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## **TRADITIONAL FARMERS OR MODERN BUSINESSMEN? RELIGIOUS DIFFERENTIATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN A KLEINE GEMEINDE MENNONITE COMMUNITY IN BELIZE**

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This article addresses the religious and entrepreneurial differentiation within Spanish Lookout, a Mennonite community in the Cayo district in Belize, Central America. In spite of the fact that most Mennonites live more or less on the edge of society, they have been able to establish a strong and stable economic position within Belize, although the different communities show a clear variation when it comes to social as well as in economic activities. Since their migration from Mexico to Belize in 1958, the Mennonites of Spanish Lookout, one of the modern communities, have developed a more differentiated economical system with commercial agriculture and agribusiness. The Mennonites maintain a remarkable transnational network, which consists of Mennonite communities and organizations in countries like Canada, the United States of America, and Mexico. These networks introduce innovations on different levels: from modern or better machines, to religious and social changes. The influences from Mennonites outside Belize on the social-economic system of the Spanish Lookout Mennonites, along with the developments within the community, will be the main focus of this article.

*Keywords:* Mennonites; religion; entrepreneurship; agriculture; differentiation; collective identity.

### **1. Introduction**

In their study about British entrepreneurs, Dodd and Seaman (1998) demonstrate that there is a complex and interdependent relationship between religion and enterprises. They even argue that religion operates as an environmental munificence factor. In economic analyses entrepreneurs are often seen as agents who play a role in the arena of the market in which they make decisions to organize productive activities and are seen as the main risk bearers, innovators, and industrial leaders (Ripsas, 1998). At first glance, entrepreneurial actions are

taken to make money and a profit and have a highly capitalist nature. This starting point gives the idea that a combination with something like Christianity is rather contradictory. Especially when it comes to orthodox Christians. After all, their fundamental values and daily practices are based on the message of God and the scripture of the bible. Basically one of the messages of Christianity is that people should live in acceptance with other people without gaining or pursuing too many personal advantages. How is somebody who is practicing Christianity in an orthodox manner able to combine his or her personal values with an entrepreneurial professional attitude? In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (2002) argues that there is a relation between Christianity and the development of rational capitalism due to a so-called Calvinistic working ethos. His thesis, however, was based on the development in modern Western societies. The focus of this study is on a non-Western society, Belize in Central America.

Belize, with an area of 22,965 km<sup>2</sup> and 232,111 inhabitants, is one of the smallest and least populated countries in Central America (Central Statistical Office, 2000). Interestingly, in Belize, several groups of orthodox Mennonites are notably present in the entrepreneurial arena of the country. Their religious values and traditions have a strong influence on their entrepreneurial behaviour. As Redekop, Ainlay and Siemens (1995, p. 4) point out:

“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-interest of the individual with a traditional group authority; the struggle with individualism and commitment.”

Because of their strong entrepreneurial position, the Mennonites are commonly regarded as the economic motor of Belize. Mennonites symbolize soundness and reliability and therefore Belizeans are eager to do business with them. This is especially true for the Mennonites of Spanish Lookout, in the Cayo district in western Belize. Apart from the influences of outsiders with a non-Mennonite background, many of the Spanish Lookout Mennonites maintain a network that operates transnational. These networks, like other networks, introduce innovations on different levels, like modern or better machines, or religious and social changes. Thus, through their linkages with communities throughout the world, the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout are constantly under the influence of (global) processes of modernization. Their lives and traditions will inevitably evolve under such external influences, whether they consciously adapt these changes or not.

In social-cultural debates, the process of modernization, including capitalism, industrialism and the growth of rational organizations 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

organizational instruments into a form of collective resistance against other social groups (Castells, 2001).

In the case of the Mennonite communities in Belize, the collective identity is one of the basic elements of their economic existence. Trust and recognition within the Mennonite village are fundamental aspects for the creation of 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" (Driedger, 2000, p. 72). Driedger points out that trust and recognition within the Mennonite village are based on fundamental elements out of the past, which are continuously transplanted from one location to another.

Throughout this study, we will interpret the significance of the external influences for the Mennonite struggle to hold foot as a pure, religious group in a multi-ethnic post-colonial context, and the way these internal religious struggles are reflected in their collective identity as well as in their entrepreneurial activities.

The central question is formulated as follows: how do the transnational connections of the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout influence the process of religious differentiation, and what is the impact of this differentiation on the internal relations and cooperation within their entrepreneurial system?

The data presented are the result of ethnographic research conducted in Belize from May 2003 until October 2003, combined with archival sources. Several qualitative research methods were used to obtain information about the religious and entrepreneurial changes in the Mennonite community of Spanish Lookout. These research methods include participant observation, informal conversations and semi-structured in-depth interviews with people who can be considered central figures in the entrepreneurial life of this community, people who have a central position in the religious life, and other players in the research field. The research subject was approached as a case study with an intrinsic as well as an instrumental focus (Stake, 2003). This means that the study is used to provide an insight into this particular subject (religious differentiation within the Mennonite community of Spanish Lookout), as well as to facilitate the understanding of a more general issue (the impact of religious differentiation on the entrepreneurial system). The purpose is to gain an understanding of the situation within its context, rather than generalization beyond (Stake, 2003).

## **2. Spanish Lookout: A Progressive Community**

The Mennonites are ideological descendents of a religious movement, which had its origins in the Anabaptist wing of the Protestant Reformation in Western Europe during the first half of the sixteenth century (Dyck, 1993; Redekop, 1989). Hostile reactions from the more established churches to Anabaptist practices, such as adult baptism, non-resistance, their opinion that the church and state should be separated, and their attitude to place themselves outside the political arena, led to persecution. In response to these persecutions, Mennonite groups migrated from Western Europe to Russia and Northern America in the eighteenth and nineteenth century where they lived mainly as farmers in a relatively isolated manner

(Dyck, 1993; Loewen, 2001; Redekop, 1989; Scott, 1996). Later, in the twentieth century, groups of Mennonites moved south to various countries throughout Latin America.

In March 1958, a group of 680 Mennonites arrived in Belize to settle at the banks of the Belize River at a place that the Belizeans called Spanish Lookout (Hidgon, 1997; Quiring, 1961; Sawatzky, 1971). They were members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation, founded in 1812 by a young minister by the name of Klaas Reimer as a reaction to the developments within the Russian Mennonite church (Plett, 1999). In those days, the *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation was known for its conservative attitude. In 1874, the *Kleine Gemeinde* migrated to Manitoba (Canada) and Nebraska (United States) as a response to the increasing pressure of the Russian Government. In the course of the 20th century, the *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation was repeatedly confronted with similar pressure from governments around the world, which meant a threat to their social and religious identity. For this reason members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* kept on moving, from Canada and the US to Mexico and later from Chihuahua and Durango (Mexico) to Belize. (Driedger, 1958; Sawatzky, 1971). This latest move, however, was also caused by internal tensions between members of the community and church leaders as well as, in other cases, simply by shortage of land (Jantzen, 1989; Redekop, 1969). The *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites' migration to Belize was the result of an agreement made on the 16th of December 1957 between the colonial Government of the former British Honduras and a delegation of the Quellen Colony in Chihuahua and Durango in northern Mexico.

The colonial Government did have a practical reason to stimulate the migration plans of the Mennonites. "The colony had a small population and only a few farmers engaged in subsistence agriculture" (Hidgon, 1997, p. 27). Therefore, the Government acknowledged that skilled farmers were required to make the rough tropical forest suitable for cultivation and stockbreeding and to establish a commercial agricultural sector in the country (Shaw, 1987).

The Mennonites' first years in Belize were difficult and full of new experiences. Both Jantzen (1989) and Snider (1980) emphasize the difficulties the farmers had to overcome in the early years of their presence in Belize. Not only the climate and the dense jungle gave them a hard time but also the fact that they had to adopt a new technique, the slash and burn technique, to cultivate the environment with its "heavy gumbo soil" (Snider, 1980). In addition to this, Driedger (1958) and Snider (1980) note that the Mennonite farmers had to grow other kinds of crops, maize and beans, than they were used to in Manitoba and Mexico, where they grew oats and wheat.

Nowadays, Spanish Lookout is a community with around 1600 inhabitants and known in Belize as a progressive Mennonite settlement. The progressive Mennonites use a more differentiated economic system of commercial agriculture and agribusiness in their communities. The beans, dairy, and chicken companies for instance, are dominant businesses in the country. Their transport and distribution network is based on well-organized logistic ordinance, which runs beyond the borders of the community. When driving into the community one seems to enter a different world within Belize. Visitors coming to Spanish Lookout to buy something at the Farmers Trading Center frequently note similarities between this settlement and the agricultural area of the mid west of Northern America. The community has

developed into an extensive area with farms surrounded by numerous acres of land. What used to be a dense jungle is now a hilly area with pastures where the Mennonites raise cattle and cultivate corn and beans. Within the community one will find important agro-businesses like Friesen Hatcheries, Reimers Feedmill, Quality Poultry Products, Western Tractor Supply, Western Dairies, and Bel Car Export. This is an important company in Belize, because next to importing beans it also exports beans throughout the Caribbean. Beside this, there are several hardware stores like Hillside Welding Centre, or Universal Hardware and other companies, like Pletts Home Builders, Loewen Furniture.

In Spanish Lookout religion and entrepreneurship are strongly related. The next section will be used to further develop this relationship and its consequences for the daily life of these Mennonites. The focus will be on the differentiation within the religious system, which has caused several changes for this community.

### 3. Religion

Mennonites' daily lives are structured according to the Scriptures of the Bible (Wenger, 1992). The internal system is organized around a congregation, which is the basic social and religious unit beyond the extended family. Congregations with common rules and discipline "participate in the same conference, which is an organizational unit held together by a biannual meeting of ordained leaders" (Kraybill and Bowman, 2001, p. 68). Leadership of the congregation is organized around three roles: bishop, minister and deacon. In fact, these leaders are more or less the "guardians" of the internal religious values. Formally, one becomes a member of the congregation after baptism, which usually takes place around the age of fifteen.

The congregation provides the family with a sense of security based on internal cohesion and religious principles. It is, for instance, responsible for the educational system but also for the creation of a social network. The congregation, consisting of families in the community, shapes the strong social interrelations. The extended family is the foundation on which the economic network is based. This network is centered on farming and farm-related businesses. In an analysis of the agricultural system of the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout in Belize, Hall (1980) mentions group cohesion, homogeneity, pervasive religion, a high degree of social organization, a self-sufficient economy, and a low threshold for migration as the cultural factors, which explain the economic success of this community and its organizations.

When the *Kleine Gemeinde* started its community in Belize in 1958, it was a very homogeneous group with shared norms and values. Especially since the last ten years this has been changing, due to several causes. As result of the migration flow of the Mennonites many people in Spanish Lookout have family or friends in Canada and the United States, thus creating a network in a sense of goods, knowledge and religion. This means that these Mennonites, although traditionally inward focused, are also aware of and connected to the world outside the community.

As a result of these outside influences the homogenous community started to change, for instance through the foundation of other churches within the community. The Evangelical

Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC) was established in Spanish Lookout some eight years ago. It is the second largest church in Spanish Lookout. The EMMC has its headquarters in Manitoba, Canada. The church in Spanish Lookout was initially assisted by the EMMC in Blue Creek, a progressive Mennonite community in the north of Belize. Like the *Kleine Gemeinde* church, the EMMC is also seen as a progressive church. However, their ideas seem less strict and they give the impression that they have a more open view towards the outside world. In practice this means that there is some disturbance in the community because the inner relations and structures are at stake.

Being a member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church means being part of a social and financial network as well. The community functions independently from the Belizean national system. They have their own electricity plant and their own tax system. The governance of the community is divided in different committees, based on the *Kleine Gemeinde* church. The changing reality of the community and the emergence of another church created an alternative for members of the community. Some Mennonites became aware that they were not satisfied with the *Kleine Gemeinde* church anymore. They did not agree with some of the rules of the church and felt that they could no longer connect with the way the Bible was interpreted by the *Kleine Gemeinde* church members. Now that they had a choice, they decided to change to the EMMC.

The discussion between the members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church and those who have left is complicated. According to those who have left, they do not agree with the way the church is disciplining people in a way of 'do's and don'ts'. Members of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, however, insist that the regulations of the church are applications of the principles given by the Bible. Without these the foundation of the community would disappear. Although the differentiation between churches is increasing, the *Kleine Gemeinde* church is still dominant and the most influential one in this settlement. Nonetheless, the church leaders and their members are clearly aware of this development and try to change some of the traditional values. As one of the *Kleine Gemeinde* ministers explains, they have a more open attitude towards other churches. This indicates that the *Kleine Gemeinde* church notices the need of people for a change in perspective and to a certain extent tries to accommodate for these wishes.

For an outsider this internal schism is hardly visible. Looking from outside, for instance, the difference between the churches' buildings is not very striking. One of the main differences is that the EMMC church is a lot smaller and contains only one church building, whereas the *Kleine Gemeinde* is divided in four districts, each with its own church building. One of these four buildings is the main church. This brand new building was recently built behind the old main church and it can accommodate around 1000 people. This church was built because the old church became too small for the amount of people. Although people choose to be a member of a different church, funerals for both the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the EMMC are conducted in this new main church of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and everyone is still buried at the same cemetery at the *Kleine Gemeinde* church.

The place of the wedding ceremony depends on the church membership of the couple. A man and woman of the EMMC will have their wedding in the EMMC church and a *Kleine Gemeinde* couple in the *Kleine Gemeinde* church. Usually when a couple out of



two churches is getting married, one of them changes his or her membership to the one of the partner. There is also a difference in the way people are baptized. While the *Kleine Gemeinde* baptizes its members inside the church, the EMMC performs its baptisms in the river.

Looking at the churches of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and the EMMC from the inside, there are clearer differences. On a Sunday morning in the *Kleine Gemeinde* church, you will see the men sitting on the left side and the women on the right side on wooden benches. Hymns are sung without music and mostly in High German. On a Sunday in the EMMC church on the other hand, families all sit together, men and women mixed. The great amount of plastic chairs behind the wooden benches symbolizes the rapid growth of the EMMC church. A young lady plays on a keyboard while the members sing modern hymns, mostly in English. While the sermon in the *Kleine Gemeinde* church is well organized, the one in the EMMC church gives a somewhat chaotic impression. Another important difference between the two churches is the idea of how men and women should dress. The dress code for members, especially female members, of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church appears to be a lot stricter than the one for the EMMC members.

The differences in ways of clothing, church sermons and views towards the outside world, represent a process of change in people's minds; traditions are questioned and matters that have always been obvious are seen from another angle. The above mentioned changes the way the Mennonites live in their community, which means that there is also a change in how they make a living. Economical activities have been and still are organized based on religious motives. Since these motives are changing, doing business is changing as well.

According to some inhabitants of the Spanish Lookout community it appears that the church and business are growing apart. The church used to be significantly involved in matters of economical activities of its members. Nowadays this influence is decreasing. Changes within the religious doctrine have also had their impact on the way the farmers organize their business and manage their farms. How this is evolving will be explained in the following part.

#### **4. Farmers and Agro-Businessmen**

Over the last ten to fifteen years the Spanish Lookout community has gone through some major changes. From the beginning of the settlement, the farmers have been able to develop different techniques to cultivate their land. From Mennonites in the United States they received bulldozers and caterpillars, which, among other things, have been used for cultivating the land and improving the infrastructure in the settlement (Jantzen, 1987). Over time the living standard of the community has changed, which is symbolized in the phrase "from Mennonites to Mechanites", a phrase which is frequently used among Belizeans to indicate the fast technical development in the Spanish Lookout community.

In the early eighties, electricity was introduced and in the early nineties the settlement started using running water. Another recent change is the pavement of the roads in the community. Driving through Spanish Lookout you will likely see one or more road-rollers improving the condition of the roads.



According to a young farmer, all these changes have contributed to a way of life in which the use of technology is more obvious. An important aspect of this statement is that the community has become more prosperous over the years. The internal logistic system has improved, which is reflected in the way the individual farmer handles his business. The young farmer explains how these improvements influence his chicken and broiler business. Not long ago the feed mill in Spanish Lookout started delivering the feed with bulk trucks to the silo of the farmer. The use of feed silos by individual farmers was recently introduced and has changed the way the farmer works. Another logistic change was made by the company that supplies the farmers with chicks, the Friesen Hatcheries, and by the one that purchases the broilers, Quality Poultry Products. They produce 80,000 deepfreeze broilers a week. The company trucks distribute this product all over the country. Friesen Hatcheries deliver the chicks and after approximately six weeks Quality Poultry Products collects the broilers. The farmer saves a lot of time thanks to these changes and they enable him to engage in alternative entrepreneurial activities, like for instance being involved in the hardware, homebuilders or welding business.

Due to these changes in the ways of doing business, there are also changes of attitude. Mennonites are primarily inward focused. However, with the process of differentiation of the churches and the flourishing of business, people are becoming more aware of the outside world. A farmer explains that over the last few years a lot has changed with regard to inside as well as outside barriers. These barriers used to be based on 'us and them' attitudes, but seem to have become less dominant. In the first place, more people from outside come to Spanish Lookout to buy groceries at the Farmers Trading Center. Secondly, the amount of schoolchildren and tourists who visit the Western Dairies for ice cream has increased significantly. Beside this, many Belizeans often come to the community when their car needs to be fixed or to make an appeal on the knowledge of the Mennonites concerning agricultural or technical matters. One of the consequences of this development is that the Low German language of the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout is changing into a language with more English words.

Because the businesses are growing, the need for workers is growing as well. Many Mennonites are involved in different kinds of activities, apart from their own farm or agriculture-related businesses. They are members of a committee or participate in church work. These changes in the division of labor created the need for waged workers from outside the community. Around seven in the morning you will see pick-ups loaded with Mestizo men and women, heading towards Quality Poultry Products, Reimers Feedmill and other places where workers from outside the community are employed. For example, at Quality Poultry Products alone, about 150 Belizean workers are employed. At the end of the day, around four o'clock, these workers hitchhike back to San Ignacio.

Beside the internal organizational system many Mennonites have external entrepreneurial connections. The way the entrepreneurial activities of the Mennonites of Spanish Lookout with the outside world are structured can be explained on three levels. The first level of the entrepreneurial activities is based on a network of business partners outside Spanish Lookout, like the way the deepfreeze broilers are distributed all around Belize.

The second level is based on the cooperation between the Spanish Lookout Committee, which is the organizational board of the community, and the Government. One of the leaders of the community explains that there is regular contact with the government concerning different matters. Beside concessions for buying land and road improvements, the Belizean government is also involved in the improvement of the quality of farming. BAHA, the Belizean Agricultural Health Authority, inspects all agricultural activities in Spanish Lookout. The manager of the Western Dairies expects to achieve the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) standard in the near future; this is a standard used for dairy products all over the world and is a program of the Center for food Safety and Applied Nutrition of the Department of Health and Human Services of the United States. Obtaining this standard will improve the sales. BAHA is also involved in achieving this standard.

The third level of the Mennonite entrepreneurial activities is based on their transnational connections, for example with the department mentioned above. North America is an important link within this network. Organizations in North America are involved in quality norms, not only concerning nutrition but also animal health and other agricultural matters, and are important suppliers of products. An important aspect in the way business has changed in the community of Spanish Lookout is the increase in variety and availability of products. The import of goods is a significant factor in the extension of businesses. An example is the Western Tractor Supplies: 95% of their products are imported and 80% of these products are sold outside the community. Besides North America, products are imported from Taiwan, Great Britain and Israel. After the containers are unloaded from the ships in Belize City, the goods are directly distributed to the businesses of the Mennonites. By doing so the Mennonite entrepreneurs are able to sustain a relatively low price for these goods.

As has been indicated entrepreneurial activity in Spanish Lookout reaches further than just self-subsistent agriculture. A result of the prosperity of the agro-business is a growing gap between the farmers who improve their farms or businesses rapidly and the ones who cannot keep up with the fast changes. And although life might get easier with the flourishing of business, for the Mennonites its consequences often cause confusion and insecurity. These changes, both on the religious and the economical level, cause a duality within the community. This duality will be discussed in the next part.

## **5. Religious Differentiation and Entrepreneurial Integration**

An interesting process in the community of Spanish Lookout is the way in which two cornerstones of the *Kleine Gemeinde* community, religion and agriculture, have changed due to external and internal influences. Looking at the rise of the EMMC-church, one can see that the cornerstone of traditional religious believes is challenged and that the religious environment is changing. Differences in religious views cause tension between friends, within families, and in the community. Although these tensions play a significant role in internal relations, and to some extent in the community, it seems that the Mennonites have accepted the possibility for different congregations in the community. Looking at the historical development of the Mennonites, their religious concept is also based on the

possibility of breaking away from a congregation. This type of schism is embedded in the tradition of the church and has always been a reflexive aspect of Mennonite history.

The other cornerstone consists of agriculture and entrepreneurial activities, which have transformed from a basic way of farming, into a more complex economy with commercial agriculture and agribusiness. On the one hand, the consequences of this change are translated into the more advanced machineries, technology, and the possibilities to keep the land, which was once dense bush, productive and cultivated. On the other hand, this transformation has had a major impact on the business culture of Belize. The Mennonite entrepreneurs have created an internal market for goods like dairy products and poultry. Furthermore, the Mennonite businesses import and supply the country with different types of cars and all kinds of parts of machineries.

Traditionally the Mennonite community could be characterized through religious consensus, shared by all members of this community. This situation can be explained through what Martin (1992, 2002) calls the integration perspective. Recently however, some bursts in the homogeneity of the community can be witnessed. The most obvious one is the rise of the EMMC as a result of the schism in the *Kleine Gemeinde* church.

Martin (1992, 2002) points out that there are other perspectives, beside the integration perspective, to interpret the culture within an organization or, like in this case, within the Spanish Lookout community. First, from a differentiation perspective it is argued that subcultures exist within organizations or, in this case, a community and that competition and conflict are seen as a result of different interests. The many subcultures are the basis for divided opinions and short or long term coalitions between the different parties. Agreements between the coalitions are made on the necessity of rational decisions. Secondly, the fragmentation perspective is based on the principle that increasing ambiguity of concepts and relations within groups and the organizational system (or community) can be witnessed, leading to a highly fragmented organization (community) (Martin, 1992, 2002).

Although there are different congregations in the community, this does not mean that a process of fragmentation is going on in Spanish Lookout. Rather, most families in the community share the same basic assumptions through their Anabaptist background and their common history in the sense of migration, language and values. Thus, the perspective of differentiation is more applicable in this case. Loewen (1993) describes the way the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites migrated from Russia to Manitoba and Nebraska where they adapted themselves to a market economy of a differently structured world, without losing their own religious values. In fact, this is an important aspect of the Mennonite culture; as it mirrors their entrepreneurial adaptation of the environmental reality and their religious values, which they cherish as a compass for their household and community norms. Redekop *et al.* (1995) argue that:

“Many Mennonites have undertaken entrepreneurial activities within the Mennonite community context, but they did not deviate from group norms in lifestyle or belief. In fact, they often helped determine the direction that local interpretation and practice of the traditional Mennonite beliefs took. This is a distinguishing characteristic of local Mennonite entrepreneurs.

They do not extend their activities far beyond the Mennonite community because their local mind-set is threatened by the greater world, and they are unwilling to risk the disapproval of the members of the Mennonite community which would be the inevitable response to any deviance from Mennonite economic norms.” (1995, p. 46).

This is an interesting argument because in the Belizean context the Mennonites are local entrepreneurs but they are also part of a bigger transnational religious and entrepreneurial network. The *Kleine Gemeinde* has its bondage with sister communities in Mexico, Canada and the United States. All these communities are historically connected through family ties and religious principles. When the Mennonites arrived in Belize they received a lot of assistance from the Mennonite Central Committee in the North America.

Their transnational connections with other Mennonite institutions in North America have always been an advantage for the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout. Their position in Belize is rather powerful, not only because of their entrepreneurial success but also because of their international bondages. Thus the observation of Redekop *et al.* (1995, p. 47) that “entrepreneurship in Mennonite contexts can be expressed in one of two ways: either in taking the entrepreneurial expression as far as conformity to agrarian community norms and values permits or in disregarding community standards and practices to compete in the larger economy according its rules” is a rather contrastive one. It is true that the norms and values of the community play an important role in the way Mennonite entrepreneurs do their business and much of the profits are recycled in the companies and the community. However, Redekop *et al.* are too contrastive in their observations of the concept of community. Cohen argues that:

“Community exists in the minds of its members, and should not be confused with geographic or sociographic assertions of ‘fact’. By extension, the distinctiveness of communities and, thus, the reality of their boundaries, similarly lies in the mind, in the meaning which people attach to them, not in their structural forms.” (1985, p. 98)

In the case of the Mennonites of Spanish Lookout the community is involved in changes both at the religious and the entrepreneurial level. These changes have also been inspired by religious ideas and techniques from North America. The EMMC for instance has its foundation in Manitoba, Canada and much of the new machinery and techniques are imported from, and distributed through transnational entrepreneurial connections, in which other Mennonite institutions often play a role. Spanish Lookout is more than a local religious and entrepreneurial community. It is part of a broader community that interacts on a transnational level and is based on shared religious principles and extended family ties. Connecting these changes with the religious differentiation one can witness the following development: when it comes to business, differences within the Mennonite religious context do not appear to play a significant role. Looking at the committees and business agreements, members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* and EMMC work together. While there used to be some tension between members of the different churches, the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout are coming

to terms with their differences. Apparently, there is a consensus among both groups about running the settlement as a Mennonite community where agro-business plays a central role and where understanding for each other's perspective is growing.

## 6. Conclusion

We started this study with the question of how the transnational connections of the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout influence the process of religious differentiation, and what the impact is of this differentiation on the internal relations and cooperation within their entrepreneurial system?

When the Mennonites arrived in Belize in 1958, their motives were first of all based on religious principles and the need for agricultural land. A strong internal cohesion gave them the advantage they needed to settle and to develop as a prosperous agricultural community. The case of the Spanish Lookout Mennonites shows us that the influence of churches and business organizations outside the community can create internal religious differentiation. Apparently, this differentiation does not have a paralyzing effect on the entrepreneurial development and expansion. On the contrary, many of the businesses in Spanish Lookout have a powerful position in Belize. One of the interesting aspects of this powerful position in the Belizean entrepreneurial arena is that the Mennonites for a long time acted in a rather isolated way inside Belize. But because of changing circumstances they cannot live in total separation from Belizean society. Matters like taxes, fuel exemptions and agricultural innovations are already common in meetings between Spanish Lookout leaders and Belizean politicians. Although different religious views exist within Spanish Lookout, the internal cohesion of the people in the community is still strong enough to maintain successful cooperation and business relationships. What is more, there seems to be a new collective identity arising, based on a shared entrepreneurial point of view and mutual acceptance. In the way they practice their agricultural activities and their entrepreneurial activities they are able to maintain a strong bond of trust, which is still typically Mennonite.

In general, religious differentiation does not always result in significant changes in the entrepreneurial relations within and outside the community. Although the religious differentiation has significant impacts on the intrinsic level of community life and thus on internal trust, in the case of the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout it seems as if the economic and family bonds are far too important to let the religious differences interfere. Rather, they are keeping the religious aspects of community life within the church, while continuing the business as usual.

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