

*People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
Amar Thelidji University, Laghouat  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English*



**Motives for and Repercussions of Leaving the  
Amish Community by Amish Women in  
*Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish  
Life* by Ruth Irene Garrett (Author) and Rick Frank  
(Contributor)**

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
Master Degree in Civilization and Literature

By:

Ghezali Baya Nassima

Board of Examiners:

- Mr. Hammadi Nadir, University of Laghouat, Chairman
- Mr. Kourdourli Abdelkader, University of Laghouat, Supervisor
- Mr. Aribi Ibrahim, University of Laghouat, Examiner

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## Abstract

Research on minority groups in the United States is important because it provides better understanding of the diverse cultures of these groups in American society. This dissertation undertakes the study of the Amish in the United States through their nascent literature. The study explores the issue of Amish woman's departure from their communities towards the outer modern world. Moreover, the study sets two objectives: first, to explore the root causes which determine the Amish woman to leave her community, towards the outer modern world. Second, to show how her process of adaptation within the modern world. This is carried out through the analysis of the autobiography *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* by Ruth Irene Garrett. The research adopts the qualitative approach in collecting data and in analyzing data. One interpretation of the findings suggests that the Amish Church and tradition decisively shape the individual identity of Amish woman that they can construct or deconstruct this identity.

Keywords: Amish community, Amish woman, outer modern world, individual identity, collective identity.

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## General Introduction

The United States embodies a large number of minority groups, which truly embrace diverse cultures and are drawn from richly varied historical backgrounds. Some of these groups are found all over the country; and one of these various groups that constitute the population of the United States and which keep themselves at a distance from other Americans are the Amish. The Amish vigorously resist modernity, and even reprobate it. Amish theology insists on the strict separation between the Amish and non-Amish people. The Amish fervently believe that the outer world is materialistic, hopelessly corrupt, and intrinsically evil. The Amish lead a remarkably simple life, based primarily on centuries-old tradition, old-time religion, and hard work. Hence, the primary purpose of the research is to enquire into Amish community. Moreover, the research undertakes the exploration of some aspects of Amish culture.

In recent years, some best-selling Amish female writers have been on the American cultural scene. These Amish female writers have published autobiographies based on their direct lived experiences of leaving their Amish communities and entering the outer modern world. Saloma Furlong, Emma Gingerich, and Ruth Irene Garrett are but a few notable examples of these American Amish female writers who have aptly described the situation of the Amish woman within the Amish community, these writers have examined and made us aware of the increasing number of Amish women who are leaving their traditional community and its outdated system. Therefore, the present research investigates the issue of departure of Amish woman from their communities. Moreover, the study identifies the crucial factors that predispose the Amish woman to leave her community to join the modern world and it shows how this woman manages to cope with this modern world.

Although there are no accurate statistics and enough scientific information about the departure of Amish women from their Amish communities, there are a good number of researches on ex-Amish. Most of these researches focus on ex-Amish within the modern world. However, one study by Kathryn Foster, *You Can't Change What You Were: Liminality and the Process of Role Exit Among Former Amish* (2016), concerned former Amish, where she conducted interviews with some Amish (men and women), concentrating on ex-Amish who move outside their communities and live in the modern world. Former's study suggests that the

key points for diversity lie mainly in the transition into modern life. In her research, she applied the theories of Victor Turner's concept of liminality, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, and Ebaugh's model of role exit. Her findings demonstrate that affiliation and location make a difference in a transition into modern life.

Ashley C. Feely's research, *Through Amish Eyes: Examining the Self-Constructed Identities of Amish Women* (2009), examined the interviews of eight currently Amish and formerly Amish women. The purpose of this study was to identify how Amish women constructed their identities in an effort to contribute to the existing body of knowledge focused on Amish culture. Her findings revealed that a subtle integration of the greater society's values into Amish society's value system. While there was no explicit mention of adapting to the modern world. She applied Mead's theory (1934) to demonstrate the strength of a community's influence on a woman's identity construction. The finding shows that the person will select the self that he will exhibit in a given situation, based upon a variety of environmental and personal factors. Amish women constantly mediate their identities in response to ever-changing environmental and personal influences based on social appropriateness and personal opinion.

However, research reveals that more men than women leave their Amish communities, but there is no actual clear investigation by the researchers why or how this comes out.

Amish culture and society actively promote group identity rather than individual identity. It means that the central focus is not on the individual but on the group. In *Growing Up Amish: The Teenage Years* (2007), Richard Stevick claims: "When the Amish think about person identity, it is much more likely to be plural than singular." (42). Amish traditions, which govern their daily life, particularly favour collective life and the broader community to the detriment of individual life and the single individual. Therefore, what the Amish strongly encourage is exclusive reliance on the community and the complete preservation of its unity. Consequently, they do not value personal freedom and rather suspect any clear expression of individual independence in the community. These elements are the basics of Amish identity. So, it is not easy for them to recognize the notion of individual self clearly. According to The social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1970), when the social identity becomes more important than one's individual identity, the individual becomes do not view his group favourably. This can lead him to leave his group and join another group that suits him better. So, what will happen, if this collective identity becomes the underlying cause of escape of numerous Amish from their own community? *The Boundaries of Citizenship: Race, Ethnicity,*

*and Nation in the Liberal State* (1994), Jeff Spenser states: “Those who leave Amish society do not simply choose another identity; rather, they reinterpret their identity in a way that better fits their plans and project” (102).

However, When the Amish woman lives within her community, she has to follow the rules of the community blindly. So, her deep desires are frustrated, her profound thoughts are not allowed to be openly expressed, and her most natural actions are not freely carried out. Her very existence becomes the existence of the community. So, to maintain her own individual identity proves to be extremely difficult. This renders the Amish woman’s image just an identical copy of the Amish community, with no strong personality of her own. Therefore, the major problem that this study identifies is: Does the non-association of the Amish woman with her collectivist community identity make her search for her own individual self far from her community?

In order to investigate this problem, a number of questions are addressed: First, to what extent does the Amish community impact the Amish woman’s individual self? Second, what are the religious or the socio-cultural influences within the Amish community that compel the Amish woman to search for her own self outside her community? Third, does the outer modern world help her to find this self?

The hypothesis that is put forward in the current study assumes that there is powerful negative impact of the collective life of the Amish on the Amish individual woman’s self and life. The increasing cultural and social alienation of the Amish woman and her resultant confirmed maladjustment to the antiquated lifestyles of this community, where self-imposed separation is the one thing in a world which has become a global village, harbour in her a fervent desire not to pertain to this community. This necessarily results in her attempt to search for another place in order to be able to express herself freely.

In order to conduct this research, we have purposely chosen *Crossing Over: One Woman’s Escape from Amish Life* by Ruth Irene Garrett. The autobiography mostly focuses on the Amish woman and her situation inside and outside the Amish community.

In order to carry out this study, the study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach. The research will be based on two different theories: the first is Foucault’s theory of power in order to indicate to what extent the Amish Church dominates Amish communities; and the second is the theory of social and personal identity in order to explain the impact of transition into the modern world on personal identity.

The present work will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter describes the historical and cultural background of the Amish in order to put the current study within a larger context. The second chapter will first present the book under study in general and will then discuss a number of major themes in the autobiography. Furthermore, it will explain the reasons why Irene (the protagonist) leaves her cultural community. The third chapter will demonstrate how Amish women cope with their new life in the outer modern world. This chapter will also discuss a number of themes, related to life as lived by Amish women in the outer modern world.

## **Chapter One**

### **Amish History and Culture**

The Amish community is one of the most distinct religious minorities in the United States because of its different lifestyle. In contrast to most Americans, who live in urban areas, the Amish lead an almost traditional way of life and live in rural areas. This chapter consists of two main sections. The first section will describe the historical background of the Amish: it will trace their origin and their evolution throughout time. In the second section, I shall attempt to explore some scenes of Amish culture in American literature, as described by both Amish and non-Amish writers.

#### **1. Historical Background of the Amish**

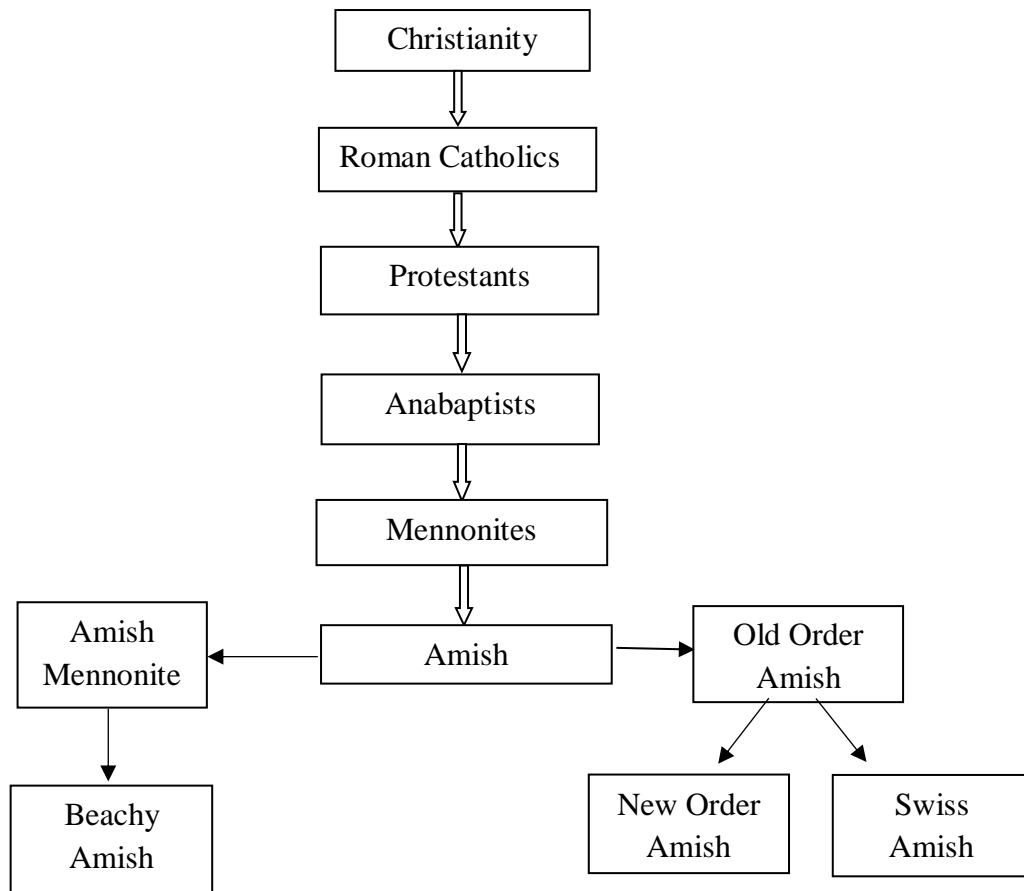
Three main ideas will be discussed in this section. First, it will trace the origin of the Amish. Second, it will describe the migration of this community to the United States. Third, it will attempt to find out how the Amish live in contemporary America.

##### **1.1. The Origin of the Amish**

The Amish are Protestant Christians and belong to the Swiss Anabaptist branch. Protestants rebelled against the Roman Catholic Church because of its corruption in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and initiated a series of reforms in the Church known in history as the Reformation. Shortly after the Reformation, four main Protestant factions emerged: Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists.

Anabaptists emerged in Switzerland and in the late 1530s Menno Simons assembled some of them into the branch of the Mennonites. Because of doctrinal disagreement, the Amish who were under the leadership of Jacob Amman split off from the Mennonites in the 1690s and have been named the Amish since then. So the formal schism between the Mennonites and the Amish eventuated in 1693. The new group insisted on traditional Christian doctrines and focused on separated life. The figure below summarizes the historical evolution of the Amish in Europe. However, the Amish did not remain in Europe and migrated to the New World.

Figure 1: The Historical Evolution of the Amish



### 1.2.The Migration of the Amish to America

The Amish left Europe to America for two main reasons. The first reason is religious: The Amish rejected to baptize their babies because they believed that only free-willing adults could be baptized. Consequently, they were considered by both Catholics and other Protestants as infidels; and many of them were persecuted and executed. The second reason is political: The Amish refused any alliance with secular government because their allegiance was first and foremost to the Bible and not to civil government. So when rulers attempted to enrol them in their armies, they migrated to America. The first Amish groups arrived in Pennsylvania on the ship *Charming Nancy* in 1737 and established a small community in the county of Lancaster. Thereupon they spread westwards to Ohio and Indiana, northwards in New York, and southwards to Maryland and Virginia (See table next page which shows the great concentration of the Amish in modern-day United States).

Table 1: Amish Population in the USA in 2019 (ordered by population)

State	Estimated Population
Pennsylvania	79,200
Ohio	76,195
Indiana	57,430
Wisconsin	22,020
New York	20,595
Michigan	16,410
Missouri	16,410
Kentucky	13,345
Iowa	9,980
Illinois	7,730
Minnesota	4,680
Tennessee	3,220
Kansas	1,850
Delaware	1,695
Maryland	1,580
Virginia	1,295
Maine	850
Montana	760
Oklahoma	670
Colorado	610
West Virginia	465
Nebraska	365

Mississippi	275
North Carolina	275
Arkansas	255
Wyoming	130
Florida	100
South Dakota	90
Texas	65
Vermont	60
Idaho	50
Total	336,235 <sup>1</sup>

Source: Amish Studies/The Young Center. Web. 23 March 2020.  
<http://groups.etown.edu/amishstudies/statistics/population-2019/>

## 2. The Amish Community in the United States

Because they have lived in isolation from most Americans for several centuries, a large number of Americans have ignored much about Amish life and culture until after World War II the Amish became a curiosity due to the media. Television has exposed Amish culture to Americans and has aroused the latter's curiosity about the Amish way of life. This great curiosity has overcome a great number of Americans to visit Amish locations and discover Amish culture.

In general, the relationship between other Americans and the Amish is peaceful. Amish doctrine promotes nonviolence and develops love among people. The Amish are mainly farmers using traditional ways in cultivating their lands and the people who live next to them like to buy their natural products such as cheese.

However, the relationship of the Amish with the government of the United States is not so simple. Because they reject any alliance with the secular state as is mentioned earlier, they do

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<sup>1</sup>The table includes all Amish that use horse-and-buggy transport only and excludes the other Amish.

not serve in the American army since this opposes their traditional doctrine of pacifism. Also, they do not share in the political life of the country.

Most of the Amish speak Pennsylvania German and English fluently; and a minority known as Swiss Amish found in southern Indiana speak a form of Swiss German. The Amish speak Pennsylvania German with each other. It is the language of sermons. But teaching in schools is delivered in English. The preservation of Pennsylvania German and standard German is a way to retain Amish identity and link the Amish to their spiritual heritage.

In addition, the Amish espouse an absolute belief in the special prominence of community over individualism, mutual aid, separation from the world, and the tremendous value of tradition. They engage in active combat against personal vanity. This latter can be shown by the mere use of cosmetics, jewellery, and personal photographs. That is why all of these are forbidden by the Amish. With respect to this, Kraybill writes:

. . . the Amish emphasize social separation from the world not only in belief, but also in their practices. The use of horse and buggy transportation, rejecting television and computers, wearing of distinctive clothing, refraining from membership in public organizations, and rejecting political offices all reflect their belief that the church [community] should be a counterculture<sup>2</sup> separate from the larger society (93)

Another crucial aspect of Amish culture in the United States is the type of clothes they wear. Amish men put on Amish-style hats and vests whereas Amish women put on head coverings, capes and aprons. Because they attach high value to tradition, their garments have been kept unchanged since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to most Americans for whom dress is the preferred means of individual adornment, Amish distinctive and traditional clothing demonstrates their submission to the collective order and translates their group identity (see figure below).

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<sup>2</sup>When a subculture (i.e. a particular group of people within a society and their behaviour and beliefs, and activities) stand in direct opposition to the dominant culture of the society in which they are located, rejecting its important values and norms and endorsing their opposites, they are sometimes termed 'contra-cultures' or 'counter-cultures'.

Figure 2: Amish Clothing



Source: Web. 24 March 2020 <<https://www.facebook.com/AmishWays/photos/an-example-of-amish-traditional-clothing-the-models-or-actors-are-not-amish-but-/10153064250929443/>>

As for schooling, Amish children are not allowed to attend high schools and colleges. Their schooling does not last beyond eighth grade. During these eight years, children receive their schooling at home by their own parents or by Amish teachers in schools within their own community. Amish children do not attend state (either public or private) schools. However, in 1972 the United States Supreme Court ruled that Amish children could finish their schooling after eighth grade. In Amish schools, only reading, spelling, writing, grammar, mathematics, history, and geography are taught while science and sex education are not. After eighth grade, Amish teenagers work as apprentices on farms or in shops.

The Amish believe in spiritual life, the unity of the family, and hard work very fervently. They are renowned all over America for their honesty, piety, modesty, and humility. They lead a life of faith and worship. They are also renowned for their agrarian lifestyle and their selective and even limited use of modern technology. In a sociological study, the Amish are divided into three distinct groups. The first group are ‘traditional’ and generally named Old Orders because they use horse-drawn transport, dress plainly in the fashion of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a sign of the separation from the modern world they live in. Old Orders speak a distinct dialect and use technology in a very selective way. The second group are named ‘transformational’. This latter place enormous value on higher education and use modern technology widely. The third group are named ‘transitional’. They wear plain clothes and reject some technology such as television

(Kraybill and Hostetter). Modern-day Amish in the United States also fall into four sub-groups: the Beachy Amish, the Amish Mennonites, Old Order, and New Order. The two first sub-groups can own cars and use electricity. The third and fourth sub-groups speak a German or Swiss dialect, end schooling at the eighth grade, reject electricity, and use horse and buggy transport (see figure below).

Figure 3: Horse and Buggy



Source: The Amish Buggy: Preservation of Social and Community Values. Web. 24 March 2020  
<<http://www.welcome-to-lancaster-county.com/amish-buggy.html>>

For their religious and social organization, twenty to thirty-five Amish families who live next to each other form a church district. Members of each church district meet every other Sunday in one of their homes to worship because Amish do not have church buildings. When an Amish sins, he or she makes a public confession in one of these meetings. In general, the Amish marry at the age of twenty-one. The husband is the head of the family. In addition to bringing up children, wives can help on farms or in shops.

Economically speaking, after their persecution in Europe the Amish left urban areas for rural ones where they became experienced and successful farmers. They rejected mechanized

farming because they feared it would rob their children of their jobs. In addition to farming, modern-day Amish can work in shops, construction, and in ‘English’<sup>3</sup>factories.

Last but not least, the Amish generally resist technology because they are afraid of its harmful effects on their social traditions. Nonetheless, some Amish use technology selectively and others have adapted some technologies to their needs. For instance, some Amish are not allowed to take photographs of themselves but foreigners can take photographs of them. Many Amish cannot drive or own cars, but they can be driven by foreigners who own cars. However, most Amish are known for their exceptional use of horse and buggy transport in an age of very advanced and efficient transport.

So far, some major aspects of Amish culture have been dealt with in above section. Next, we shall discuss Amish culture in American literature.

### 3. The Representation of Amish Culture in American Literature

Most Amish do not complete their education beyond the eighth grade. In other words, they neither attend high school nor enter college. Therefore, they do not have an extensive literature of their own like the literature of other minorities in the United States. However, a number of them write and publish some literature. These have already left the Amish community and have joined in and taken part in the greater American society.

The people who are particularly interested in writing about the Amish are associated with the Evangelical movement and most of them are women such as Beverly Lewis, Cindy Woodsmall, and Wanda Brunstetter. In 1997, Beverly Lewis published *The Shunning*. The novel motivated many other writers to write about the Amish.

Novels dealing with Amish culture and themes gained popularity among American readership, especially nostalgic women because these themes create a wide-open space to return to an age which is far from modern life, a space of romance fiction always ending happily. This type of fiction has recently been known as Amish romance (a subgenre of Christian fiction). However, critics do not find that these novels represent the Amish since the writers are non-Amish. Nevertheless, this type of fiction has helped satisfy the curiosity of American readers

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘English’ is used by the Amish to refer to non-Amish people, i.e. those who do not belong to the Amish community.

about Amish culture and has encouraged them to visit Amish locations, thus, bolstering Amish local economy.

Actually, Amish writers do exist but before beginning to write about their community they have already left it. Linda Byler is one of these writers. Other Amish writers who left their community prefer working on autobiographies.

An autobiography is a story of a person's life written by him- or herself and it may be largely fictional. It is used to inspire, or motivate, or merely to enjoy the reader. Amish writers use autobiography as a direct means to address their readers and share their experiences within their Amish community with the rest of the readers. These experiences are of escape from the Amish community and can be illustrated by *Runaway Amish Girl* by Emma Gingerich and *Why I Left the Amish* by Saloma Miller. While reading such novels, one can be overcome by overwhelming emotion.

In sum, this chapter has dealt with the origin of the Amish, who as Protestants, rose in Central Europe during the Reformation. Then chapter one has explained the reasons behind the immigration of the Amish to America. Moreover, we have discussed major socio-cultural aspects of Amish life and their relationships with the greater American society. By the end of this section, we have introduced a few Amish writers and their works. One of these works will be displayed in the following chapter.

### Chapter Two

#### Living in and Leaving the Amish Community

The previous chapter has been an introduction to the history and culture of the Amish community as a distinct ethnic group in the United States. In the present chapter, we shall consider a few aspects of Amish culture through an autobiography entitled *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* by the author Ruth Irene Garrett with the contribution of Rick Frank. *Crossing Over* was released in 2003. It is about a real-life story of Irene (the protagonist). In this autobiography, Irene tells her unique story of growing up as an Amish woman in the strict Old Order community, and her leaving this community to engage with the modern world. This chapter will outline the way that Irene leaves her community and will be divided into three main sections. The first section will present the book. The second section will discuss a number of major themes that are dealt with in the autobiography. Finally, the third section will explain the key reasons that lead Irene to leave her cultural community.

#### 1. General Overview of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*

This overview presents *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*. First, it describes the background of the autobiography and carries out the analysis of the cover and title of the book in question. Then it summarizes the content and provides a portrait of the characters.

##### 1.1. The Background of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*

*Crossing Over: One's Woman Escape Amish Life* belongs to the genre of Christian romantic literary books which are commercially known as Bonnet Rippers.<sup>4</sup> *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* is an autobiography co-authored by Ruth Irene Garrett and Rick Frank. In this autobiography, Irene (the protagonist) tells the realistic story of her life within the Old Order Amish community in Kalona, Iowa, and then outside the Amish community after leaving it. In brief, the autobiography is a comparison of two different worlds, i.e. two different cultures that exist in the same country.

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<sup>4</sup>The phrase "Bonnet Ripper" is an industry term for Amish romance novels which belong to Christian fiction. These novels are always featured by a woman wearing a bonnet on the book cover.

This narrative takes the reader inside the strict Old Order Amish hidden community, with a strong emphasis on one Amish woman who leaves her traditional family, faith, and the unsatisfactory world of the community in order to cross over bravely to the more modern life. This crossing over is undertaken to fully explore the foreign and frightening reality in the hope of better understanding Irene's emotional and spiritual desires.

*Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* is a mixed autobiography with a novel style. It is divided into twenty-five chapters which cover religious, social and romantic events. Many Americans are used to read Amish books written by evangelical writers, but *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* is another type of Amish books that are written by the Amish themselves. The biography is full of moral messages. Garrett writes in the introduction of *Crossing Over One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* that "This book tells my experiences growing up Amish, my husband, my hopes, and my dreams I feel compelled to tell my story, hoping it will help anyone with similar struggles on their own. If I have hurt any in so doing, I ask for their forgiveness and prayers" (Garrett 3).

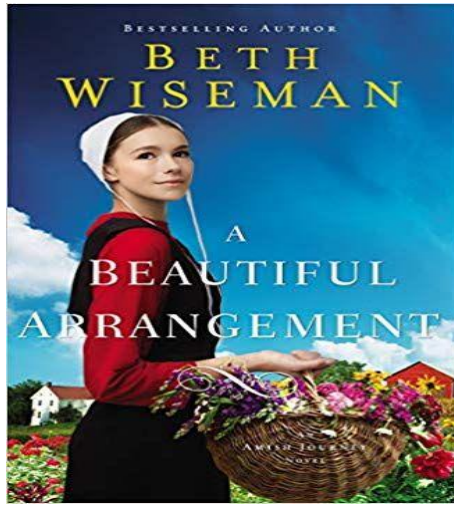
### **1.2. Analysis of the Cover and Title of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life***

What distinguishes the covers of books that deal with topics related to the Amish is the picture of a smiling woman in nature putting on a nice long dress. These covers, which are usually brightly coloured, show the romantic aspect of the content and express the idealistic and peaceful world of the Amish. On the contrary, the cover of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* is dark in the background, with a picture of a woman who turns her back and puts on a pale colour dress. The cover expresses sadness, pain, fear, the unknown, troubles, suffering, escape, parting, unwillingness to communicate, rejection, and solitude. The phrase *Crossing Over* means to get over something to reach something else. This means going over the Amish life to reach the modern. It also means to move from an old life to have a new life.

The following figures on the next page illustrate what has just been described.

Figure 1:

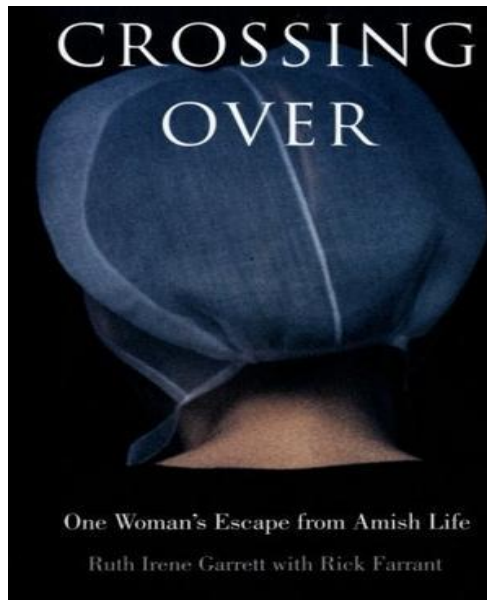
This figure represents the cover of one of the romance fiction novel



Source: web. April 2020 <https://i.pinimg.com/474x/a5/18/22/a518223baef885c698185163c2fd58a1.jpg>

Figure 2:

This figure represents the cover of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*



Source: web. 1 Feb 2003 <<https://d1ldy8a769gy68.cloudfront.net/300/006/052/992/006052992X.jpg>>

### 1.3. Summary of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*

The story narrates events that happen mainly inside the Amish community in Kalona, Iowa, and outside the Amish community in southern Kentucky.

Irene is a woman who was born in 1974 in Iowa. Surrounded by seven siblings, Irene is the fifth child. She grows up in the strict Old Order Amish community. As a child, she is raised in a typical Amish Christian religious community. She grows up within a family system where the mother takes care of the home, the father works outside on the farm, and the children go to school until the eighth grade. Irene's father is a man who teaches his children Amish traditional beliefs. He is the one who administers punishment in the house. Irene's mother is the member of the family who cares about practically everything in the house. After Irene has finished her education in the Amish school, she works as a teacher. She loves teaching and is loved by the children.

Amish families love to travel every year. Because the Amish are forbidden to drive, they have to rent a van and a driver from outside of their community. The English man<sup>5</sup>Ottie Garrett is the driver of the Ruth family. With time, he becomes close to the family. Ruth's family manages a trip to Canada. Due to this trip, Irene becomes close to Ottie and falls in love with him. But Ottie is a non-Amish, a married man, and twenty-five years older than Irene. This makes their romantic relationship difficult.

Out of fear of the rejection of their relationship by Irene's family, Irene does not confess her love to Ottie at the beginning. But later, she and Ottie decide to keep their relationship secret. With time, the fear that their relationship will be exposed grows. This makes Irene decide to escape from the Amish community to marry Ottie. On 8 June 1996, Irene could leave the Amish community at the end.

Irene and Ottie move to live in a city in Kentucky called Glasgow and they get married. Irene is introduced to her husband's family who receive her with love. In the beginning, the couple faces some financial and social problems before they could achieve stability. With the help of some persons such as Faye who helped her to adapt within the contemporary world and

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<sup>5</sup> It was already explained in chapter one that the phrase "English man" means any foreigner to the Amish community, not necessarily a person from England.

James Bettermann who helps her to find a new spiritual way to find God, Irene manages to stabilize her life.

Whereas the Old Order community actively avoids all interaction with the English, Irene leaves the Amish community to get married to an English man. Because Irene violates the Ordnung (the rules of the Amish Church), her marriage is considered illegal by her community. Irene gets excommunicated and is banned from the Amish community. Irene's family stops any contact with her except from time to time she receives some letters from them telling her how bad the family is feeling because of her absence and asking her to leave her husband and return to the Amish community by seeking forgiveness from the church. It is emotionally very painful for her to be shunned by the family and community.

Later on, Irene and her husband decide to write a book under the title "True stories of the X-Amish" which recounts stories about Amish people who leave their own community. This makes the couple popular. The press and the local television get interested in their writings. Also, Irene is offered an opportunity to play her escape story into a movie.

Despite all the problems, Irene is able to achieve personal ambitions such as obtaining a driving license, completing her studies, and finding a new spiritual way to God by joining the Lutheran church.

The story ends in the year 2000. After the ban is lifted on her, Irene could meet her family in the end.

### **1.4. The Characters of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life***

Irene is the principal character in the story and the narrator of the story. Oattie is the driver of Irene's family and Irene's husband who used to be married and later gets divorced to marry Irene. He supports Irene emotionally during her ordeal. Irene and Oattie face some challenges in the course of their love and marriage.

Irene is a character who is able to analyse and criticise the Amish community. This makes her look for answers to the many questions that she gathers throughout her life within the Amish community. She does not accept the life of the Amish as it is but desires a different and better life. This does not happen until she falls in love with Oattie. Now, Irene's feels fearful and courageous at the same time. Fearful of facing the Amish community judgment and courageous to take the life-changing decision to leave her community, bearing in mind what this action will

entail. Finally, Irene's determined nature makes her resist the pressures of the family and the church.

Alvin Miller is Irene's father. He is an Amish minister. He heads Irene's family and administers punishment and establishes the rules. Irene blames him for mistreating her mother. During her absence, Alvin sends to Irene some letters begging her to turn back to the Amish community.

Martha Miller is Irene's mother. Irene is very attached to her. She is a kind person, caring mother, and obedient wife. Because Martha has health issues, Irene feels very concerned about the health of her mother since she has left the Amish.

Bertha is Irene's only sister and the eldest one. She is the only one who knows about Irene's plan to escape. So, she helps her to escape.

Elson is Irene's eldest brother. He is kind to her and not judgmental of her actions. She shares with him a lot of memories from their childhood. Elson never stands the Amish way of living. He has his doubts about the church, heaven, and God.

Faye, who is Ottie's sister, helps Irene to cope with her new modern life. They go out together for shopping for clothes and makeup.

Reverend James Bettermann helps Irene find her faith again and answer many of her questions related to her religious doubts. This makes Irene join the Lutheran Church to which the reverend belongs.

### **2. Living within the Amish Community**

To lead an Amish life is like living in the seventeenth century. The Old Order Amish are considered the least educated and modern community. Living within the Amish community is not romance as it is shown in Amish novels. It is not easy to be an Amish and to live according to the Old Order system. This section below will deal with the different themes that the writer develops in *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*.

#### **2.1. Religious Manipulation**

This dominant motif in the autobiography includes: damnation as intimidation and knowledge as power.

### 2.1.1. Intimidation as Domination

The Old Order Amish is the most conservative, strict, and disciplined in Amish group. The Amish use the Ordnung which is an unwritten code of behaviour of everyday life and which was established by the Old Order Amish leaders. The Ordnung organizes the way the Amish should dress, how to express themselves, and the way to teach at schools. To have a chance to ascend to heaven and attain salvation, the Amish must abide by the Ordnung.

Irene says: “As long as I stayed in the church, worked hard, did my daily prayers, was humble, and always followed the Ordnung, I might have a chance of going to heaven” (3). Irene thinks that the Ordnung used to control the activities of the Amish people. For instance, in order not to break the rules of the Ordnung, the leaders put the Amish under a social monitor. In the Amish community, everyone is required to put a finger on anyone who breaks the rules and judge him. For instance, if a woman is wearing a dress one inch shorter than what is recommended she will be judged by the neighbourhood, the children, and friends. No one is safe from judgements. The person becomes cursed by society in order to make him or her regret his or her bad actions against the church. The Ordnung controls even the spontaneous self-expression of the Amish. In other words, if the person laughs too much or is funny, he or she will be considered as a bad person. This is the reason why most Amish people look so serious. This indicates the extent of Amish community's interference in the lives of the Amish as individuals.

Irene believes that the only way to go to heaven and find salvation is by one's good actions, not through the church. “The Bible does not say anything conditional love or guidance. It says that if people follow God, they will have his blessing. And no matter what I have done, I had not turned my back on him . . . I had more fully embraced his comfort forgiveness and strength” (5). Irene is obliged to follow the rules and says: “I, especially had to strictly follow the Amish inflexible beliefs and stern rules of the Amish church (the Ordnung) which governs everything from the dress and modes of transport to dating etiquette and reading habits” (11). Irene starts to question whether following the strict Amish rules is necessary for having salvation.

Then, the Amish are thought by their leaders to be the privileged ones who had been chosen by God to be saved. The outside world is considered as evil and inhabited by bad people, liars, and thieves, who will only bring harm to the group. Irene tells the readers: “From the time you are born until you die, you are reminded by the leaders of the church that you are privileged to

be Amish, that the world outside the Amish is evil and corrupt. One grows up thinking the Amish are the only ones with a real chance of going to heaven” (2-3)

This makes them live in constant fear of the other which lead them to do not trust the English man. To protect themselves, the Amish never speak about their tradition or faith to non-Amish. They keep their community as mysterious as possible. So, they neither grant foreigners any interviews nor take any photographs with them. Limiting the contact with the English means avoiding to answer any questions about what is happening in the Amish community. To make the Amish community a safer place, the Amish prefer to live in cultural isolation.

Irene, has never understood why the Amish are a privileged sort of people and the only one who has the key to God’s grace. She believes that all people have the same equal chance to go to haven if they are believing in the same God and attend the same prayers. For her, all Christians and non-Christians must learn how to unite under God’s mercy. All these significant factors have predisposed Irene to feel concern, express doubts, and put the Amish Church and its authority into question and also Amish practices and values in to question.

The Amish Church lives in fear of losing control of the Amish community. This forces its leaders to establish their control over the Amish community through intimidation and punishment. The Amish leaders exert pressure on their community to obey them under the threat of damnation. Unconsciously, the Amish put themselves under pressure as a habit.

From what has been aforementioned, we formulate the plausible hypothesis that there is much socio-cultural and religious pressure exerted on the Amish by their church leaders that they feel alienated in their own community.

### **2.1.2. Knowledge as Power**

To help to understand the Amish Church’ domination over the Amish people It is important to use theories. The theory of power can provide us with an outline for analyzing this domination over the Amish group. The problem of power is of great importance in most of Michel Foucault's works. According to Foucault, the concept of power is used to control people’s thoughts, feelings and actions with anonymous intentions. Additionally, it can be found everywhere as in institutions, family, groups, and individuals.

The leaders of the Amish Church could be able to create their areas of power by keeping knowledge to themselves. What is meant by knowledge here is any truth or facts. Foucault

considers that power and knowledge are intensely interdependent that they cannot be separated from each other (Foucault 1980; Reinharz and Davidman 1992; McPherson 103). Based on this, if you own the knowledge and prevent people from accessing that knowledge, it may give you power on them. So, the leaders of the Amish Church prevent Amish people from accessing any knowledge. For instance, the Amish are not allowed to read the Bible toughly, giving the justification that the Amish should not learn more than they should know, as this will make them smart for their good. Irene says: “It is like the Catholics days of yore when the priest was the only one who read the Bible; people will merely listen to what he told them” (13). The leaders know that the Bible is a source of truth. If the Amish could discover the truth, they will have the power to ask for change and be enlightened which will lead to non-social discipline and non-social compliance with church laws. Irene describes this situation: “The Amish, who came to America seeking religious freedom fiercely afraid of change and therefore not interested in having an enlightened community” (13).

Also, Amish children are only allowed to study at school until the eighth grade, learning only the basics such as reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics. They do not learn history, biology, or technology which might make them know some truths which in the end can put the traditional system of the Amish into question. This is why the Amish Church requires the Amish to focus only on learning Amish traditions but not modern technology. Irene sees this as a way to plunge the Amish into darkness: “The fact that the Amish children are formally educated only through the eighth grade is further evidence of the need to keep the Amish people in the dark” (13).

On the other hand, violence is not the only way to practice power. Foucault sees that there are many other ways to practice power such as using discourse. According to Foucault, discourse is the production of knowledge through the language used to influence and shape the thought of others. Foucault believes that discourse, knowledge, and power are also interconnected. Moreover, Foucault's focus is on how discourses can shape and create meaning systems that can gain status of the truth. For example, the Amish leaders use the religious discourse to work on the facts that only maintain the Amish community in its present situation, such as “the Amish are chosen by God”, “the Amish are a privileged people”, “Paradise is for those who follow the Ordnung”, and “the outside world is evil”. They pass this discourse among the Amish, as being the truth while no such thing is mentioned in their bible. This makes Amish live in the illusion of the ideal community. Thus, leaders are able to manipulate the Amish unconscious mind in order to believe what the church wants. Foucault argues that “our self

identity comes from the way in which we are positioned in relation to particular forms of knowledge or discourse” (Kirby 40). Because of the domination over the Amish group, the Amish as a collective community becomes as one body under the authority of the church which shows the Amish community as a single individual that has to do the same things in the same way. Moreover, the Amish have no right to say or do anything only under the church authority. So, any information, attitudes, opinions, or thoughts, are most definitely not for public consumption and should be kept unspoken and in private because they are socially unacceptable (Layder 96). This can threaten individual identity that needs to be expressed freely.

Then, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault states that “where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault 1976; Miller 40). Thus, when a person feels that there is power against him, his self shows unconscious resistance. This is what Foucault calls self- subjectification which means self-care. The self- subjectification makes the individual build strategies to show his resistance by using his critical thinking, demanding freedom, demanding space, or demanding choice. Irene as an Amish woman is able to notice these different powers that are exercised against her and the Amish. At the beginning, her resistance takes the form of critical thinking about what goes around her. Well, Foucault argues that, there is no one truth, right or false, good or bad because this differs from one person to another. So, what is right for the Amish church or community, Irene can see it false. On the other hand, she does not reject what the church or the society dictate. She chooses to be a member of the Amish church, by being baptized and committed to the church. This confirms that she does not reject Amish collective identity, but she is dissatisfied with Amish life and she questions the Amish community and the church.

Overall, Foucault’s theory of power helps to answer the question: How can religious manipulation and oppression pave the way for the individual to leave the community.

### **2.2. Domestic Violence and Domination of Man**

One of the things that the Amish are known for is being peaceful. They do not believe in violence and confrontation. But this can be just a total hypocrisy. Because of the culture of secrecy, male domination, and obedience of wives and children, it is hard to hear about abuse in Amish communities.

In the Amish community, women and children are considered as the subservient class. The children must work assiduously instead of developing their personality and the mothers take care of the house and serve their husbands. The Amish woman must respect and follow the

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Amish church rules, obey the man, accept patriarchy and hold a submissive role. Amish women see family as their most important priority. Before marriage, Amish women may work outside the home, while a few women can work outside the home after marriage. Most choose to stay home and assume domestic responsibilities. Some Amish women earn money by selling eggs, fruit, and vegetables, or handmade items such as dolls and quilts. Their daily lives are hard because they work from sunrise until past sunset, rarely having enough sleep.

An Amish mother cannot protect her children from abuse within the community. If a father abuses his children, neither the wife nor the children are offered any protection. Both the mother and her children are the father's property in the eyes of the whole community. So, they must obey and forgive, or else they are the ones at fault.

The Amish believe that God is merciful and forgiving, and so they should. If a person confesses, then, he must be forgiven. Of course, they are punished. But the harshest punishment meted out is six weeks during which he must remain separated from the other members of the community though he can still live in his house. After these six weeks, he is declared forgiven.

The Amish do not believe in divorce, so mothers whose children are abused face a stark dilemma. She sticks with it, or she leaves. But if the mother leaves her spouse, she is excommunicated and considered as dead.

In Irene's case, she has grown up in a family where the father is dominant. Irene's father maintains rigorous standards on his children that any sign of weakness that they show deserves the father's withering scorn. He harshly punishes anyone who makes even small mistakes. Irene blames her father for mistreating and punishing her mother for such mistakes. The mother should accept the punishment and always forgive her husband.

Irene confesses: "The other concern that I had growing up was the dominant sometimes cruel behaviour of my father a stern, unforgiving.... A cold look of disdain that can freeze a person standing" (15). Irene could not stand that Amish women be submissive to men.

Frequent punishment has impacted negatively on the children. Irene admits: "we are all deathly afraid of him unsure for the most part when something was going to send him into a rage my sister and some of my brothers became submissive, they walked around with their shoulders slumped and heads down, unable to maintain eye contact with people" (15).

Living among a family where domestic violence is a daily practice has made Irene decide not to marry. She says:

Watching how my father treated my mother-and his children-gave me a jaded sense of family and marriage. Especially the latter. The Amish believe-implore, really with binding mandate that their people should

stay married for life. And there is a stigma attached to those women never marry they are considered old maid. Some Amish women would rather get married and be unhappy than be old maid. But I decided early on that, given such a choice, I never wanted to get married. I never wanted to walk the valley that was my mother's and father's relationship. (15)

Because Irene's mother suffers from being oppressed, she does not want her daughter to face the same fate as her and be as unhappy as her mother. Studies show that the rates of depression among Amish women are much higher than the general population in the United States.

Finally, the Individual identity is built from the childhood. Irene's exposure to domestic violence since childhood was the first step to deconstruct her individual identity inside the Amish community. Growing up in a patriarchal society where excessive domestic violence have made Irene unhappy. These are the worst moments of her life within the community. The macho and the negative image of Irene's father because of his rigid attitudes towards his family may be a strong reason for Irene's marriage with Ottie. For Irene, this marriage is a practical way to improve that image. Therefore, Irene's marriage is also an effective way to get away from the intolerable pressures of her community.

### **3. Leaving the Amish Community**

In general, there are several ways to leave the Old Order Amish community. One of these ways is not to become part of the Amish Church by rejecting Amish adult baptism. This requires the person to leave the Amish group. Another way is to be rejected by the Amish Church and be avoided by the Amish people. This happens when the person chooses not to follow the Ordnung. A third way is to leave the Amish community by moving to another area to join a different Amish community in another region. In this case, the person is still one of the Amish.

To leave the place where one has grown up, knowing that one cannot go back home means that one has strong reasons for leaving one's community. In what follows, we are going to consider how Irene's marriage has greatly facilitated her escape from this community.

#### **3.1. Marriage and Love**

The Amish only marry other Amish people. They have the freedom to choose any spouse who belongs to the Amish community. Marrying people who do not belong to the Amish community is considered a violation of the Amish Church rules. To marry, both men and

women must be committed to the Amish Church and have been baptized. “Amish have to be a member to be married; to be members have to be baptized. When they are baptized the community believes they are making a promise to never leave the Amish faith” (Adam 29). Moreover, it is their way to define their group and their social identity. In the book of *social identity: Intornational Perspectives* (1998), Setephen Worchel explains:

...Amish people believe that particular prescription of behaviors define their groupness and contribute to their social identity. For example, Amish beliefs prescribe the necessity of separation from the world. For example [Amish] Amish man does not marry a non-Amish woman, does not do business with an outsider and even does not enter into intimate relationships with a person outside the Amish community. (96)

After the Canada trip, Irene falls in love with the family driver Ottie Garrett. Ottie is a non-Amish man who has been several times married and older than her by more than twenty-five years. The rules of the Amish are strict and must not be broken. If an Amish woman desires to marry a person who is non-Amish, this will be met with absolute refusal at the levels of the Amish Church, society and family.

The Amish typically consider that to marry for love is not the best reason. One Amish bishop, quoted in Stevick’s *Growing Up Amish: The Rumspringa Years*, claims:

When seekers from the outside come to us wanting to be Amish . . . they are often attracted for the wrong reasons. They could have fallen in love with one of our Youngie. Or they may have fallen in love with what they think is a simpler way of life. What they fail to realize is that our faith in Christ is at the centre. Horses, buggies, and kerosene lanterns will quickly grow stale without the faith foundation. (38)

So, Irene and Ottie’s love is vigorously rejected by the family, the church, and the community. In this case, Irene has only three choices: (1) to stay in her community and not marry him; (2) to convince Ottie to convert which is something rare though the Amish do not encourage outsiders to join their community; and (3) to leave the community to marry him, which she has done by the end.

Furlong, who is one of the Amish women who left the community, writes:

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There are two ways to leave the Amish—one is through life and the other one through death. To leave through life, someone has to deliberately walk away from the security of the conformity strictly ordered community. Once abandoned, the future is self-determined, exhilarating, and terrifyingly open. Anyone who lives the life determined by the community leaves solely through death. (1)

This means that there are only two ways to leave the Amish group: one by walking away and choosing a different and better fate far from the Amish, or just by waiting death to get rid of it. Here, Irene chooses to leave the Amish instead of accepting her fate. It is so difficult for her to leave the Amish. Irene admits: “Leaving the Amish is perhaps the most serious offence one can commit” (2). On the other hand, “It is never easy to leaving the Amish, especially to marry an outsider”(7).

Marriage is clearly a cogent reason for Irene's departure, but she is truly inspired by other hidden motives such as refusing church complete domination of all aspects of daily life and domestic violence which has helped Irene think up an idea of moving away from the Amish community and looking for a better place since her unhappy childhood.

All in all, Irene is a woman who has looked for a new and better life outside the Amish community. She has legitimate reasons for so doing. She appears extremely dissatisfied with the Amish way of life and she entertains severe doubts about Amish beliefs. Marriage outside the Amish community allows her to escape her rigid and traditional community and experience the outer modern world. What must be vividly kept in view in the end is that Irene seems to be an exceptional Amish woman who is fully able to choose her fate. This chapter has explored how life is within the Amish community, with great emphasis on the life of Amish women in Amish society and all the various relentless pressures that they are put under and that they must painfully struggle to cope with. These pressures have successfully persuaded Irene to leave her community. What will ensue in the next chapter, however, is the exploration of themes related to life outside the Amish community when one of its members decides to leave that community.

### Chapter Three

#### Perceiving and Dealing with the Outer Modern World

The previous chapter made a clear presentation of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life* and then discussed themes related to life within the Amish community, with a strong emphasis on women and how they live their existence under considerable pressures of various sorts. The present chapter will be a systematic analysis of *Crossing Over: One Woman's Escape from Amish Life*, but here we shall shed light on the existence of women outside the Amish community. The women who have left the Amish community have had a hard time keeping up with the outer world. Once in this world, they have gone through new experiences. This chapter will demonstrate how Amish women have coped with their new life in the modern world outside their community of birth. This final chapter will deal with a number of themes related to life as lived by Amish women in the outer modern world.

#### 1. Facing the Ordeal of Leaving One's Community

Irene has faced a terrible ordeal once she has left her Amish community. This section outlines some of the trials and tribulations of leaving the Amish community.

##### 1.1. Excommunication

Irene says: "But leaving the Amish meant I was no longer of the church, I was in the ban, and I was cut off from God. To them, if I die this way, I have doomed my soul to hell and have no salvation" (Garrett 3).

Any person who leaves his or her Amish community, leaves God and heaven because according to Amish doctrine there is no way to go to heaven and attain salvation except by displaying absolute commitment to the community. Any lack of commitment to the community means that the person is worshipping the Devil. Six weeks after Irene has left her community, she receives a letter from her uncle, the bishop of the Amish community Elmer T. Miller. In the letter, he informs her that "As you well know, it is the duty of the church not to tolerate such things in the church. So, by voice of the church, you have been excommunicated from the church" (59). Irene now is officially excommunicated by her community and banned. By

marrying a divorced outsider, she is guilty of adultery according to the rules of the Amish, and thus she is considered to have got out of her commitment to the church. According to the Scriptures, what Irene has done is displeasing in the eyes of the Lord: “that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery, and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matt. 5:32; Garrett 59).

Excommunication means that any person who is a member of the Amish Church and decides to leave will be shunned. In this case, the person will forever be considered an outsider and stranger and will not be allowed to participate in the community ever again. Excommunication is to drive someone away from the church and the Amish community. In this case, the person is avoided by all members of the community. Excommunication is a practice fundamental to Amish identity. The Amish practise shunning, or social avoidance as a means of enforcing the individual’s commitment to God and show remorse and ask for forgiveness.

Practising shunning is out of “tough love” means that it is only a way to make one see one’s errors first; then change one’s behaviour and re-affirm one’s commitment to the church. At the same time, the Amish always allow the possibility of a return, confession, and reinstatement into the church: “You may now think that nobody likes [you], nobody wants (you); etc., but wait, my heart still aches for you and your soul as many a tear has been shed since you left. Oh that you may repent while living in the days of grace. This is written out of love and concern,” Irene’s uncle says (59). Amish leaders believe strongly in excommunication. However, the offenders are always welcomed back to the community if they repent.

Since Irene has been excluded as a member of the Amish, she has had extremely disturbing thoughts. For example, she has not found any logical meaning of the “love and concern” her uncle has been writing about in his letter when one is officially banned from the community of one’s birth. Irene confesses: “My uncle had said in his letter that the ban was done ‘out of love and concern’ but there is nothing . . . nothing Christian, about shunning” (60). Also, it is not forbidden if one leaves one’s more conservative Amish community for more liberal Amish communities such as the Beachy Amish or the Mennonites, but not to other denominations. Irene wonders: “why couldn’t a person become a Baptist, a Lutheran, or Methodist without facing the threat of excommunication?”(25). This has made her believe that her community is a place of glaring contradictions. Therefore, she has preferred to become utterly determined to live outside the Amish community and lead a radically new life outside the community and not to turn back there. She says:

Well, I guess it's official now,' I said after opening the bishop's letter. I had no tears or regrets-t least not on that day. It was over. But only for the moment. Even though I was no longer Amish, I felt like a cast-off, and there was a part of me that wanted to find to find a way to have the ban lifted, if for no other reason than to bring a symbolic peace of mind. Just as disturbing, I didn't know when to see my family again. (61)

Irene's family has felt sad and painful for what has happened to her daughter. "They tearfully described how my leaving had cast a pall over the family, how my parents were losing their minds and might have to enter a mental institution, how my mother was experiencing heart pains and didn't know how much longer she could hold out. "She takes sleeping pills at night," she says (60). Her family has not visited her in Kentucky and she has not visited them in Kalona either. The separation is inevitable that Irene has to stand alone.

Because of shunning, Irene and Ottie have faced social and financial problems. Despite this, the couple have managed to maintain the stability of their marriage.

During the shunning, Irene has only two things left: to rekindle memories and receive letters from her family. These are the only ways left to communicate with her family.

#### **1.2.Memories**

When one walks away from one's family home, is always attracted to old memories, especially memories which are strongly related to one's childhood. Irene thus recalls lovely memories with great fondness and awful ones with strong aversion. She reminisces about the past:

Therefore, I have very few photographs or family albums with which to reflect on my past. I must rely on recollection and memories. When a person reflects or remembers on his or her past it should bring back beautiful and wonderful moments in time, as well as, childhood dreams. While I have many pleasant memories of my time as a member of the Amish religion, I also have unpleasant and sad memories that I wish not to remember but I can't forget. (2)

Irene evokes some of the memories that she has retained from her siblings. Although Amish children usually have a busy schedule during which they have to work on farms, go to school and constantly pray during the day, this does not prevent them from spending some time playing

and having fun. For instance, watching butterflies and birds, catching bird eggs, listening to the sound of birds, and making mud cookies by mixing water and dust are Irene's precious and unforgettable moments from her happy childhood. Besides, she has liked to perform leisure activities such as riding ponies, ice skating, and acting in plays in church and school. She recalls her cherished memories within her community:

I had fallen in love with swans at the age of thirteen when I saw their images on greeting cards. They were floating on a willow bordered stream, and they seemed so proud and graceful and serene. Swans and butterflies I realized had a lot in common. They start out as drab cygnets and caterpillars, then blossom into stunningly beautiful creatures. In this way, I was different from some Amish: I had an awe and appreciation for nature. And I guess I liked the idea that things so plain that could return into things so pretty. (12)

But she also remembers the horrible memories linked to her father's cruelty towards the family. Irene sadly recalls these memories: "But couldn't escape the years of abuse or years of suggesting a problem was some else's fault" (50). For example, she can distinctly remember how her brother Elson has been beaten by her father with leather straps for any little mistakes he has done. She says that Elson would say: "I know Irene had her struggles with Dad, but really, plain to speak, I don't think she knows what it was like to be abused like I was" (57).

Although her father has been sending her letters after her voluntary departure from the community, apologizing for his abuse and expressing his love for her, she continues to blame him for having roughly mistreated his family. She openly admits: "Sometimes my father would seem to soften his letters . . . sometimes he'd even tell me he loved me – something he'd never done when I was at home" (50).

#### 1.3. Letters

Irene has received countless letters from her family since her departure from family and community. The letters are full of loaning, warnings against moving away from God, and family news. In addition to memories, those letters are the only link between Irene and her family. Those letters have expressed a flood of various emotions. In what follows, some of the most powerful emotions felt by her family members are briefly reported.

### 1.3.1. Sadness and Pain

“It seems so hard to write when I feel so broken up. It is so hard to take that you have left. It’s hard to realize that even the sun could rise again...,” says her mother painfully (7).

“Last Sunday evening, as I was walking home from the singing, I just simply couldn’t stop crying oh empty spot you left behind you!” Brother Benedict openly confesses (16).

“I feel so sorry for your family! I wish you could get a glimpse of the great sorrow and grief they are suffering! Your mother is going downhill and dad looks pale face! Oh how sad I hope and pray they will not lose their mind through all this!” Uncle Perry says (52).

“The choice you have made causes pain in my heart deeper than the loss of my companion,” her grandfather writes (62).

With all these intense emotions that the letters have been filled with, her family have earnestly endeavoured to persuade her to turn back home and to the community.

### 1.3.2. Requesting Irene to Turn Back Home

“Come! Come! Before it’s too late... God can heal the broken heart, but he needs all the pieces. So please come!” Her mother desperately entreats her (7), tenderly adding and promising: “The only way that I could come to you is if you come back home with us” (44).

However, her father warns her bluntly: “Who soweth in the flesh will also reap the eternal fire, frightful where you stand! So comeback and let Jesus cleanse you!” (13). Yet, he has sufficient moral courage to ask her to forgive him.

### 1.3.3. Asking Irene for Forgiveness

Conveying profuse apologies, her father writes: “We are very, very sorry if we were the cause for you to leave us. I ask you to forgive me in all areas where you feel I have wronged you or mom” (47). He adds with bitter regret: “I apologize for any cause in words or actions for your going, and pray to be forgiven by our creator and saviour” (23). Nevertheless, her family also ask her to regret her departure insistently.

### 1.3.4. Requesting Irene to Repent

Her brother Wilbur writes: “I’d like to sum thing up this way, what you did, we feel, was way wrong. But what Dad does to mom or the do toward each other- and have done for years-

is way wrong too. Their own mistakes are making it hard for everyone around them. My constant plea and prayers is that we can all see our mistakes and truly repent” (23).

“...oh, come home and make peace with God and the church . . . The man that you have left with is an adulterer and is on the wide and brood way, but you can come back if God moves you,” her father asks her (66). Furthermore, he beseechingly tells her: “Let the blood of Christ cleanse you like the snow. We hope the devil’s power will be taken so that you come back” (71).

Her sister Bertha writes: “Are you ready to meet Jesus when he comes? ... Are you making the scars in Jesus’ hands bigger if you keep right going your way?” (80).

#### 1.3.5. Cruelty

Voluntarily disclosing extreme cruelty, her father tells her: “. . . Mom just cried and cried and finally she said if only you could have died when you fell out of the upstairs window. You wrote you have not died. We hope and we hope you can repent before you’re spiritually without life” (49).

These letters have made her feel depressed most of the time since she is honest enough to admit: “But even those fond memories were not enough to overcome the dramatic letters from my parents, siblings, uncles, cousins, deacon, and former friends. It took me days, sometimes longer, to rouse myself from the funk that would set in after their letters arrived” (92).

Irene has gone through immense pain just like her family has done, but she considers these letters as a kind of family drama to distract her from her plan. She says seriously affected: “My parents spent a lot of time crying and wailing, and that brought to me tears to my eyes and made it difficult for me to speak. I know the only way I could ease their sorrow was to say I was returning,” adding with clear determination: “and was not something that I was prepared to do” (59).

Despite her family’s humble and constant entreaties to rejoin the family and the community, she has refused to go back home, especially during the first year subsequent to her departure. This persistent refusal is due to several reasons. First, she has grown afraid of facing her father and has wanted to avoid any tension that could be generated between them. Second, because her biggest concern outside the community is the health of her mother, Irene has not wanted to make her mother feel worse because of any tension that might be generated by the reunion

between her and her family. However, she prefers to write letters to check on her mother's health. Irene writes enquiring about her mother's health: "Are Mom's legs doing better? My suggestions may not go far, but for Mom's sake, I wish she would go see a specialist if they don't get better. I worry about her health and I'm afraid she could get blood poisoning and lose her legs if she is not careful" (83). Irene fully realizes that she has become a different person once in the outer modern world. Even if she decides to go back home, home will never be the same. Irene looks forward to being able to move on in her new life and not think back.

In these difficult times, her husband's support is very important for her. They organize trips together to visit different places in the United States. This makes her discover various aspects of American society and she starts making a new memories.

With her entry into the outer modern world, Irene undergoes markedly different experiences from the ones she used to go through in her own community. The themes that we are going to treat in the subsequent section reflect some of these experiences of the outer modern world.

#### **2. Irene's New Experiences in the Outer Modern World**

As an outsider in modern society, the Amish woman will have to face different experiences. Irene frankly admits: "They say a person can't truly know something if they haven't experienced it, or can't acquire perspective if they haven't been to the outside looking in" (52).

Because the transition from the Amish community to the English community is sharp, a person's identity can be most affected by this transition. The use of the theory of social identity and personal identity allows for a better understanding of how Irene's process of transition from the Amish community to the English world takes place. Personal Identity means what all the person is formed from: thoughts, ideas, feelings, and personality. The theory of social identity and personal identity are interconnected, since personal identity is always affected by social identity.

Because of social and religious pressures, and family disappointments, Irene's personal identity faces a duality of separateness from and relatedness to her community. This leads her in the end to separate herself from her community. But leaving the Amish community does not prevent Irene from suffering from another duality of separateness from and relatedness to the English world. She does not know if she should keep her personal identity or create another one which fits within the English world. To avoid this kind of duality, any change of identity within a new social group should have self-knowledge and awareness about self in order to have self-

confidence, self-reliance and self-esteem. All this makes the individual avoid any insecurity of personal identity that can lead to a deviation of personal identity. In the case of Irene, Irene's husband provides her with the emotional support which satisfies her need of love and acceptance. This makes her feel related to her new social group.

Next, Irene begins to use the sophisticated instruments that make life exceptionally easier in the modern world: electricity, the car, and the washing machine. She has also taken part in leisure activities such as watching television and going to the cinema, which make modern life outside the Amish community and in the outer modern world more enjoyable. But these instruments and activities are only the material aspect of the outer modern world. Irene discovers more important aspects of modern life; these are the intellectual and spiritual aspects of modern existence which have proved to be liberating Irene from the intolerable pressures she has been put under by her overly rigid community. The three main themes that are connected with the intellectual and spiritual aspects of life in the modern world are: femininity, forgiveness, and affiliation.

#### **1.4. Femininity**

One of the sharpest differences that Irene has clearly perceived between her new world and the Amish world is their distinct conception of women and femininity.

First, within the Amish community femininity refers to humility and typical modesty. The Ordnung orders the woman to wear long dresses with long sleeves. Some less conservative Amish groups allow the woman to wear short-sleeved dresses but never sleeveless. The Amish woman never shaves her legs or armpits, never cut her hair. An Amish woman would never be seen outside her home without her covering. When going to town or church, Amish women typically wear a stiff black bonnet over their covering. The Amish woman wears black cotton stockings and non-elegant black shoes without high heels. Make-up and jewellery are forbidden. Amish girls are taught to behave in a ladylike manner since childhood and are instructed to be submissive.

Unlike in the Amish community, the woman in the outer modern world is entirely free. She can do whatever she wants. But Irene admits: "The commercial, widely accepted, modern-world nation of femininity-the essence of womanhood . . ." (16). She fully realizes that femininity in American society is a commercial concept more than a cultural concept.

Once Irene and Ottie have left the Amish, Ottie asks Irene to shave her feet. He justifies his request on the grounds that she is no longer one of the Amish. Indeed, Irene does that. This is the first thing that she does for her own body in the outer world.

Next, she often goes out and enjoys the exhilarating experience of shopping which has not been known before. She also enjoys trying on different types and colours of clothes thoroughly. This has never happened to her in her community. But she remains modest and keeps wearing very decent clothes. She says: "I'm not a fan of women who bare too much of their bodies . . . sometimes when you don't expose everything, you're prettier"(18).

Besides, she begins to appreciate using make-up. For her, too much make-up can, however, be unappealing. She confesses: "I Liked the pampering and I liked the new look, but I never tried to duplicate it. If anything good has come from growing up Amish, it's that I appreciate what's on the inside of a person, not just what's on the outside" (18). This physical transformation of Irene did not change her nature as a female who believes in inner beauty, not external. This confirms, despite her physical change in modern world, Irene kept her inner self identity as an Amish.

#### 1.5. Forgiveness

Since her departure from the community and ban, she has thought about the real meaning of forgiveness long and hard. She deeply ponders over the fact that if she accepts to be rejected by the Amish, she will never accept to be rejected by God. Irene firmly believes in the complete and unconditional forgiveness of God, while her community does not. She concedes: "Unconditional forgiveness, for example, there isn't anything in the Amish system that gives me any picture of unconditional forgiveness. Everything is tied to behaviour, and that moves it dangerously close to being outside the Christian realm . . ." (68). For the Amish, God forgives only those who genuinely repent of their sins. If one dies while being banned by the community, one will inevitably go to hell.

While considering unconditional forgiveness of God very carefully, Irene finds totally clear answers to her spiritual questions in the Lutheran Church.<sup>6</sup> She regularly attends the Lutheran

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<sup>6</sup> Lutheranism is one of the five major branches of Protestantism, in addition to Anglicanism, Calvinism, Methodism, and Baptism. The term "Lutheran" appeared as early as 1519 and was coined by the opponents of Martin Luther who initiated the Protestant Reformation. Theologically, Lutheranism embraces the repudiation of papal authority in favour of the Bible and the insistence that human reconciliation with God is effected solely by divine grace (kindness that God shows towards the human race), which is appropriated solely by faith, in contrast

Church and discusses freely with the bishop any question and doubt that arise in her mind. The Lutheran bishop successfully persuades her that her marriage to a divorced man outside her community is not adultery and thus cannot be considered a deadly sin in Christianity. This ultimately persuades her that God's love and forgiveness are unconditional.

#### 2.3. Irene's Affiliation to the Lutheran Church

Ottie's family belongs to the Lutheran Church. Irene meets Reverend James Bettermann at the church. Bettermann is a Lutheran Church man and actively helps Irene to find her way towards God again and dispel her religious doubts.

After several meetings in the church, Irene decides to join the Lutheran Church. This requires her to do be baptized according to Lutheran doctrine. Her affiliation to the Lutheran Church will allow her to remove the ban as she will not be a member of the Amish Church any longer. This, in turn, will enable her to meet her family and experience the love, care, and understanding she has missed in her own church. She makes a true confession: "I have not forsaken God; rather, I have embraced my beliefs in God and Jesus more than ever. The church now attend is an extension of my faith in God and I have taken my faith far beyond anything the Amish would ever dare to do" (3).

Irene's major problem with the Amish is her feeling of non-belonging. Though she feels that she belongs to the Amish group, she has never felt that she is part of the Amish outdated system. Immediately after the shunning and her departure, her community membership and belonging have faded away. In lieu of this, she discovers a new and strong sense of belonging within the Lutheran Church. She explicitly recognizes that "After being somewhat in sea of abandonment since the ban, I began to feel a sense of belonging again" (68). This made her to restore her trust in God and Christianity again thus her lost religious identity.

The Amish strongly hold the belief that the union of the community and the institution come first before God, whereas the Lutherans espouse the deep-seated belief solely in God. This is the true spiritual meaning of faith. "With Amish, it was the Amish first. With the Lutherans, it was God first. Faith to the Lutherans was a relationship with God, not with institution" Irene states (68). Irene feels perfectly satisfied and happy with her new spiritual life. She writes to

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to the notion of a convergence of human effort and divine grace in the process of salvation (the state of being saved from the power of evil).

her sister Bertha: “My life is so free, happy, and peaceful, you couldn’t imagine the difference, Bertha. My church is a loving Christian church and I have made many good friends” (83).

After joining the Lutheran Church, Irene could eventually meet her family.

#### **3. The Meeting of Irene with her Family**

The Lutheran Church man has personally interfered with the Amish Church authorities to remove Irene’s ban. After many unsuccessful attempts, he manages to make the authorities lift Irene’s ban. She finally meets her family after a ban that has lasted more than three years. Irene admits: “I had barely made it inside the door of the Amish of the old, two-story white farmhouse when my mother fell into me, put her head on my shoulder, and began sobbing.” ‘Everything’s all right,’ I whispered, wrapping my arms tightly around her. ‘It’s all right.’ ”(4).

After a long absence and trip, Irene arrives at her childhood house. The meeting is at first cold, but soon Irene and her family hold lively conversations. Sometimes they have blamed her for her departure, other times they have blamed themselves for pushing her to leave. After this meeting, the contact between Irene and her family has become rare. Indeed, Irene’s family has never accepted or even understood her decision to leave the Amish.

To conclude, the modern world is much bigger than the Amish world, and its dangers are more. But this did not prevent Irene from taking risks to reach it. Irene was looking for belonging and assimilation away from Amish. By discovering the new world, Irene has faced a cultural-shock. But she soon absorbed it with the help of those around her. Irene aims to reach forgiveness and unconditional love of God. The Lutheran Church was able to provide these conditions and to treat her doubts which made her restore her lost religious identity due to her leaving the Amish. Through this experience, Irene had the opportunity to experience two different types of life: old and modern life. Despite the pressures and struggles, Irene has advanced in her life. She has completed her studies and she is now helping the ex-Amish to go forward in their lives. This chapter gave a good look at Irene’s experience outside the Amish. First, it presented the obstacles that Irene faced in the modern world Amish. Then, it discussed the different themes that were linked to living in the modern world. Later, it showed up how the meeting of Irene and her family looked like.

## **General Conclusion**

This research explores the root causes which determine the Amish woman to leave her community, towards the modern world and how this woman manages to cope with this modern world. The study has aimed to clear the ambiguous vision of the Amish community. Since the Second World War, there has been a growing interest in the Amish by American writers whose majority were not Amish. Actually, these writers failed to reflect the genuine Amish culture because they simply did not belong to that culture. So, in order to better represent that culture, it was necessary that an Amish writer should write about it. Thus the choice of an autobiography by an Amish woman was the best means to understand Amish culture. This dissertation has first shed light on the historical and cultural background of the Amish. Then it has briefly presented Amish literature. Afterwards, it has discussed themes that are relevant to Amish culture.

This study has achieved a number of outcomes. First, the Amish community is a strict community whose strong foundations are the church and the Ordnung. The Amish Church and the Ordnung decisively shape Amish identity. It has been clearly observed through the study of this autobiography that there is total absence of intellectual freedom within the Amish community, caused by preventing the Amish from acquiring knowledge (except basic knowledge of the Bible and a few rudimentary subjects) on the flimsy pretext that knowledge is evil. Next, social freedom is totally absent as well since the Ordnung severely restricts how the Amish should dress and behave on a daily basis. Above all, the church controls the actions of the Amish by using the social monitor among them. In the case of Irene, she is absolutely forbidden from getting married to a non-Amish man. Therefore, the impact of the whole Amish community on the individual and its control on individual personal life is profound, making the individual virtually non-existent.

This study has especially focused on the woman within the Amish community and on her widespread alienation. Although she plays an important role within her community in preserving the family, she is a second-level member of the community. The domination of the man in the Amish community has placed her under several pressures. Because of all these pressures, it is inevitable for the Amish woman to leave her community and find comfort in the outer modern world. The outer modern world is truly a way for Irene to find her own self.

Deciding to leave the Amish is not an easy matter because it causes one to become utterly ignored and vehemently rejected by family and community. The church punishes the members of the Amish Church who leave the community, by shunning and banning them. Following that strict rule, Irene could not meet her family until the ban is overturned on her. Irene has had to join a different church from the church of her community in order to have that ban removed. This conclusively proves the absolute control of the Amish Church over its members either when they choose to remain in their community or when they decide to leave it.

Once in the outer modern world, Irene is in desperate need of a sense of belonging. This strong sense of belonging is conveyed by the Lutheran Church. The sense of belonging developed by the Lutheran Church has powerfully reinforced a keen sense of self and individual identity in her.

There have been several fundamental limitations to this study. First, it has been difficult to find adequate reliable sources that deal with the issues under investigation. Furthermore, there has not been easy to find enough studies which have directly discussed the topic of this research or other studies which have directly dealt with the autobiography. Besides, this sort of study typically requires both a considerable amount of knowledge about the culture, traditions, religion of the Amish community.

Finally, we humbly suggest that this study be used as a basis for further research on literature of the Amish community in particular and the literature of other ethnic groups in the United States in general.

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## Résumé

La recherche sur les groupes minoritaires aux États-Unis est importante parce qu'elle favorise une pleine compréhension des diverses cultures de ces groupes au sein de la société américaine. Ce mémoire procède à une étude des Amish aux États-Unis à travers leur littérature émergente. L'étude explore la question du départ de la femme Amish de leurs communautés vers le monde extérieur moderne. De plus, l'étude se fixe deux objectifs: premièrement, explorer les causes profondes qui poussent la femme Amish à quitter sa communauté, vers le monde extérieur moderne. Deuxièmement, montrez le processus de son adaptation dans le monde moderne. Cette étude est effectuée à travers l'analyse de l'autobiographie *La Traversée: l'évasion d'une femme de la vie Amish* par Ruth Irene Garrett. Cette recherche préconise l'approche qualitative dans la collecte des données et dans leur analyse. Une interprétation de résultats suggère que l'Église et la tradition Amish façonnent décisivement l'identité individuelle de la femme Amish où les deux peuvent construire ou déconstruire cette identité.

Mots-clés: Communauté Amish, femme Amish, monde extérieur moderne, identité individuelle, identité collective.

## ملخص

إن الأبحاث حول الأقليات الدينية في الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية مهمة لما توفره من فهم أفضل للثقافات المتنوعة لهذه المجموعات في المجتمع الأمريكي. تهتم هذه المذكرة بدراسة طائفة الأميش في الولايات المتحدة من خلال الأدب الناشئ لهذه الطائفة. تستطلع الدراسة قضية رحيل امرأة الأميش عن مجتمعاتهن نحو العالم الخارجي الحديث. علاوة على ذلك، تحدد الدراسة هدفين: الأول ، الكشف عن الأسباب الجذرية التي تدفع امرأة الأميش لأن تترك مجتمعها نحو العالم الخارجي الحديث. ثانيا ، إظهار عملية تكيفها داخل العالم الحديث. تنجز هذه الدراسة من خلال تحليل السيرة الذاتية بعنوان "الانتقال: فرار امرأة من حياة الأميش" بقلم روث إيرين غاريت. يعتمد هذا البحث على المنهج النوعي في جمع البيانات و تحليلها. تشير أحد التفسيرات للنتائج إلى أن الكنيسة وتقاليد الأميش يشكلان بشكل قطعي الهوية الفردية للمرأة الأميشية بحيث يمكنهما بناء أو تفكيك هذه الهوية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مجتمع الأميش ، امرأة أميشية ، العالم الخارجي الحديث ، الهوية الفردية، الهوية الجماعية

