for the market. Secondly, the cooperative has a responsibility to its shareholders. It contributes the profits and members are able to make a loan, with poultry related innovations. Thirdly, it functions as an intermediary actor between the individual farmer and the Farmer Trading Center that operates as an internal settlement bank. The only people who are allowed to participate in this internal financial system are members of the two cooperatives. This implies that those chicken farmers who are not a member of the cooperatives are excluded from internal advantages. "The community's cooperatives are an important source of capital for member households. The Farmers Trading Center (FTC) is the main purchasing cooperative and de facto bank within the community. The FTC takes in cash deposits, issues bank checks and administers a 'coupon' system for internal colony [Mennonite members] use. The FTC grants loans for all types of purposes including home and barn construction, equipment purchases, and most importantly, land purchases" [Higdon, (1997), 68]. Next to this internal organisation of capital advantages, the Kleine Gemeinde church also has a credit and loan system for their members called the 'Hilfsverein' or 'Help Association'. Adult male members of the church make an annual contribution, the 'Auflagen'. This contribution which is a percentage of the members total financial assets is deposited in a general fund. By making this contribution adult males are able to get a loan against a profitable and low interest rate.

The entrepreneurial behaviour and organisational power as sketched above are based on an internal network of members of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite community. This network is based on religious, organisational and family ties. It does not only function as an enabling structure for entrepreneurial behaviour and change, but also contains elements of exclusion. This system, in short, is a cultural instrument of normative control to keep the church community pure.

## **6 Conclusions**

The case of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites offers us an insight in the specific religious and ethnic background of this group and the relation to the process of organisational change in general. The story contains elements of migration history, frontier experiences, adaptation to local contexts and entrepreneurial behaviour. By showing their collectivity, networks of acquaintance, power of distinctions and mentality of preservation, our chapter comes about struggles for purity. The Spanish Lookout Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites success is built upon stable self-defeating structures of internal solidarity. These structures, as we have shown, are based upon institutional aspects

of the church and the intrinsic mentality of family ties connected by a strong, local household-based network-economy.

We can reconfirm Driedger's observation (2000) that trust and recognition inside the Mennonite settlement are fundamental aspects of the creation of a collective identity and suggest that this aspect is also connected with their ability of organisational change. Trust and recognition inside Spanish Lookout are fundamental aspects for the creation of collective identity. The organisation of the chicken industry, which we take as a major example of their entrepreneurial expansion, helps to explain this collective identity. Rooted in the settlement, this industry does not only connect agribusinesses, but at the same time different Mennonite families. In other words, it is the solidarity between agribusiness firms in this network that mirrors the solidarity in the social network of the Spanish Lookout Mennonites.

The Mennonites are often called 'Die Stillen im Lande'. This characterisation is not only used by the Mennonites themselves but also by outsiders. The phrase 'Die Stillen im Lande' is taken from the Bible (Ps. 35:20: "gegen die Stillen im Lande") and symbolises the 'good' people and their 'Gelassenheit' in a world of wickedness and nonbelievers. These pure and humble people are quiet and are the ones who work on the land, which was created and given to them by God. However, in our case we have shown that these people can be quite successful. This contrast raises the following question: to what extent the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of Spanish Lookout are symbols of 'the quiet ones in the country'?

When they entered British Honduras in 1958 the Mennonites were confronted with an environment which they had to conquer. By working hard and leaning on their organisational skills they were able to get a grip on their surroundings. The instrument to get control over the existential circumstances was and still is their strategic and accurate way of using their entrepreneurial skills (Roessingh and Plasil, 2009). It is not so much the amount of land that is owned by the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites of Spanish Lookout per se that stands for their success, but the way it is cultivated. These aspects of land and the cultivation of it, however, are only one side of the coin. It is their ability to transplant traditional cultural elements into a new context that is the basis of both their stability and flexibility.

In line with this, Driedger (2000) points out that trust and recognition inside the Mennonite settlement are based on the continuous transplantation of fundamental elements of the past. According to us this element is a very strong reliable mechanism within Spanish Lookout, which is used by die 'Stillen im Lande' and forms a starting point to adapt their new frontier environment. Right from the start the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites used the farming knowledge of the indigenous people to broaden their own perspectives on cultivating newly obtained land. However, in this phase of the process the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite ideology was centred around the concept of selective modernity in relation to their entrepreneurial processes. The duality between the need of purity and the need to progress was illustrated by the road in-use contrast between a conservative and a progressive settlement. Inside the settlement this duality is best illustrated by the expansion of the broiler industry and the austere way in which the Kleine Gemeinde families maintain their household system.

In Belize this austere image is related to the Mennonite identity, in other words, it is their symbolic capital. To conclude, the remark 'We are growing Belize' is a sign of both their working ethos inspired by their religious background, and their will to progress and expand.

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