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*Community of Faithful Dissidents: Representations of Anabaptism
in Swiss Historical Fiction by
Walter Laedrach and Katharina Zimmermann*

Abstract

The twentieth-century Swiss local authors Walter Laedrach and Katharina Zimmermann rediscovered the dark chapter of Swiss history documenting the torture and execution of non-resistant and non-conformist Christians in the Bernese *Oberland*. The following analysis of the literary representation of these pacifist Anabaptists will identify historiographical sources that served as inspiration to the authors and the contributions their historical novels make in Switzerland's process of coming to terms with its tragic past.

1. Introduction and historical background

«Früher verjagt, heute gefragt»¹ is a phrase that fittingly captures the Anabaptists' experience in their Swiss homeland. When the Anabaptist movement started in the midst of the sixteenth-century European Reformation, its followers were soon harried out of their Swiss homeland. As an alternative reform movement, Anabaptism sought to restore the early apostolic church and attain discipleship to Christ through self-exclusion from the secular realm and ecclesiastical sphere governed by the Swiss Reformed Church. As the movement rose and spread quickly in the State of Bern², the

¹ In their 2006 annual meeting, the European Mennonite Conferences asserted that «nachdem die Täufer früher verfolgt wurden, sind die Schweizer Mennoniten heute stärker gefragt als je zuvor in der Geschichte», especially in consideration of Switzerland's *Täuferjahr* (a year of commemorating the Anabaptists) in 2007 and the broadcasting of Peter von Gunten's Anabaptist documentary *Im Leben und über das Leben hinaus* on Swiss Television in 2005 (Hege Halle, Rediger 1).

² At that time, Bern was organized as a city-state and often referred to as *Stand Bern* (State of Bern). Since the use of the term *Kanton* (canton) for Bernese territory and government only appeared in the eighteenth century, the area will be referred to as the State of Bern in this article.

Bernese authorities issued orders that demanded the abolition and extermination of the radical faith group. In spite of unceasing persecution, the region of Bern, notably the Emmental, was able to remain a central location for Swiss Anabaptism until the early eighteenth century due to the deep valleys and more inaccessible homesteads of the *Oberland*, where members of the faith group managed to avoid persecution and carried on their Anabaptist belief and practice for centuries.

Self-exclusion from the secular realm was both a prerequisite for and a consequence of the Anabaptist endeavour to emulate the early church. The movement's mission to gather a community of true disciples that incarnate values associated with Christ's teachings caused social and political nonconformity. The Brotherhood's refusal to take the oath of allegiance and serve in the military was perceived as an act of civil disobedience by Bernese officials and punished accordingly. In reaction to Brethren's non-conformity with the secular powers, the Bernese Council formed the Commission for Anabaptist Affairs (*Committierten zum Täufergeschäft*) in 1659 to carry out measures against the faith group including the banishment of Brethren from the region³. The departure from the Emmental homeland was most traumatic for the Swiss Brethren⁴. Oyer has explained that the mountain folk struggled greatly with the exile from their homeland because they believed «God visited them in a particular geographical locale» and therefore regarded the *Oberland* as a sacred place (102). Their love of home and kin prompted many Anabaptist emigrants to return to the State of Bern where their repeated capture resulted in incarceration and galley slavery.

This regional aspect inspired several Swiss authors to write about seventeenth-century Anabaptism in their homeland. Particularly the events in Bern, the significant gain in the numbers of believers followed by severe persecution, and the great aid given by caring neighbors provide plentiful material for regional novelists. Fictional writings employing the development of Bernese Anabaptism as a principle theme began to appear in the twentieth century when authors rediscovered the Brethren's tragic fate. The writers' awareness of the region's Anabaptist past is largely due to the efforts of Ernst Müller and his research assistant Adolf Fluri who helped him

³ In 1699, the Anabaptist Commission (*Täuferkammer*) replaced the *Committierten zum Täufergeschäft*, continuing the work of looking after the confiscated estates of Anabaptists and administering Anabaptist mandates and orders issued by the Bernese government.

⁴ Their love to the geographical homeland caused many of the Emmental Anabaptists to suffer from homesickness when going into exile. The experience of leaving the beloved hills and valleys was expressed, for instance, in Daniel Krehbiel's poem «Peter Krehbiels Abschied von der Schweiz 1671».

to compile the history of Bernese Anabaptism for his publication *Geschichte der bernischen Täufer* (1895). Müller, a Reformed church minister in Bern, explains in the introduction of his work the motivations that led to the writing of the Anabaptist history, namely to offer current congregations a «Darstellung ihrer Geschichte, denn diese Gemeinde ist eine Märtyrerkirche, die ihre Existenzberechtigung und ihre Kraft in ihrer Geschichte hat» (2). He honored the memory of the early Brotherhood by identifying the Brethren's self-sacrifice and dedication to values and beliefs as essential aspects of the Swiss character (2). With his description of the atrocities that Brethren suffered in Bern, he laid the foundation for the Swiss *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and provided a great impetus for several fictional writings on the Anabaptist theme, two of them presented in this article. Müller's call for the rehabilitation of the marginalized group received strong support from Walter Laedrach and Katharina Zimmermann. In their respective novels, the authors commemorate the Brethren's passionate conviction, religious courage, political fortitude, and endurance of pain as part of the history, culture, and identity of their Bernese homeland.

2. Laedrach: *Passion in Bern* – Between Sedition and Piety

In his novel *Passion in Bern*, published in 1938, Walter Laedrach gives a sympathetic and historically accurate portrayal of the Bernese Anabaptists at the end of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Having studied history, geography, and literature at the University of Bern, the author was eager to explore the socio-religious particularities of the Emmental region⁵. As a teacher in the rural area of Hasle-Rüegsau, Laedrach came to appreciate the Bernese countryside and consequently combined the aspects of local history and rural scenery into his literary works and folkloristic nonfiction⁶. His historical narrations are characterized by «Sympathie für die Zukurzgekommenen», whether depicting individuals who have been neglected by society, as for instance in the fictional works *Aufstieg zur Sonnseite* (1941) and *Die Genesung* (1948) or entire groups who experienced persecution by

⁵ According to his biographer Paul Hugger, Laedrach grew up in a Pietist home (13). It can be assumed that his interest in the local church development was motivated by his personal commitment to the Christian faith.

⁶ In his collection of folkloristic nonfiction and as editor of the *Berner Heimatbücher*, Laedrach was concerned with the portrayal of the Bernese rural countryside and lifestyle (Meister 1). Due to his great investment in the history of Bern – many of the manuscripts collected in his literary estate at the Staatsarchiv Bern deal with matters of the local Bernese history – he became known as «lokaler Kulturträger» (Hugger 13).

the state, such as the Anabaptists in his novel *Passion in Bern* (Berner Schriftsteller-Verein 96).

Laedrach's Brethren novel is set in the midst of the conflict between Swiss Brethren and the Bernese authorities in the late seventeenth century. The story begins with an act of charity committed by the Bernese couple Hans and Anna Flückiger who provide shelter for the wounded soldier Peter. While recovering and gaining back his strength at the Flückiger home, the mercenary discovers the family's affiliation with the Swiss Brethren movement. Anna is a member of the faith group and frequently hides Anabaptist preachers in a small chamber built into the wall of their house. Although her husband attends the local Reformed Church service, he supports her efforts to protect fellow Brethren from persecution. As Peter ponders on the unethical conduct he witnessed during his military service, he turns to the Brotherhood for spiritual nurture and guidance, and eventually joins the faith group. In the meantime, Swiss officials prepare for a war against French influence on Switzerland and start a new campaign to enforce the pledge of allegiance and military conscription. Hearing about the Brethren's refusal to swear an oath and bear arms, they call for a strict implementation of Anabaptist mandates and deputize a corps of *Täuferjäger*. During one of these Anabaptist hunts, Anna and Peter are captured and put in prison where they are starved into submission. Anna miraculously manages to escape from the dungeon and flees back to her *Oberland* home where she dies in the company of her family. Peter also returns to the Flückiger family but is reported to state officials, resulting in the imprisonment of both himself and Hans for he has harbored the dissident believer. During his interrogation, Hans proclaims his conversion to Anabaptism in order to experience the same pain that his wife had previously suffered during her imprisonment. However, when the church bells ring to announce the victory of Swiss troops, he realizes that he bears responsibility for the state and his family. He recants the Anabaptist faith, returns to his children, and tears down the secret chamber in his house. Peter, on the other hand, emigrates with his wife – the daughter of the Flückiger's – to the French Jura mountain where the Brethren faced less persecution than in their Bernese homeland.

Laedrach's fictional treatment of the Bernese Anabaptists provides a valuable illustration of the *Oberland* Brethren in respect to historical accuracy and insight into the spirit of the faith group. In his literary depiction of the religious movement, the author addresses central aspects characteristic of the situation of the faith group in seventeenth-century Bern: the transition from religious to secular persecution based on the Brethren's rejection of

the oath and military service; the government's strategic approach to rid the country of Anabaptist influences by establishing a centralized commission and a network of spies and *Täuferjäger*; the strict implementation of harsh punishment including galley slavery; the religious renewal and vitality of the Brotherhood despite severe persecution.

Laedrach combined factual and fictional elements in his Anabaptist novel. Fictional figures such as Peter and Anna represent typical Anabaptist characters and illustrate the Brotherhood's religious principles and ethical conduct⁷. Historical personages, for instance, the Reformed pastor Thormann and the Dutch Mennonite Vlamingh appear according to historical references and their own writings of that time⁸. In his portrayal of the historical events, places, and figures, Laedrach was greatly influenced by Ernst Müller's pioneering work on the Bernese Anabaptists. The major aspects in his historical novel such as the Brethren's opposition to military service, their interaction with the local population, and their terrible lives as slaves on the galleys, are directly taken from Müller's historical writing⁹. In the preliminary novel layout and manuscript of his *Täuferroman*, the novelist occasionally adds page numbers of Müller's work that correspond thematically to sections of his narration (St.A.B. 7). Thus, some of the details, for instance, the description of the secret chamber resemble the historian's account of the underground Anabaptist movement in Bern¹⁰. Moreover, the novelist adopts Müller's somewhat didactic approach to the issue of the conflict between the religionists and the state articulated in the last section of his historical writing. The historian concludes that both the Brotherhood

⁷ The author's handwritten notes pertaining to the novel indicate that Peter's character is based on the historically attested figure Hans Bürki who served as an Anabaptist preacher in the Emmental in the late seventeenth century. Laedrach drafted Bürki's biography with the heading «Der Täufer vom Trachselwald», including well-known facts about Bürki's life – for instance, his capture by the government, confinement in the Bernese dungeon tower – as well as general information about the Brethren's convictions and labor as galley slaves (St.A.B. 7).

⁸ The archival material of *Passion in Bern* contains an outline in which Laedrach lists reported Bernese Brethren and local Brethren hymns, to be included into his historical novel (St.A.B. 7).

⁹ See Müller 132, 136, 215-232.

¹⁰ Müller has related in his work that «als vor etwa zwanzig Jahren das alte Haus abgebrochen wurde, fand sich zwischen zwei Wänden ein verstecktes Gemach, in dem ein Stuhl und ein Bajonett sich befand» (122). Similarly, Laedrach describes the hidden «Gemach» as a dark and narrow cranny that is furnished with one chair and hanging on the wall «ein[em] krumme[n] Säbel, den vor vielen Jahren ein verprügelter Täuferjäger verloren [hat]» (10-12).

and the Bernese state advocated «alte Wahrheitselemente», namely Christ's sole magistracy on the one hand and the appointment of authorities by God on the other hand, realizing that «zu einem Zusammenwachsen in eine höhere Form waren sie noch nicht reif» (399). Following Müller's notion of differing yet equal theological concepts, Laedrach ends his novel with the assertion of the Bernese officer: «Eigentlich wollten wir ja das Gleiche! Ich wollte einen mächtigen Staat, und sie ...? Sie auch! Aber nicht ganz auf die gleiche Art» (288).

The Anabaptists in Laedrach's fictional narration are characterized by a sense of independence and an opposition to the state authorities rooted in their distinct theological beliefs and practices. Despite harsh persecution by the Bernese state, the local Anabaptist community undergoes a dramatic growth and becomes more emancipated through the support of the village population. Peter's conversion to Anabaptism serves as an example for the group's rapid growth based on its emphasis on genuine fellowship. In that respect, his baptism represents an outward expression of his spiritual rebirth. The practice of (re)baptism is an integral aspect of the Brethren's separatist ecclesiology portrayed in the novel. Through the act of believer's baptism, Peter commits himself to discipleship and becomes a member of the religious community. Anna, who has also joined the community through baptism, explains the difference between the Anabaptist fellowship and the state church to the local Reformed pastor: «Ihr seid die Welt ... aber wir Brüder und Schwestern wissen, daß der Welt Freundschaft Gottes Feindschaft ist. Wer der Welt Freund sein will, der wird Gottes Feind sein» (122). In her explanation, she draws a line between the church and the world, alluding to the existence of two kingdoms: the secular kingdom and the kingdom of God. This notion of the two worlds functions as a group-building element in the novel. Only in the company of like-minded believers, they experience the joy and anticipation of God's kingdom: «Glücklich war sie [Anna] nur in der Vereinigung ihrer Brüder und Schwestern; nur dort verspürte sie den Vorgesmack der Seligkeit» (18).

In the narration, the congregation emphasizes the practical life of Christian discipleship rather than abstract points of doctrine. As Anna asserts, «der Unterschied ist nicht in der Lehre, aber in der Gemeinde», suggesting an orthopractical rather than orthodox approach to faith (147). The Brethren's insistence on a practical application of a Christ-centered theology that manifests itself in a moral transformation, noticeable, for instance, by a commitment to non-violence and a refusal to swear oaths, is perceived as a threat to the foundation of Swiss political and social order. The Brotherhood's rejection of the oath based on a literal reading of the New Testament

becomes most pronounced in Peter's interrogation by state officials. He responds to the officer's demand to swear an oath:

Gnädiger Herr, was das Eidschwören betrifft, so glauben wir, ... daß der Herr Christus den Seinen dasselbe untersagt und verboten hat, daß man auf keinerlei Weise schwöre, sondern daß ja, ja und nein, nein müsse sein. Daraus verstehen wir, daß uns alle hohen und geringen Eide verboten sind, und daß wir unser Ja und Nein so getreulich halten müssen. (77)

With an uncompromising clarity, Peter articulates the Anabaptist refusal to swear oaths by keeping with the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt: 5.37). This practice of Anabaptist discipline generates a collective identity. Using the pronoun «wir», Peter identifies with the religious group, thus separating himself from the state as he follows the Brotherhood's distinct theological system and its practical implications.

Alternating between state officials and the Anabaptists, the omniscient narrator presents the point of view of both the oppressor and the oppressed. The Brethren are idealized as peaceful and pious members of the rural community, and at the same time, they are demonized as political dissenters by state authorities. It is a dialectic that derives from the biased portrayal of the religious group in seventeenth-century accounts such as Thormann's *Probier-Stein*. In a conversation between clerical and secular authorities, one of the councilmen asserts: «damals strafte man die Ketzler mit dem Tode; heute straft man die staatsfeindlichen Untertanen mit Bußen und Landesverweisung», indicating a shift in the perception of the Brethren (89).

The emphasis on the Brethren's subversive rather than heretical attributes is particularly expressed by the character of Thormann. In the novel, the Reformed pastor sides with the state authorities. Similar to his actual publication in 1693, the fictional Thormann seeks ways to prevent further spread of the radical movement. In his effort to convert the Brethren to the state church, he admits that the problem was mishandled in the previous century and that violence avails nothing (87). He approves of the officer's comparison of the faith group to a «dumme[n] Bauernjunge[n], der zu unrecht von seinem Vater Prügel bekam und nachher nicht essen wollte und im Trotz sagte: Extra hab ich Hunger und friß keinen Käs» (90). The councilman's illustration of the group's perceived stubbornness addresses the central theme of the novel, namely the issue of civil (dis)obedience. From the perspective of the ruling government, the Brethren appear as a religious minority that refuses to acknowledge the necessity of a worldly authority after having experienced harsh persecution by the State of Bern.

As a result of their perceived dissident character, the Bernese Brethren are faced with another wave of persecution which they interpret in the language of martyrdom. Perceiving themselves as «Ausgestoßene», the Brethren construct a self-image that is determined by their role as outsiders and victims of governmental orders (14). The possibility of suffering draws them closer to their faith community and reinforces the principle of imitating Christ in his bearing of the cross. According to the novel's title, the Brethren's experience of physical, spiritual, and mental suffering due to the officials' cruel persecution is perceived as an act of imitating the Passion of Christ¹¹.

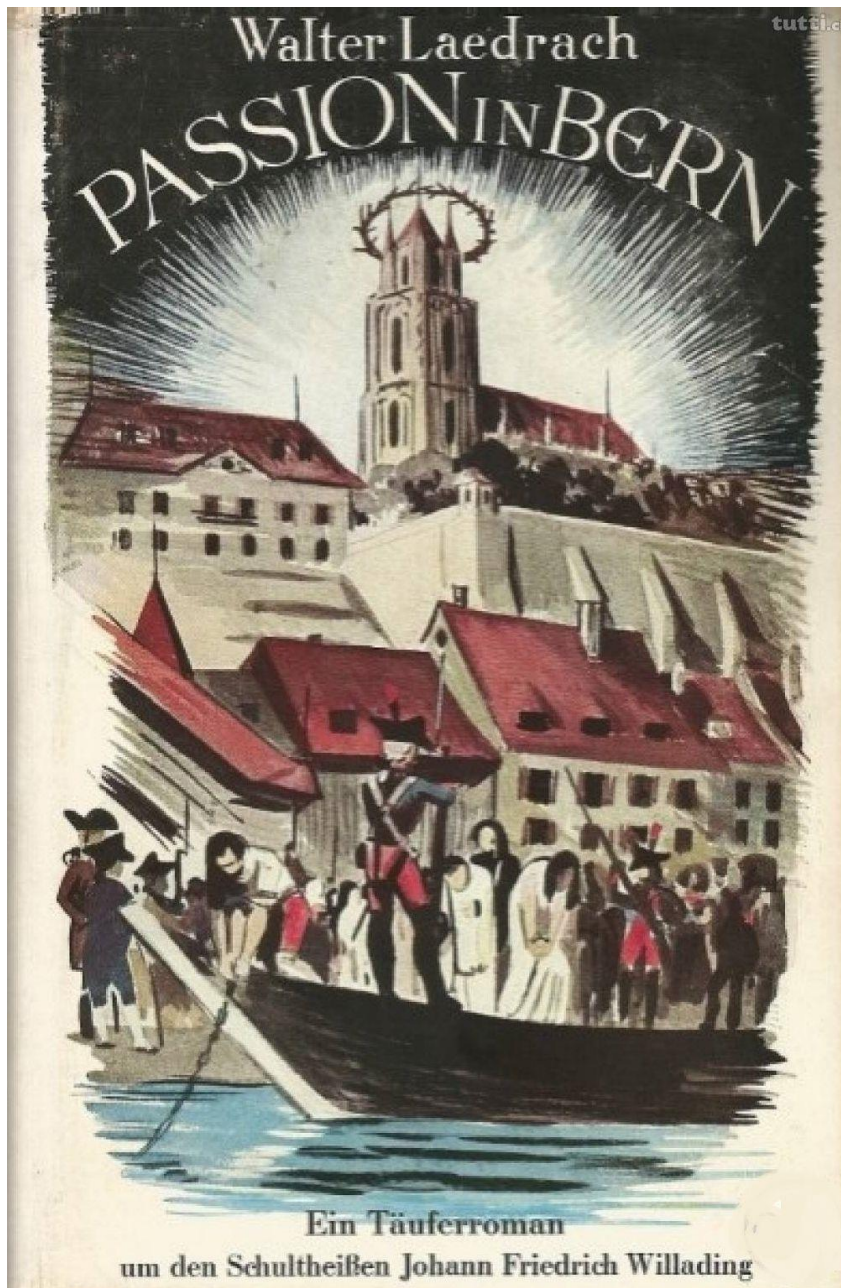
The image of the persecuted yet steadfast fellowship is particularly emphasized in the novel when Anna escapes from prison and finds temporary shelter at the house of Margaret Gurtner. The two women are united by their experience of suffering: «Hier lagen nun die beiden Duldnerinnen» (169). They bear («dulden») the pain that was inflicted upon them by state authorities. Reflecting on her deplorable situation as well as Anna's state of physical suffering, the old woman notes: «Wer sich nicht gebeugt hat vor der Welt, und wer den Glauben seiner Väter nicht abgeschworen, kehrt aufrecht heim, und wären ihm seine Glieder tausendmal geschändet worden» (169).

Despite the religious fervor of these two women, the novel ends with a loss of the Anabaptist story in the *Oberland*. Any traces of the nonconformist group are eventually erased from the memory of the Bernese state. Peter's emigration to the French Jura illustrates the Brotherhood's exodus from the Swiss homeland and the snow covering Bern at the end of the story symbolizes the state's attempt «alles Unrecht aus[zul]öschen, daß keine Erinnerung daran bliebe» (287). With his literary treatment of the seventeenth-century conflict between the State of Bern and the separatist religious movement, Laedrach rediscovers the history of Anabaptism in this region. Investigating the Brethren's distinct theology and their persecution by state authorities, the novel works toward a rapprochement between the Bernese state and the Anabaptist minority.

3. Zimmermann: *Die Furgge* – *Intersections of Locality and Faith*

After Laedrach's literary portrayal of the Brethren in Bern's *Oberland*, the Anabaptist movement received little attention from Bernese historical and

¹¹ Corresponding to the title's reference to Christ's travails and suffering, the novel's front cover displays the crown of thorns looming over the city of Bern.



Walter Laedrach. *Passion in Bern*. Ein Täuferroman um den Schultheißen Johann Friedrich Willading. Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch Verlag, 1938.

fictional writers¹². It appears that, indeed, all traces of the religious minority were buried in oblivion until 1989 when the Bernese author Katharina Zimmermann shed light on the movement's struggle with authorities' repressive policies in seventeenth-century Bern. In her novel *Die Furgge*, Zimmermann attempts to capture the particularities of the Emmental landscape and its people as they relate to the development of the historical Anabaptist movement. Zimmermann investigated the persecution of the religious minority in the Emmental after having come across the name of an Anabaptist woman in old records of Schangnau's Reformed Church. Her coincidental discovery in the «Taufrodel» (baptismal roll) led to the fictionalization of the historical Anabaptist figure¹³. The novelist researched the subject matter extensively, assembling the picture of the historical Bernese Brotherhood like a mosaic¹⁴. She sought contact with the Mennonite community in Amsterdam, consulted with scholars in the field of theology and folklore at the University of Bern, and studied Müller's work on the history of Bernese Anabaptism¹⁵. As a result of her commitment to thorough research, the novel gives a sympathetic and historically accurate depiction of the late seventeenth-century Anabaptist movement in the Emmental.

The novel is divided into two narrative levels. The frame story is set in present-day Emmental where the musician Anna visits the Bernese countryside as a relaxing getaway from the stress of her career and family life. In

¹² Apart from Laedrach's collection of folkloristic nonfiction about Bern in the mid twentieth century, the history of the Bernese Brethren was predominantly examined by Swiss Mennonites in America, for instance Delbert Gratz and Isaac Zürcher. In his publication *Die Täufer um Bern*, the latter provided an account of his ancestral past for the *Schweizerische Verein für Täufergeschichte* in 1986.

¹³ In a personal interview, Zimmermann recounted the events that inspired her to investigate the Bernese Anabaptists. While her husband served as pastor at the Reformed church in Schangnau, she decided to write a novel about this area «wo die Bauernhöfe noch alle gleich hießen wie vor dreihundert Jahren». When she discovered the name Madleni Schilt in a list of people who had been expelled from Bern during the time of the great Anabaptist deportation at the end of the seventeenth century, she contacted the municipal administration for more information. As she randomly opened one of the old baptismal rolls, she recognized Madleni's name, a coincidence that fully convinced her to write about this former Bernese resident and her affiliation with the Anabaptist movement.

¹⁴ Zimmermann noted in the interview that her research «war sehr aufwendig, ein Zusammensuchen von Mosaikstücken».

¹⁵ In the acknowledgement on the last page of *Die Furgge*, Zimmermann expresses her gratitude to Ernst Müller, who, as she asserts, has started the process of the «Rehabilitierung der Altevangelischen Wehrlosen Taufgesinnten Gemeinde» with his historical research on Bernese Anabaptism (256).

the small town of Schangnau, at the foot of the Hohgant mountain (formerly known as «Furgge»), she makes time for herself and gathers strength. While talking to a hotel guest, she finds out about the region's Anabaptist history. Although she has not previously heard of the Anabaptists, she soon develops a great interest in their history. As she becomes more and more invested in this local history and studies the old records in depth, she starts reconstructing the life of Madleni Schilt, a member of the local Anabaptist group.

Thus, the embedded story centers around Madleni, who lives with her husband Christen in the area of the Emmental. The young woman suffers a serious depression after her first two children were stillborn. Only through the religious views of the old Anabaptist woman Ida, Madleni regains strength and a sense of purpose. While Madleni converts to the Anabaptist faith and participates in the fellowship's clandestine gatherings at night, her husband remains with the Reformed Church and allows for his four children to be baptized by the local pastor. However, when he is dismissed from his duties at the «Chorgerich» (the village court), he joins his wife at a secret Anabaptist meeting, and soon becomes a committed member of the underground church. Soon after, he is forced to flee the country when authorities propose a stricter enforcement of mandates against those who refuse to bear arms and swear the oath of allegiance. As the government issues the deportation of all resident Anabaptists to colonies in North America, Madleni and fellow members of the Brotherhood are flocked together in the city of Bern and shipped out of the country. Upon her return to the homeland, she discovers that the Bernese government confiscated her property and hired out her daughters to families in the area. When one of the spies in the neighborhood reports her to the state officials, she is captured again and sent to the dungeons where she faces imprisonment and a starvation diet until the end of her days.

Similar to Laedrach's historical novel, Zimmermann's story combines factual and fictional elements on the two narrative levels. While the embedded narration fictionalizes historically attested figures¹⁶ and incorporates

¹⁶ As Zimmermann has pointed out in her interview, the protagonist, Madleni Schilt «existierte wirklich. Im Taufrodel von 1690, aufbewahrt in der Gemeindeschreiberei Schangnau, steht ihr Name als Gotte des kleinen Christen». The narration also fictionalizes well-known characters of the seventeenth-century Anabaptist movement, for instance Hans Bürki, the Brethren preacher in the Emmental and Johann Ludwig Runckel, the Dutch ambassador to Switzerland and friend of the Brotherhood.

songs and attributes characteristic for the seventeenth-century movement¹⁷, the frame narration presents information about the Brotherhood predominantly in a descriptive style through reports, citations, and historical discussions¹⁸. This presentation of historical facts allows the fictional character to reflect on the Anabaptist theme, thereby relating it to contemporary debates concerning, for instance, Switzerland's compulsory military service, and the coming to terms with the shortcomings of Switzerland's refugee politics during World War II.

Drawing a comparison between the exile of Jews in World War II and the banishment of Bernese Brethren in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the author perceives the discussion of the Anabaptist issue as a matter of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. In her novel, she describes and analyzes the conflict between the nonconformist group and the state, thus working through Bern's authoritarian past. In an interview, Zimmermann has noted that the oppression of the Anabaptist group «ein historisches Phänomen [sei], das aber nie aufgearbeitet wurde». She explores the reasons for the state's non-acceptance of its Anabaptist past, explaining in the primary fabula of her narration that «[man] etwas Ungutes gern verdrängt. Und dann war Angst dabei, viel Angst, die hat alle Erinnerung gelöscht» (13). Consequently, her engagement with Bern's Anabaptist history initiates the process of resurrecting memories that were suppressed and forgotten throughout the course of the past three centuries. Her literary treatment of the Brethren theme is an attempt to raise consciousness of the Anabaptist-hostile era in the state's history.

Similar to Laedrach's representation of the Bernese Brotherhood as a righteous yet subversive group, the Anabaptists in *Die Furgge* are characterized by a strict obedience to New Testament teachings, especially non-violence, which results in an opposition to secular powers. Depicted as mountain folk, the Brethren in Zimmermann's novel lead a simple life close to nature, and practice an ethical faith that is rooted in the spiritual reform movement predating the Reformation. The term «Altevangelische», fre-

¹⁷ Much of this historical material, especially the information regarding the Anabaptist deportation in 1710, is drawn from Müller's *Bernischen Täufer* (299-314).

¹⁸ The information presented in the frame narrative is largely based on Müller's historical work, for instance the narrator dates the origin of Anabaptism back to the fourth century, when «damals das Christentum in Rom zur Staatsreligion proklamiert [wurde]» (226). Similarly, Müller traces the root of the Anabaptist-state conflict to the year 425 when the Western Roman Emperor Valentinian III issued a number of laws under which «das Christentum Staatssache geworden ist» (395).

quently used by the narrator, alludes to the concept of a direct lineage between Anabaptism and the early church¹⁹. As the Brotherhood remains true to the apostolic order, it sets itself apart from the state – a practice of world-church separation that is perceived as political subversion and consequently punished by civil authorities.

In her historical novel, Zimmermann links distinctive features of the Anabaptist separatist theology, particularly the Brethren's rejection of pedobaptism and their isolation from the fallen world, to the geographical specificities of the Bernese *Oberland*. The rural population of the Emmental lives on the edge of Swiss society, in terms of spatial proximity and social interaction. In the lonely valleys and isolated hamlets, far away from the local churches, it is seemingly difficult to follow church practices such as baptism of newborn children. This challenge of abiding by the rules of the state church in the remote region of the Emmental is exemplified by Madleni's struggle to take her newborn godchild through a ghastly winter storm to the predicant's house for the infant's baptism. Having been brought up in the belief that human beings are trapped in bondage to sin from the moment of their births, the young woman risks her own life for the sake of the child's baptism.

Deriving from the understanding of baptism as a religious act that confers the infant's salvation and saves him from the stain of original sin, Madleni faces an existential crisis when her first two children die before the ritual is performed. The predicant's assertion that children who have not received the benefit of baptism are «nicht von der Erbsünde bereinigt» torments the young mother (86). In this moment of great despair, the old Anabaptist woman Ida comes to her rescue. She is respected by the rural population and despite, or perhaps because of, her affiliation with the Brotherhood, she is perceived as a spiritual healer whose presence and prayer is reported to have worked «auch bei anderen Kranken schon Wunder» (93). Her act of laying «die Hand auf die Stirn der wild Phantasierenden», resulting in the cure of Madleni's feverish state, is reminiscent of shamanistic

¹⁹ The term «Altevangeltische» (old evangelicals) was first introduced by Ludwig Keller, who has identified Anabaptists as descendants of the primitive church. According to his lecture on *Altevangeltische Gemeinden*, there was a succession of true evangelical groups in the history of Christianity. In this sequence of apostolic orders, Anabaptism marks the early modern continuation of the early church tradition (41). The name «Altevangeltische» was later employed by several historians, including Ernst Müller, who used the term to emphasize the group's apostolic character as well as its split from the *Neutäufer*, members of the Evangelical Baptist Church, a Christian fellowship founded by Samuel Fröhlich in 1832.

customs practiced in the medieval age, without, however suggesting an intersection between witchcraft and Anabaptism (93). Rather, the narrator's presumption that «Madleni ruhiger wird, sei es durch die Kühle der aufgelegten Hand oder durch das Gebet», alludes to the Anabaptist simple, practical conduct and firm faith (93).

Indeed, Ida's Anabaptist beliefs serve as a remedy for Madleni's troubled state of mind. Responding to the young woman's question «warum ist Gott so hart? Unschuldige Kinder stösst er in die Verdammnis», Ida explains the concept of love as the Brotherhood sees it, a vision of love that flows from the understanding of the nature and example of Christ (93). This lesson of God's «lautere[r] Liebe» and the Anabaptist conviction in children's sinlessness – «ein junges Kind, ohne alle Sünd» – soothe Madleni's worried soul and ease her emotional pain, «die Worte der alten Ida fallen wie Tau in sein heisses verwundetes Herz» (93-94). The Anabaptist faith is thus portrayed as a practical alternative to the institutional church which advocates the concept of original sin and the loss of salvation for those infants who die before being baptized, a theological principle that causes much desperation and pain for mothers of stillborn children. In that regard, the narration assumes a female perspective on the Anabaptist belief and offers an explanation for the vitality of the movement's faith that takes into account the conflict between biology and theology in the seventeenth century.

The discussion of pedobaptism arises once more when Madleni delivers her first son after having given birth to three daughters. Although Christen sympathizes with his wife's Anabaptist congregation, he complies with the baptismal practice of the Reformed Church. The description of the children's baptism reveals the church's alliance with the state in matters of religious practices. While the predicant dismisses the late baptism of Christen's daughters with the words «Ja nun, es sind Mädchen, nach denen wird kein Hahn krähen», he is determined to enter the son's name on the baptismal roll (102):

Er hatte gemeint, das Wichtigste sei die heilige Handlung der Taufe, aber nein, laut einem Mandat von Schultheiss und Rat der Stadt Bern ist das Aufschreiben, das sorgfältige Eintragen von Namen und Daten der männlichen Täuflinge wichtiger. In der letzten Capitelsversammlung war den Prädikanten deswegen die Hölle heiss gemacht worden. Sie würden durch ihre nachlässige Führung des Taufrodels das militärische Erfassen der vierzehnjährigen Knaben erschweren. (102-103)

Baptism marks the infant's status not only as a member of the church, but also as a member of the civic community. And more importantly, by

entering the boys' names on the baptismal roll, the church automatically registers them for military service. The predicant's concern with the correct recording of the name and birth date of Christen's baptized son indicates the indistinguishable line between church and state in seventeenth-century Bern. In her research on the baptismal rolls of Schangnau's Reformed Church, Zimmermann came to the conclusion that the alliance between the institutional church and the state government is manifested in the strict adherence to the practice of baptism. Fascinated by «die Auseinandersetzung der Dienstverweigerer gegen die adeligen Herren» on the matter of baptism, the author focused in her narration on the conflict that arises between the Brotherhood and the (state) church over the issue of Anabaptist pacifism²⁰.

The Anabaptists' attempt to adhere to the peace principle causes social and political problems in seventeenth-century Bern. The consistorial counselor perceives their refusal to participate in military service based on their commitment to Christian non-violence as a threat to the well-being of the state: «das täuferische Gesind weigere, Wehrdienst zu leisten. Die Folgen seien erschrecklich» (103). Juxtaposing the two oppositional perspectives, the Brethren's peace witness on the one hand and the authorities' concern with the civil order and military defense of the state on the other hand, leads to a dialectical swing of idealization and condemnation of the Anabaptist movement that was previously delineated in Laedrach's historical novel on the Bernese Brethren. The state officials refute the non-violent position as stubborn persistence. They regard the Anabaptists as a «Bande von trotzi-gen Bauern», who «sich halsstarrig weigern, das Vaterland mit der Waffe in der Hand zu verteidigen», therefore not worthy of Bernese citizenship (106, 117). Calling them «Ketzer» with an «aufrüherisches Wesen», the civil authorities fuse theological rhetoric with political objectives (104).

This ambivalent conception of the Brethren as pacifists and traitors provokes Anna, the protagonist of the frame narrative, to further reflect on the issue of «Wehrlosigkeit». Through the profound experience of giving birth to her son, she comes to the «Überzeugung, dass jegliches Töten von Menschen, auch wenn es aus Vaterlandsliebe geschieht, verwerflich ist» (72). Yet, she also realizes that she does not take a clear stance on the matter of

²⁰ In the personal interview, Zimmermann described how she uncovered the connection between infant baptism and the state's conscription system. Studying Bernese church history, she learned that «Vater und Pate (Götti) bei der kirchlichen Handlung der Taufe das Seitengewehr zu tragen hatten, sonst war die Taufe ungültig». She then realized that the church, «die dem Staat gehorchte und die männlichen Täuflinge melden musste als zukünftige Soldaten», persecuted the Anabaptists because they insisted on the Christian principle of non-resistance.

non-violence. For instance, she feels relieved when hearing about her son's plans of becoming a military pilot for she does not have to worry about a «zukünftigen Dienstverweigerer in der Familie» (73). The historical conflict between the Anabaptist mission of peaceful discipleship and pressures from society to conform to civil order initiates a contemporary discussion regarding the discrepancy between a citizen's obligation to serve the nation and his commitment to ethical and Christian values.

As a consequence of their refusal to partake in military actions, the radical believers were severely persecuted by the state. The novel depicts the harassment of Bernese Brethren on two levels; it reports of historical cases of Anabaptist abuse, dispossession, and banishment²¹, and it fictionally treats the state's repression by the example of Madleni and her family. For a while, the family is able to avoid persecution while Christen serves as judge in the village court. Zimmermann portrays the network of family relationships as well as the support by benevolent neighbors in her historical novel. In her depiction of the fellowship's life in the Oberland, she addresses the differing attitudes of village neighbors toward the faith group, varying from social marginalization to active and organized support. For instance, when the state resurrects a policy of persecution, the rural community aids the Anabaptists through various signals and physical force.

The novel also points out the regional particularities of Bernese Anabaptism in terms of the Brethren's relationship to the people and the countryside of the *Oberland*. The movement in Bern is determined particularly by the Brethren's closeness to the geographic locality. The massive Hohgant range is depicted as a sacred place; «solange Madlenis Füße noch über Berge und festen Fels schritten, spürte es sich geborgen in Gottes Hand» (211). Furthermore, the spatial relation to the mountain symbolizes Madleni's tragic fate as a persecuted believer. After her conversion to the Anabaptist faith, she loses her fear of *Berggeister* and develops a close relationship to the mountain as she spends happy years with her family on the *Alm* of the Furgge. When the government issues compulsory emigration for all Anabaptists, however, she is forced to leave the *Oberland*. As the Furgge represents her home and family, the departure from the mountain is a most traumatic experience for her. Marching off to the city of Bern, she turns around

²¹ In form of a messenger's report, the narration describes some methods of punishment administered by the Bernese government, for instance the beating with rods and the branding with hot irons so that the Anabaptists were stamped for life as criminals: «Mit Ruten haben die Knechte des Landvogts ihn ausgepeitscht. Dann haben sie ihn mit dem Brenneisen gebrannt» (63).

once more «und hätte beinahe geschrien vor Weh. Da steht sie die Furgge, breit und in der Mitte ein wenig eingefallen, mit vielen senkrechten Falten» (197). The mountain reflects her deplorable condition as a banished Anabaptist, an existence that is marked by grief and despair.

The story of Madleni's steadfastness during times of great despair has an inspirational impact on protagonist of the frame narrative. Comparable to Anabaptist martyr stories which provided spiritual support for Brethren enduring torture and privations during times of severe persecution, Anna gains new strength for mastering her daily struggles through hearing about Madleni's act of perseverance. The protagonist is particularly impressed by the Brotherhood's persistence on the *Nachfolge Christi*. She comes to realize that their striving for complete discipleship implied a willingness to accept worldly punishment, thereby posing a threat to the political order of the day. Employing the contemporary term «Polizeistaat», the main character of the frame narration attempts to fathom the historical development of the State of Bern from today's perspective.

The discussion of the state's repressive actions against Anabaptism suggests a process of coming to terms with the Bernese past. Raising the question of whether «der Bär tatsächlich keine Ohren gehabt [hatte] zu jener Zeit? War er taub gewesen für die Klagen vom Land», the novel points to the state's (personified by its heraldic animal) failure to tend to all of its people (98). As part of this Bernese (and, to a greater extent, the Swiss) *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the protagonist of the primary fabula seeks to understand why the Brethren's tragic fate in the seventeenth century has been erased entirely from the state's collective memory. Anna wonders «warum wusste ich davon nichts ... ich bin in Bern zur Schule gegangen und habe nie ein Wort über die vertriebenen Täufer ... vernommen» (224).

The state's unwillingness to acknowledge its wrongdoings in regard to the Anabaptist issue has significantly influenced the contemporary (mis)conception of the faith group. Preconceived notions about the faith group are presented in the novel by Anna's friend Petra. Complaining about «die Enge dieser Sekten, ihre Überheblichkeit und Weltanschauung», Petra voices common prejudices against the Anabaptist movement (156). The public's lack of knowledge about the Anabaptists has led to their stigmatization as dissident sectarians.

Parallel to the protagonist's effort to inform and educate her friend about the historical conflict between the state and the persecuted minority, the author aims to draw the public's attention to the matter of Bernese Anabaptism. With her historical novel on the Anabaptist theme, she contributes to a culture of remembering. Not only does the literary treatment of

the movement's struggle with authorities revive the memory of Anabaptist persecution in Bern; it also provides guidance and inspiration for contemporary initiatives of *Webrlosigkeit*. Considering the Anabaptists' insistence on Christ's teaching of peace, the novel concludes that the Brethren's non-resistance «die einzig mögliche Verhaltensweise der Zukunft zu sein [scheint]», thus rehabilitating the marginalized group and contributing to an awareness of its history in Switzerland (229).

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