

**Negotiating the “Sacred Village”:  
*Dietsche* (Low German speaking) Mennonite Women  
in Southern Manitoba**

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*Dietsche* or Low German speaking immigrant women’s acculturation into Canadian society is affected by the legacy of the Mennonite sacred village in Latin America. That is, their experiences in, and response to, their sacred village heritage, with its interconnection between culture and religion, shapes how they preserve and transmit their culture and how they access or become part of the larger Mennonite and Canadian society.<sup>1</sup> Typically, effective integration into the host society depends on an ability to maintain one’s culture while being able to access the larger society.<sup>2</sup> However, maintenance of *Dietsche* culture, that is, the sacred village, generally elicits an attitude of separation from society. The Latin American sacred village acts as a repertoire to which they refer when settling into life in Canada. They choose, unconsciously or consciously, certain elements from their past culture and search for an appropriate environment that reflects these elements to some degree. They then assimilate the new community of southern Manitoba into their perception of Mennonitism. This makes it possible for most to identify with the community, adopting new ways of being while attempting to maintain continuity with the past. It is through the Mennonite community in Canada that they become part of the larger society.

This paper arises out of a qualitative research project conducted for my Masters thesis in sociology. It focuses specifically on women’s experiences and voices to understand better their specific location in the

preservation and transmission of cultural and religious traditions to their children because it is often women who are charged with these tasks.<sup>3</sup>

### **History**

To contextualize the present situation of the *Dietsche* Mennonites in Canada it is necessary to give some background history surrounding their departure and return. The history of dislocation, difficulties and re-migration of the *Dietsche* Mennonites is an important element in understanding the divergent interests in cultural and religious preservation and transmission of identity to their children.

Different groups have used various terms to distinguish this group of Mennonites from others. They are typically known as “Mexican Mennonites” by those who live in southern Manitoba; many immigrants have spent most of their lives in Mexico. “Kanadier,” is the term used by some academics and Mennonite Central Committee to distinguish these Mennonites with their Canadian roots from Mennonite immigrants from other countries. I use the expression *Dietsche*, the Low German word for German, because this is how most of the women identified themselves. They are the descendants of Mennonites who migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1870s. Here they attempted to transplant their traditional religion and way of life based on the concept of the sacred village. When their way of life was threatened, that is, the boundaries were unable to separate them from the larger world, the most conservative members of the most traditional Mennonite churches left Manitoba for Mexico. Thus the *Dietsche* are those Mennonites who have re-migrated back to Canada from Latin America. Several factors including political, religious, economic and cultural, led the most traditional to leave Canada for Latin America.

Mennonites initially migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1870s. Here they attempted to transplant their traditional religion and way of life in closed communities. This included operating their own independent educational institutions, living in bloc village settlement patterns, and governing their own village affairs. These rights were protected by the federal government in a special *Privilegium*. A *Privilegium* refers to a set of special rights that governments throughout history have granted Mennonites allowing them to live relatively autonomously within the countries to which they have migrated. After having lived in Manitoba and Saskatchewan for a generation, many of conservative Mennonites felt these rights were threatened in several ways. The Mennonites were

included in the Anglicization program to assimilate immigrants on the prairies. Because education was under the jurisdiction of the provinces, the Mennonites' right to their own schools that had been granted by the federal government did not stand. Thus, they were no longer allowed to manage their own separate schools, something they knew was paramount to socializing their children.<sup>4</sup> The government further provoked the Mennonites by imposing conscription upon all young males; this negated the Mennonite's right to military exemption, which the Canadian government also granted them upon arrival to Canada.<sup>5</sup>

Several divisive forces within the Mennonite community also influenced the decision to relocate to Latin America. The most traditional Mennonites resented the tactics of progressive Mennonites from the United States espousing Protestant revivalism.<sup>6</sup> Protestant revivalism with its focus on individual piety and conversion introduced ideas contrary to the traditional Mennonite collectivist philosophy. Also, to gain a foothold in the Mennonite communities were individualistic farming practices where a family lived on a separate acreage farming their own land. This contradicted the traditional shared land system as well as village life central to their culture and religion. This last process initiated a breakdown of common fields, self-contained bloc settlements, and village life to the dismay of those wanting to maintain traditional cultural practices.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, those who moved viewed migration outside Canada as a way to separate the true believers from those who had waned in their religious convictions and become seduced by the world.<sup>8</sup> High birth rates and a shortage of territory that would allow for enclosed settlements also influenced their relocation. Maintaining kinship ties and an agrarian lifestyle were just as fundamental to the Mennonite community as its religious ideals. Instead of succumbing to what many saw as the inevitable dissolution of their cultural and religious way of life, many opted to migrate once again, this time to Latin America.

As a result, nearly two-thirds of Mennonites from the most conservative churches, the Old Colony (5,500),<sup>9</sup> and Sommerfelder (several hundred) immigrated to Mexico in the 1920s. The government of Mexico granted them autonomous settlements in various locations across northern Mexico with the same type of *Privilegium* Canada had given the Mennonites in the 1870s.<sup>10</sup> In an attempt to preserve their traditional culture and religion, that is, the sacred village, the Mennonites attempted to isolate themselves from the larger Mexican society that surrounded their various settlements.<sup>11</sup>

In Latin America, families lived in semi-extended family units on farmyards that bordered both sides of a long street making up a village.<sup>12</sup> A colony was comprised of several villages whose religious and secular affairs were run by the men within the church. At a community level, the women were involved in the informal activities such as preparations for funerals and weddings. On a daily basis they were responsible for raising the children, caring for the household, which included tending a garden, and conducting farm work.

Despite the original will to maintain and preserve the “traditional” Mennonite culture, a significant number of descendants eventually left Mexico.<sup>13</sup> They have been steadily re-migrating back to Canada. A common motivatin factor for the *Dietsche* people is the poor economic situation of the colonies in Latin America. Helen said they left because, “Well it was that there were such poor years, and there was little rainfall, and then it became poor there.” She speaks to forces beyond her control such as the devaluation of the peso, and drought. A growing population and shortage of arable land also left many without a means to earn a livelihood. Continued connections with Mennonites in Canada broke down barriers those in the Mexican colonies had placed around themselves to maintain their separate way of life. Issues around the use of rubber tires on tractors, and the use of electricity and other technologies divided the people. Many of the most traditional left the original colonies in Mexico for new settlements in other parts of Mexico and Latin America. Thus those remaining in the original colonies tended to accept some changes predisposing them to leave the colonies to find a way to earn a living when it was not possible to do so within the colonies. Most of the women I interviewed came from these latter communities.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

I use the concept of the sacred village as a heuristic tool to explore how *Dietsche* women preserve and transmit their culture within Canadian society. Sociologist Leo Driedger describes the dynamics of a “sacred village.”<sup>14</sup> It is a space that encompasses community life at the organizational, cultural, familial, economic, educational, friendship and religious levels. It is “sacred” because these Mennonites considered themselves a religious people whose organizations and families were under the authority of their church. In traditional sociological framework, generated by Emile Durkheim, that which is “sacred” is so because of prohibitions that serve

to separate it from something else thereby making that from which it is separate “profane.”<sup>15</sup> The boundaries, in terms of proscriptions and prescriptions, defined everything within the bounds of the village/colony as sacred. Therefore, that which was outside the boundaries, physical and metaphorical, was designated “of the world” or profane. The *Dietsche* women interviewed engage in negotiating this sacred village tradition, that is, they “choose” which elements to maintain and transfer. This results in a range of possible acculturation strategies.

John Berry’s acculturation typology illuminates how *Dietsche* immigrant women’s everyday experiences serve to acculturate them into the larger Canadian society. Berry has proposed four strategies that individuals adopt in order to acculturate. They are based on individuals’ “orientation to two issues: cultural maintenance (to what extent it is important to maintain one’s cultural heritage and identity); and contact and participation (to what extent is it important to seek out and participate with other groups in the larger society).”<sup>16</sup> Assimilation occurs when there is little desire for cultural maintenance and one seeks contact with other cultures. Separation develops when there is high cultural maintenance and low contact with other cultures. When an individual prefers cultural maintenance and contact with other groups, integration follows. Finally marginalization results from minimal interest or possibility of cultural maintenance and contact with other groups. While these are ideal types and several of these strategies may exist in one person, nevertheless, this typology aids in understanding how immigrants become part of, or acculturate into, a new plural society.

A feminist framework for conducting research and feminist theory also informs this work. As a daughter of *Dietsche* immigrant parents and a mother raising her children as cultural and religious Mennonites, I was interested in the extent that *Dietsche* women have been able to preserve and transmit their cultural and religious traditions to the next generation. I sought to explore women’s lived experiences within this community because “the only way of knowing a socially constructed world is knowing it from within.”<sup>17</sup> The ways in which women re-create or negotiate their culture in a new society occurs in a particular manner because they are women. Gender becomes the lens through which the process of negotiating culture and religion is accomplished.

As well, feminism also contributes the idea of the link between the “private” realm, the institution of the family, and the “public” realm, often related to economic and political institutions.<sup>18</sup> I am interested in the

discourse on public/private dichotomy insofar as it helps to examine *Dietsche* women's lives in their preservation and transmission of their culture and religion. In beginning from the place of *Dietsche* women's lives, that is, their role as mother in the family, it has become clear that their relegation to the private realm in the Mennonite community is a result of their "choice" to perpetuate certain elements of their sacred village heritage. They have undergone a shift from a relatively self-sufficient way of life that resembles the pre-industrial world with its interconnection between the public and private realms, that is, the sacred village, to a "modern" society, which is based on a dichotomy between the public and private.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Findings and Theoretical Analysis***

*Dietsche* immigrant women's experiences in, and response to, their sacred village heritage, with its interconnection between culture and religion, shape how they preserve and transmit their culture and how they relate to the larger Mennonite and Canadian society. The majority of the women stated that they moved to southern Manitoba because they wanted to continue to identify with the Mennonite community. They wanted to maintain a sense of their sacred village community:

Tina: When did you and why did you move to Manitoba?

Susan: Well, here (in southern Manitoba) at the schools, here they still prayed, in the school.

Tina: Oh, in Ontario it isn't in the public school?

Susan: No, there it isn't. And we wanted not to live in the city, we wanted to live in the country. Not always holidays (easy) when one has to keep the kids locked up inside, so that they can't go play outside when they are used to going to play outside. We moved to Blenheim, there we lived in the city and it was very hard with the children always so that when they went outside to play then one always had to be around. There were many kidnappers there.

Because the public school still allows prayer and Bible readings, southern Manitoba is viewed by many *Dietsche* women as a Christian friendly environment. The area provides a safe environment for her children from

the larger society, represented by Susan as “kidnappers.” Women, like Susan, and their families moved to the area because it was populated by Mennonites, because it was rural and contained villages that were familiar to them in their Latin American Mennonite colonies. Marie said, “I thought this was still villages and a lot like the place where we came from.” All the women perceived that migrating to a predominantly Mennonite area would provide the greatest opportunity to maintain a sense of their Mennonite identity.

Statements made by the *Dietsche* Mennonite women suggest that they are actively engaged in the process of negotiating their ethnic and religious culture in a new cultural environment. The women’s past, or habitus, in the sacred village “becomes a stabilizing influence that shapes the flow of effort and allows them to sustain identities, meanings, and interactions over time.”<sup>20</sup> They exert their agency (applying effort) by selecting the sacred village (their habitus) elements of religious community lived out in a particular geographical location separated from secular society and projecting it onto the Mennonite community in southern Manitoba. In doing so they maintain a particularly *Dietsche* Mennonite ethnic and religious identity. In this respect, the majority tend to separate themselves from the larger secular society, but integrate into the larger Mennonite society by assimilating or merging the larger Mennonite society into their conception of their past Mennonite sacred village experience. Upon leaving Latin America, they seek something familiar, and finding that which is most familiar integrate it into their religious and ethnic Mennonite identity. Thus “through this active process of recognition and assimilation [*Dietsche* Mennonite women] actors contribute to a sense of continuity and order within temporally evolving experiences.”<sup>21</sup> In this way, many separate themselves from the larger society while becoming part of the larger Mennonite society and maintain a Mennonite identity that is particularly *Dietsche*.

This tendency is further evidenced in hopes for and actual marriage patterns of their children. Women like Mary and her family emigrated from Latin America so their husbands could obtain employment, but chose southern Manitoba to ensure the maintenance of their cultural identity for their children:

Mary: There was very little for the children (unclear). There were Mexicans and (unclear). And they made friends with them. When they would have gone to school for 17 or 18 years, then they would

have had friends to whom they could have gotten married. And we thought about it a lot, so we moved out here.

Tina: So you didn't want your children to marry. . .

Mary: Dark people. I wanted them all to [marry]. . .

Tina: . . . with Mennonites?

Mary: Mmhmm (yes).

Tina: So have all your children married Mennonites?

Mary: Such as there are (those that have married have married Mennonites).

Mary was living in the United States in an area populated with many Hispanics. She said she saw her children making friends with people of different ethnicities and knew that if they stayed where they were, her children would possibly not marry other Mennonites. One of the motivations for coming to southern Manitoba was its high Mennonite population where her children could find Mennonite partners. All the women wanted their children to marry Christians, most, like Mary, thought it best if they were Mennonites. This may sound rather ethnocentric, that is, the belief that one's ethnic group is superior to others.<sup>22</sup> However, this attitude is in response to separate nature of the Latin American community which is based on the biblical mandate that Christians are to separate themselves from unbelievers (see 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.) Their concern also derives from the realization that the perpetuation of their culture and religion depends on endogamy.

Southern Manitoba acts as a Mennonite ethno-religious enclave<sup>23</sup> for these women and their families where, for example, public prayer at civic functions continues to be the accepted norm and traditional gender ideologies and roles predominate. Thus the Mennonite community in southern Manitoba can be construed as a "quasi-sacred village" for these women. The *Dietsche* women interviewed maintained that by living in this Mennonite enclave they are better able to preserve their ethnic and religious identity and ensure its continuation in the next generation. Weinfeld suggests that "Ethnic residential concentrations, whether as ghettos or neighbourhoods, have been linked to ethnic communal cohesion



and to the preservation of communal and cultural ties.”<sup>24</sup> He adds that living in ethnic enclaves seems to be voluntary. The participants uphold this suggestion because actors, such as Mary, state that they move to the area willingly to perpetuate their Mennonite identity by living with other Mennonites. This enables their children to continue to identify by greatly increasing the likelihood of marrying other Mennonites, because, as Weinfeld states, “ethnic intermarriage (marrying someone outside of one’s ethnic group) is usually seen as both a consequence of, and contributor to, the process of decreasing ethnic cohesion and ultimately, assimilation.”<sup>25</sup> As Mary and other *Dietsche* Mennonite women with adult children have attested, their children have predominantly married Mennonites. This illustrates their tendencies toward separation from the larger society, but integration into the larger Mennonite society.<sup>26</sup> Their children’s marriage to a Mennonite partner is, however, the culmination of years of dedication to raising their children to become Mennonites.

Within this “quasi-sacred village,” women take on the responsibility to raise their children to be religiously and ethnically Mennonite and the home itself is part of this sacred realm. Nettie’s response is typical of most women when asked what was important to teach their children: “I don’t know, what kind of words I should use. I wanted to bring them up to be Christians.” Caring for their children is their religious mandate. Mothers are unofficially sanctioned to perform this religious and cultural duty. This is evidenced by Marie’s statement about the use of babysitters:

Marie: I have used a babysitter only when I needed to go to the doctor or, there was a babysitter when I went to Bible study. I have almost had no use for babysitters. I mean babysitters are fine if you absolutely need them in an emergency. I don’t know, but otherwise I always said, “We got our children for the hours that it’s convenient and also for hours that it’s inconvenient; they’re ours.” And they’re just ours and we’re responsible for them. And I’m not willing to let other people instill their values in our children if they’re different from ours because somebody is going to instill values in the children. And they better be us because they’re ours and we know what we want . . . I mean they’re ours and who else should be having the privilege of raising them than us? And that’s why I think it’s sad that so many people and many small children have to go to daycares.

Mothers are obligated to stay at home to care for their young children, to instill cultural values and religious imperatives upon them. Alternative

care for their children is viewed as a threat to the role of mothers in the home and the transmission of one's culture and religion to the next generation. All the women interviewed cared for their children and their households on a full time basis until their youngest children could be cared for by older siblings, thereby overcoming this perceived threat.

Theoretically, all of women's work in the home takes on religious significance within the construct of the sacred village since their work maintains the larger Church community by socializing its members. However, there seems to be a disconnect between what they do as mothers and what is considered religious. This is noted in Justina's response to my question about what she did during her day that was religious:

Justina: I guess basically what I do during the day that is religious is make sure that we pray before meals and after, to thank Him [God] for the food. I guess basically when I do my work, well that everybody does so there isn't much religious or not religious about it but (chuckle).

Tina: But do you consider your work to be religious, something that you do that is part of your idea of what faith is about?

Justina: Right, I guess yeah, staying at home, being here for the children when they come home and stuff, I do believe that is important for that [as part of being religious] too.

Because "everybody" does the type of work she does as a mother, she checks herself for thinking that it is religious. In questioning her about whether she does consider it to be religious, she consents that it is. While they are charged with the mandate to raise their children to become Mennonites, the mundane work that takes up much of their time, which is so much a part of the task of raising children, is not a church recognized religious task. It is just that, mundane. Nevertheless, they believe that their role in staying at home to raise their children to become religious Mennonites is of infinite value.

*Dietsche* women as actors tie together their task of childrearing with religious work; it is again something done out of an engagement with their past repertoire.<sup>27</sup> They select the role of mother in the home with which they are intimately familiar in the Latin American sacred village, infusing it with an invigorated religious purpose: they are the ones responsible for transmitting Mennonite religious identity to their children. As they did in

Latin America, they continue to raise religious Mennonites for the larger Mennonite community because they have internalized the larger community into their conception of their own Mennonite identity. Typically, feminists “have questioned the universality of the distinction between public and private spheres.”<sup>28</sup> A feminist analysis exposes the ways in which the private sphere, the family, and public sphere, in this case the church and community, are mutually integrated rather than separate.<sup>29</sup> The *Dietsche* women whom I interviewed defied the dichotomization of the private and public spheres. Though the women function primarily in the “private” sphere of the home, they see it as integral to the larger Mennonite society in which they live. Their work in the home is religious because it creates the space in which the future generation of the Mennonite society is perpetuated. This way of being is a continuation of their sacred village in Latin America. These women migrate from a sacred village where all they did including raising children, socializing them into the church and community, sustaining the largely self-sufficient farm household and completing farm work, connected their economic, cultural and religious spheres. The lines between public and private were blurred. They continue to blur these lines in their new society.

While raising children is their primary task, household production along with providing economically for the family are also important but tend to fit in around children. There is a definite shift in the way children are perceived and the mother’s role in raising them from Latin America to Canada. In Latin America, children fit in among the various tasks necessary to run a farm and household and were expected to contribute at early ages to their operation. Trudy recalls her own experiences as a child:

I often had to stay home from school to help mom wash. My mom was . . . when my last brother was born I was eleven years old and then my mom’s fingers became very sore and she could not work. Then I had to stay home a lot, always kneading dough and making food.

Mothers did not cater to their children’s needs, rather children, like Trudy, were expected to aide in the maintenance of the household and farm. In North America, the priorities for children change. Mothers come to realize that their children cannot appropriate better jobs without at least some high school education.

Tina: So for you that is important to go to school.

Susan: Well, if they want to. It has to be that one has to have a high school diploma if they want to get a decent job.

While Susan realizes the necessity of a basic education, she leaves this choice to her children. This is in itself a change, because in Trudy's case she was not given a choice. In Latin America, religious education was administered through church-run schools. In Canada, Sunday schools (religious instruction on Sunday mornings in churches) take the place of these schools. The majority of the socialization is relegated to mothers. Religious education for their children is also seen as important by the women interviewed:

Justina: I guess also we never went to Sunday school. And we only started going to church when we were teenagers, basically that's when we were allowed to go to church and I definitely believe that a child should be taken to church from the beginning as soon as it's born. So that we do different.

Even though Justina's children attend a private Mennonite school with Christian curriculum, it is important for her that her children become part of the institutional church at a very young age. Children's development, instead of their "usefulness" becomes a priority for these women as they appropriate North American cultural values regarding children and their future employment. In addition, the women see the need to perpetuate their religious and cultural values for the future through their children's development.

Working for pay often revolves around their children and at times involves them. Susan said that, "One just has to spend more time with them. That's the [reason] I started working outside the home for pay at night. I felt that my kids needed me to spend more time with them, if I wanted to teach them. I started working the nights when they sleep." The other shifts available at the factory in which she works would take her out of the home in the evenings for two weeks out of the month. Thus Susan is compelled to renegotiate her perception of being a mother in conjunction with employment options regardless of the economic constraints. In order to be the role model she feels her school age children need, and to earn a living, she reorganized her life working at night and sleeping during

the day when her children are at school. Susan's negotiation of work and childrearing was similar to that of the other women in the study. Trudy only worked during the summer for a vegetable farmer, where she could bring her children along. Marie ensured that her children were part of the family business:

Well they went along with him (her husband) before they went to school. And I mean I was there often at the work site too. And when he was working, like he did a lot of floor installations, I remember I just waited till they were home from school and we all packed up and we went to where he was and helped him whatever needed to be done.

The children's first responsibility was their education, however, Marie continued to want her children to play an active role in their family's company, just as children in Latin America take part in the family's operations. Actions by Marie and Trudy in involving their children in the realm of work, blurs the lines between the public and private.

Self-sufficiency and a connection to the land are two important *Dietsche* Mennonite cultural values that many of the women attempted to perpetuate in Canada. By perpetuating this aspect of their *Dietsche* heritage, they attempted to reduce the bifurcation encountered in their new society. Many grew gardens, and raised or had access to farm animals, whereby they could supply many of their needs. Mary grew a garden but was unable to keep animals in the small town in which she lived; still she maintained a connection to the farm particularly for the sake of her children. She, along with other mothers, stated that they wanted their children to have an appreciation for food's origins and self-sufficiency:

Tina: Did you always have a garden?

Mary: Always. Every year we had one and the children had to help. And we slaughtered chickens.

Tina: You did that too?

Mary: Mhmm, they were supposed to know how to do that too. Now it's not so necessary because you can go and buy it in the store. But I have nevertheless, the older ones anyway, taught them how to slaughter chickens.

Tina: Ok. Did you also slaughter pigs?

Mary: Mmhhh. Every year we did one. And when we slaughtered they had to help. We just bought it from my husband's uncle. And we drove there often so that the children could be on the farm among the chickens and pigs and so they could see everything. And now almost all of them know what it looks like. Well, not how much work it all is, that they don't know about. But that is a lot of work.

Tina: Did you wish that you could have a farm with all the animals and everything?

Mary: Yes.

Tina: But you couldn't?

Mary: No, we . . . well my husband was always [busy working] when we first got here. He didn't want to. I wanted to because I wanted the children all to learn it.

Tina: Mmhhh. But you tried to have them learn a little bit.

Mary: We drove to places where all that sort of stuff was . . . I wanted them to know what it was about.

Women such as Mary wanted their children to be familiar with and have an appreciation for their heritage culture. Even though circumstances at times did not allow some of the women to be as self-sufficient as they would have liked, many found ways to transmit elements of an agrarian life to their children. This self-sufficiency allowed women with few employment opportunities due to their often definitive ideas regarding division of labour based on gender, lack of education or limited English language abilities, to provide for their families.

Thus "as actors respond to changing environments, they must reconstruct their view of the past in an attempt to understand the causal conditions of the emergent present, while using the understanding to control and shape their responses to the arising future."<sup>30</sup> As Emirbayer and Mische suggest for all acts of agency, the past lies at the base of how *Dietsche* women interpret what they want in the future and the means by which they arrive there.<sup>31</sup> The past has a stabilizing effect allowing individuals to maintain identities and meanings in the present and for the future. One of agency's dimensions, is the "practical-evaluative" wherein

a problem is encountered, is related to the past, is thought about as to possible consequences of actions and decisions are made whether deliberately or unconsciously.<sup>32</sup> Several problems arise due to the *Dietsche* women's migration and change in environment. Many of the women's actions were simultaneously oriented to the past and future. In encountering a new way of life, Mary wanted to maintain and have her children be exposed to their past self-sufficient agrarian way of life by growing gardens and accessing animals. As well, a change in the way work is accomplished meant making decisions that would accommodate their work around their traditional role as mother. However, in this process change does occur though it continues to be oriented around their habitus. Mother's roles become more centered around their children, while the role itself become more oriented towards religious and cultural transmission. These changes reflect the operation of a third dimension Emibrayer and Misch describe as being interconnected with the iterational and practical-evaluative: the projective dimension.<sup>33</sup> This consists of goals and hopes about the future. The projective is oriented to the past, but is done so with reference to future possibilities. *Dietsche* Mennonite women reflect on the past to change the present actions for future benefits which ultimately refers to the continuation of their children's Mennonite identity.

### **Conclusion**

*Dietsche* women have been successful in preserving their culture and religion in several ways. One way they have done so is by migrating to an area that resembles their cultural heritage. By positioning themselves within this Mennonite enclave most are able to associate themselves with this new community allowing them to transfer aspects of their *Dietsche* Mennonite culture and religion. They separate themselves, as they see it, from the larger Canadian society by migrating to southern Manitoba; this is an act of preserving their sacred village heritage, that is, of being separate. It also serves the purpose of promoting endogamy, which supports the continuation of their culture and religion. Another way in which they have been successful in preserving their culture and religion is by concentrating on raising their children in the home, allowing as little as possible any outside influence, particularly in their early years. As well, many of the women have been able to involve their children in work and/or household production, which is an important aspect of their culture. Finally, many have continued some degree of self-sufficiency and

connection to farm life, including children in these tasks. A testimony to their success is that the majority of the women's adult children married Mennonites and remained in the area.

Particular concepts and theories help one to understand *Dietsche* women's lives. Taken together, the concept of the sacred village and Berry's acculturation typology inform the various ways in which *Dietsche* women acculturate into the larger Canadian and Mennonite society. The concept of the sacred village, with its emphasis on segregation, predisposes the *Dietsche* women to exhibit an "attitude of separation" to the larger Canadian society, that is, many of the *Dietsche* women were concerned about cultural maintenance and did not seek out contacts with the larger society. To maximize their Mennonite identity in the face of migration to Canada, they integrate, to greater and lesser degrees, into the larger Mennonite society in southern Manitoba. Feminist theory also assists in understanding *Dietsche* women's everyday lives by illuminating the gendered nature of the preservation and transmission of culture to the next generation and exposing the false dichotomy between the public and private spaces in which this occurs. The women interviewed center their efforts around the home, but at the same time contextualize their activities in the larger Mennonite community.

While this paper has focused on how *Dietsche* immigrant women maintain and transfer their traditional culture and religion to the next generation it must be understood that not all the women share equally the desire for retention. Also, the environment in Canada is significantly different from that of Latin America so a considerable amount of change inevitably occurs. Migrating to Canada allows some of the women the ability to discard aspects of their traditional culture and religion with which they no longer wish to connect, such as conformity to a certain mode of dress. In traditional Mennonite culture, their way of life and religion are intimately connected; in Canada new ways of doing the Mennonite religion are introduced as well new occupations and educational models. Mennonite culture and religion in Canada, with its adaptation to the Canadian environment, causes the "traditional" *Dietsche* culture to change and adapt as these Mennonites incorporate Canadian Mennonitism into their own way of life.

Further research on preservation and transmission of culture to the next generation needs to be conducted. It is often only in-depth qualitative research that reveals the finer nuances of acculturation. Particularly with respect to the *Dietsche* people, this type of analysis needs to occur in other



geographic locations in which they reside, such as southern Ontario and northern Alberta, to explore differences and similarities. As well, research on ways in which men preserve and transmit must also be performed with analysis that also explores the integration between private and public realms. Finally, how the children of *Dietsche* immigrants come to internalize and express their *Dietsche* Mennonite identity and their own estimations of their parents' efforts needs further exploration.

### **Endnotes**

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