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Title

Amish in Films:

**A New Historicist and Cultural Materialist Study of *Witness*,
For Richer or Poorer, and *Amish Grace***

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To my father and mother
For their unconditional love

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with the study of the Amish portrayal in three American films, namely Witness (1985), For Richer or Poorer (1997), and Amish Grace (2010). The aim of my work is to demonstrate that these texts are the product of their respective socio-political contexts. They deploy the Amish religious minority for the purpose of criticizing and reproducing the American mainstream values. The study is divided into three chapters. The first one consists of the historical background whose major goal is to provide a better understanding of the Amish history and culture as well as their place amidst the mainstream American culture. As for the second chapter, it discusses the image of the Amish as a critical metaphor of mainstream America in Witness and For Richer or Poorer. Witness uses the Amish culture as a vehicle for reinforcing and articulating the 1980s conservative agenda. In the same vein, For Richer or Poorer invokes the sense of the Amish as Other and exotic only in order to reinforce the centrality of the dominant American culture's self. The last chapter deals with the Amish image as a supporting metaphor of mainstream American values in the film Amish Grace. It shows the shift in the dominant culture's attitude and vision of the Amish minority as a film subject. The Amish values that are manifested after the Nickel Mines School Shooting tragedy are appropriated by the mainstream majority as a healing mechanism for the post 9/11 United States of America.

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General Introduction

Media cultural texts are neither merely vehicles of a dominant ideology, nor pure and innocent entertainment. Rather they are complex artifacts that embody social and political discourses whose analysis and interpretation require methods of reading and critique that articulate their embeddedness in the political economy, social relations, and the political environment within which they are produced, circulated, and received (Kellner, D, 1995:4).

In today's world, as the epigraph above shows, film has become a new kind of text. It is appreciated not only for the telling of good stories, but for the ways in which it goes about capturing social context and political problems. Among the various issues which are widely debated in American films is that of minorities. In fact, this is not a new topic since America is a country of immigrants from its origin.

The United States is made up of a large number of groups with diverse cultures and different historical backgrounds. The theory of Anglo-conformity has always been the dominant one in America. In 1908 an English writer named Israel Zangwill wrote a drama entitled The Melting Pot. The latter embodies the idea that immigrants arriving in the United States would fuse with one another to create a new and exceptional American culture.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, scholars began to question the ideology of the "melting pot" suggesting instead that American society should be conceived as a "salad bowl" composed of ethnic groups with distinct historical backgrounds and interests (Pinder S, 2010: 55). Nevertheless, the "melting pot" and the "salad bowl" tend to be self-congratulatory theories. They encourage further tolerance, but they underplay America's continuing ethnic difficulties. It goes without saying that the move from the melting pot idea of America to that of the salad bowl was the result of a shift from the continental politics of isolationism to that of intervention in world affairs after the wake of World War II.

The American public has always been concerned with the acculturation of minority groups into mainstream American society. Yet there are several minority groups spread all

over the country which keep themselves at a reasonable distance away from larger American culture. The Amish Community is one of them. They represent an ethnic minority that has successfully maintained its identity against the pressures of assimilation.

The Amish are a religious minority that was split from the Swiss Anabaptist Mennonites around the 1690s. They are Christians who chose to live a rural and traditional life apart from the modern world. Political instability and religious persecution in Europe led the Amish to migrate to America (Hostetler J, 1980:31-34). It is worth mentioning that there are four major branches within the Amish community in America; the Old Order, the New Order, the Beachy Amish, and Amish Mennonites.

At the start of the twentieth century, almost nobody was interested in the Amish but after World War II the situation changed and the Amish became a curiosity due to the media that revolutionized society and put the Amish in the spotlight. The diverse media were and still are the main source of information. They have a significant force in shaping opinion on various subjects that is subsequently internalized by the general public. The cinema has an enduring impact on the viewer's perception of ethnic groups such as the Amish. It influences also the image which will be taken over and remain in the mind of the viewer after watching a film about this minority.

The Amish culture and practices are in sharp contrast with the ideas of modernity and fashion. They had always been opposed to modern technologies and progressive assumptions likely to bring out violence and danger to their peaceful lifestyle. The cinematographic representations of the Amish minority contribute not only to creating opinions but also to changing those of people who are struggling to maintain themselves separated from what they consider as a changeable, violent, and corrupt technological world.

The Amish have now become subject matter for many films and television programs. The latter deploy this minority as a device for various interests. Therefore, in this dissertation, I shall argue that Amish representation in American films is ideological. The Amish community is used by the cinema as a language to communicate and to serve the interests of the mainstream majority across different eras.

In the present dissertation, I shall undertake a case study of three cinematographic portrayals of the Amish in the American film industry, namely Witness (Peter Weir, 1985), For Richer or Poorer (Bryan Spicer, 1997), and Amish Grace (Gregg Champion, 2010). It is worth mentioning that the latter movie is a drama based on a true story, and it is adapted from the book written by Kraybill, D et al entitled Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy (2007).

The choice of these films is not fortuitous. It is justifiable on the grounds that these cinematographic representations of the Amish have drawn both critics and world attention because of their thematic and historical importance. More importantly, they represent different genres; Witness and Amish Grace are rife with dramatic elements whereas For Richer or Poorer is a comedy which uses humour and satire to address the social and political aspects of life in America.

In order to elucidate my arguments, I deem it useful to compare two views on the Amish provided by two different sources. The first is based on facts from the literature written by historians who are interested in the Amish groups. The other view is represented in the above mentioned films which portray the Amish.

Review of the Literature

A considerable literature has already been written about Amish culture, beliefs, and origins. Yet, in spite of all the attention focused on ethnographic studies of the Amish and their culture, little critical attention has been paid to the Amish in relation to cinema. The approaches differ from one to another. For instance, Rick Clifton Moore (1996) has conducted a comparative study of three films Witness, Sergeant York, and Friendly Persuasion arguing that these films have a unifying theme. The focus of the study is on the pacifism of the Amish. For example, the main characters in Witness experience a spiritual conversion. A clear struggle with the relationship between individual consciousness and community standards of justice is highlighted (Moore.R, C 1996:114).

Besides, Moore thinks that Witness does demonstrate the ability of non-mainstream ideologies to receive positive treatment. The film's solemn ending makes the viewer yearn for the hero John Book to be more like the pacifist Amish and not like his colleagues in the police department. He concludes that Witness uses peace as a means to achieve justice which offers some important contemplation about the relationship between cinema and ideology (Ibid, 118).

In a similar fashion, Richard James Leonard (2003) analyses Peter Weir's films using Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the archetype. He argues that Witness is a romance thriller with a mystical journey at its core. He adds that to achieve this end, Peter Weir has employed archetypal and cross cultural symbols and myths in the narrative (Leonard.R, J, 2003:31).

Witness expresses an ideological tendency to naturalize social behaviour. From a feminist perspective, Jonathan Rayner (2003) argues that Witness mythologizes the Amish landscape and community. He highlights the film's use of "the look" or "the gaze" device

which, as he suggests, undermine the cinematic structures of patriarchy in Witness (Rayner, J, 2003:130)

Hollywood films featuring the Amish are not really about the Amish but rather about America's urban aspirations for rural peace. This is the perception of critics like Crystal Downing (2008) who approaches the film For Richer or Poorer from a psychological point of view. He claims that cinematographic depictions of the Amish are pastorals where the Amish are perceived as the Agrarian preservers of an idealized rural America. Downing considers this comedy film as a perfect embodiment of the pastoral literary genre which reflects human psychology. Moreover, the author goes further to show that Amish depiction in For Richer or Poorer involves a process of Othering. To paraphrase his words, the film's narrative stresses the idea of rural Amish as a foil to modern American lifestyle (Downing, C, 2008: 28).

In addition to these sociological and psychological analyses, films about the Amish have been considered from an anthropological point of view. For instance, Trollinger Susan L (2008) asserts that a film's narration about the Amish manipulates the depth of our knowledge. As public interest in and knowledge about the Amish grew, portrayals of them appeared to become increasingly authentic. Trollinger insists that from the fictional accounts of the Amish in films like Witness (1985), For Richer or Poorer (1997), and Amish Grace (2010), most Americans are familiar with prevalent conceptions of this community as a distinctive religious sect whose members wear plain clothes, drive horse drawn buggies, reject violence, and preach forgiveness (Trollinger. S, L, 2008:3).

Issue and Hypotheses

As already have been noted, a huge bulk of literature has been published about the Amish. However, much of it, as the sample of criticism above shows, has stressed the mimetic dimension of Amish representation rather than the metaphoric one. More importantly, critics have overlooked the important issue of how the Amish are mediated

across these films with reference to the prevailing historical and political atmosphere which surrounded and shaped their cinematographic productions.

I shall analyse this mediation by deploying a new historicist and cultural materialist approach. This is in order to uncover the underlying discourses about the Amish minority as a *subject* and *metaphor* in the American film industry. Moreover, I shall try to consider how these cinematographic representations of the Amish across different periods of time debate major issues in American society. Thus doing, I shall follow in the footsteps of Moore and Downing enlarging the historical perspective and modulating the approach towards cultural materialism as defined by Raymond Williams in his Culture and Materialism (2005).

One of my hypotheses is that the film Witness (1985) reflects a number of issues prevalent in 1980s America during Ronald Reagan's presidency, among which I can mention the rise of Christian fundamentalism and conservatism. My argument is that Amish portrayal in this film is prejudicial and raises many controversies. In fact, Ronald Reagan achieved stardom as an actor in Hollywood movies before turning to politics. During his presidency, the conservatives gained a considerable power and were well- positioned politically in the context of limited government and the protection of traditional values. In addition, during this era, there was a widespread suspicion in the government and its ability to deal effectively with the country's social and political problems. All these issues are represented in Witness. I shall demonstrate that the latter promotes conservative ideals and the triumph of traditional values and condemns drug- dealers and police corruption.

As for the film For Richer or Poorer (1997) I assume that it questions in a humorous way a number of prominent issues in America during the 1990s. The latter decade was for most Americans a period of economic prosperity, a period also marked by the end of the Cold War, and the return of the Democrats to the presidency. During this era, the majority of Americans asserted their support for traditional family values. Therefore, in this film we are

invited to see that the Amish are naïve people who can be taught and educated to match the modern American culture. The movie uses the Amish family values as a reference to teach the English couple the value of family and marriage. Besides, it launches a critic against a “modern” culture’s viewing of material goods and money as a path to personal happiness and social progress.

The critics of Amish Grace (2010) have focused mainly on the theme of Amish forgiveness in relation to the Nickel Mines Massacre of 2006. However, in this work, I intend to extend these ideas by doing an intertextual analysis of the film Amish Grace (2010) with Donald Kraybill et al’s book Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy (2007) on which the film is based. I shall argue that the film reverses the theme of forgiveness by representing it not as a mere Amish Christian virtue. It rather deploys the Amish and their forgiveness as an ideological and political practice similar to Hannah Arendt’s (1958) assertion that forgiveness is just a political action for restoring public relations. I shall discuss how the rhetoric of *forgiveness* is used in the film Amish Grace in a purely secular sense. This will be done taking into consideration the terrorist attacks of the 9/11 after which America adopts an ideology of reconciliation.

Methodology

As suggested above, the present dissertation attempts to discuss how the three films Witness, For Richer or Poorer and Amish Grace are all the products of their time. They reflect issues of America’s cultural dilemma towards its minorities.

My intention is to discuss how these motion pictures involving the Amish, are not really about the latter. Rather, the Amish are deployed as a metaphor to debate the American ideological bias; as the Hollywood producers did in the early days of the cinema when they depicted minorities such as the Indians as savages. I shall try to show that in these films the

Amish are represented as a sub-culture against which the ideas and experiences of the larger American culture are defined.

To explore the above issues, I shall adopt a New Historicist perspective supported by cultural materialist theory. These two theories share the common point that subjects cannot transcend their own time but live and work within the horizon of a culture constructed by ideology and discourses. The ideological constructions that authors live in, and have internalized, inevitably become part of their works.

New Historicists see a text as a work of art in the context of its time, so they reconstruct the historical situation in which the work is produced. For them, knowing a culture leads to a better understanding of the literary text (Holbling Walter W and Tally J, 2007:112). Always according to New Historicism, literature is another form of social construction which is produced by society and in turn reshapes the culture of that society. Therefore, social, political, religious, and economic factors of a given society determine the literature it produces:

The governing context of all literary investigations must ultimately be an historical one. Literature is a human product, a human art. It cannot be carried on (created), (understood (studied) or appreciated (experienced) outside of its definitive human context. The general science governing that human context is socio-historical. (Jerome J, 1988).

New Historicists gather information about the time and place in which the story is set, as well as when and where it is produced. To borrow the words of Allan Lui (1995): “*Context is a text itself and must be read*” (Holbling Walter W and Tally J, 2007:112). This technique links the literary work to different cultural phenomena of a period and compares them. One or several threads of discourse of the work are taken and traced to the outside of the text, to the different types of the media of a culture literary and non-literary. By doing so, a new historicist attempts to make sense of the connection between history and culture (Ibid).

Louis Montrose in his Professing the Renaissance (1989) suggests that history is knowable in the same sense as literature is; through subjective interpretation,

our analysis and our understandings necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially, and institutionally shaped vantage points, that the histories we reconstruct are the textual constructs of critics who are, ourselves; historical subjects (Montrose,1989:23)

Therefore, New Historicism assumes that there is no objectivity, since society experiences its own world in language and language can never be objective: “*individuals and the very concept of “individual” are historically constituted in language and society*” (Ibid, 21). This perspective assumes that our reading of a visual or written text is constructed by our own historical position. Therefore, the reader or the viewer is an active part.

As far as Cultural Materialism is concerned, the term was made popular in 1985 when it was employed by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield as a sub- title to their edited collection of essays Political Shakespeare (Barry P, 1995:182). Cultural Materialists seek to draw attention to the processes being employed by contemporary power structures, such as the Church, the state or the media, to disseminate ideology. To do this, they explore a text’s historical context and its political implications, and then conduct a close textual analysis:

Cultural materialists investigate the historical conditions in which textual representations are produced, circulated and received. They engage with questions about the relations between dominant and subordinate cultures ... the scope for subaltern resistance, and the modes through which the system tends to accommodate or repel diverse kinds of dissidence. In this approach, the terms ‘art’ and ‘literature’... are neither spontaneous nor innocent. They are ... strategies for conferring authority upon certain representations, and hence upon certain viewpoints (Sinfield. A, 1997: xxiii).

Thus, cultural materialists read the literary and the non- literary work in a way that enables them to “recover its histories” through the investigation of the context of production that created it (Barry P, 1995: 187). In this sense, Cultural Materialism is the study of literary materials within a “politicized” framework.

The difference between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism is the result of their different intellectual frameworks. New Historicism was much influenced by Foucault’s

notion of “discursive practices”, whereas Cultural Materialism owes much to Raymond William’s notion of “structures of feeling” (Barry P, 1995:186).

Methodological Outline

My work will be divided into three chapters. Chapter one starts with drawing a short background on how early America was a haven for persecuted religious minorities, particular emphasis will be put on the Amish community. This is in order to signpost to the reader the different aspects of the Amish culture and to put the present study in a larger context. As for the second chapter, it seeks to highlight the Amish representation as part of the mainstream discourse in the two films Witness and For Richer or Poorer. The aim is to show how representation and its implied critique is directed against the larger American society and the issues that bedevil it. Similarly, in foregrounding the positive image of the Amish in the third chapter, I shall argue that the circulation of such an image in the film Amish Grace is meant as a positive appreciation of conservative American values.

So on the whole, the image of the Amish in the above three films will be examined for the purpose of displaying the shift or transformation of opinions about the Amish ethnic minority. The latter as mediated images in the American film industry are deployed by the mainstream American visual culture for different ends across marked periods of American history. I shall start this highlighting of the deployment of Amish cinematographic representation as a metaphor or parabolic narrative for mainstream American culture by providing a brief and concise historical background. This background will show to the reader the process of metaphorization to which the Amish are submitted in cinematographic productions.

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Chapter One

Chapter One: Historical Background of the Amish

Introduction

A number of early immigrants who settled in America, specifically in the Northern part of the country, share a common experience. They were persecuted in their homelands for their religious beliefs. The Amish are one amongst many ethnic and religious groups that migrated to America in search of religious freedom. They share with them the same prosecution at home and the same quest for free religious worship in their adopted country. However, unlike most other minority groups or sects, they are the one who have managed to go on living according to principles that can be traced back to Sixteenth century Switzerland.

America as a Refuge for Persecuted Religious Groups

The United States has a long history of providing a haven to refugees escaping political oppression and religious persecution in their homelands. The early settlers in America longed for a better life than the one they left behind in Europe. The Pilgrims, Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Jews, and Anabaptists all came to America to seek for religious freedom. America became known as a religious haven to these different religious groups. To quote Sherrow Pinder:

Variety in early America's religious experience resulted largely from the numerous doors opened to the religiously oppressed of Europe. From Germany's Palatinate, refugees relocated along the Hudson River Valley in New York. Savannah, Georgia, was settled by Lutherans fleeing persecution in Salzburg, Austria. Then, too, like a magnet, vacant spaces of early America attracted many who yielded to the tendency to become their own religious masters, as with the Quakers in Pennsylvania who implemented William Penn's "Holy Experiment (Pinder, S, 2010: 39).

The core principle of democracy is that the majority shall rule. This inexorably means that some people in a democratic society will be forced to adhere to laws with which they disagree. Because the Founding Fathers clearly saw the potential for harm in this arrangement, they provided safeguards against a tyrannical majority. Among these safeguards is the Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These amendments are

crafted to protect minorities in certain key areas of life where it was thought that special protections against majority tyranny were particularly significant. One of these areas was religion and its importance is symbolically emphasized by the fact that constitutional protections both for religious freedom and against religious domination constitute the first two clauses of the First Amendment. In this regard, President George Washington's letter to the Quakers summarizes the founders' understanding:

The liberty enjoyed by the people of these states of worshipping Almighty God agreeably to their consciences, is not only among the choicest of their *blessings*, but also of their *rights*. While men perform their social duties faithfully, they do all that society or the state can with propriety demand or expect; and remain responsible only to their Maker for their religion, or modes of faith, which they may prefer or profess (Allen W.B, 1988: 533).

President George Washington's above words testify that religion has always played a central, yet contested, public role in America. The Founders lived in a world heavily shaped by religion. This reflected not just abstract theory but the experience of those who first came from Europe and settled the colonies that would eventually become the United States. In the seventeenth century, the New England colonies (Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) and Pennsylvania had been founded with religious purposes in mind, usually as refuges for persecuted religious groups in England.

For this, they braved dangerous voyages and the settling of untamed lands. Unfortunately, once they had gained power, many of those who had histories of religious oppression by established churches made their own religion the official religion and proceeded to persecute other religious groups. It was against this background that the First Amendment was written and ratified.

In fact, the years immediately following the signing of the Declaration of Independence, many colonists suffered from religious persecution and intolerance at the hands of established religion. In the colony of Virginia, Baptists, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Quakers were whipped, fined, and imprisoned, in an effort to coerce support for the Anglican

Church. However, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and George Mason, asserting that: “*religious belief was a natural right entrusted to the conscience of the individual*” (Fisher L, 2001: 616)

Therefore, in order to protect the rights of different religious minorities, the founders such as Thomas Jefferson defended the doctrine of the strict separation of church and state. He recognized the imperative of outlining the specific relationship between the state and religion. He did so in a reply to the Danbury Baptist Association:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (Gaustad, Edwin S, 1996:98).

The freedom of religious minorities became an important part of the identity of America. It was written into the United States constitution, specifically the first amendment. The latter proclaims that “*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof*”. The U.S. Constitution offers protections for religious minorities and for religious practices in general. These guarantees are included in what are called the Free Exercise and Establishment clauses of the Constitution’s First Amendment.

The drafters of the First Amendment, most notably James Madison were keenly aware that religious differences in Europe had led to centuries of violent conflict. They also opposed policies made by some American states of that era to impose restrictions on certain religious denominations in favour of state established churches. Madison, in particular, believed that religious faith would best thrive in an environment in which the government protected individuals’ religious liberty but did not support religious institutions (Neusner, J, 2000 :34).

The Founding Fathers included a presidential oath in the Constitution, and while it did not contain any religious language, many presidents have chosen to swear on the Bible and add “so help me God” after the oath. Even that is controversial, in fact, a lawsuit by atheist

activists following President Barack Obama's election in 2008 tried to ban Obama from using the phrase "so help me God" following the oath, but a federal judge refused the request (Ibid,17). Likewise, the history textbooks used in American classrooms present a highly selective version of the nation's origins. The story of the Pilgrims at Plymouth gives the impression that the colonies were made up of pious Bible-believers, while obscuring the real social and cultural history of the nation's founding (Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 2010: 203).

"The return to Eden" and "City upon a hill" aspects of the American dream have biblical origins. The Pilgrims, Puritans, Catholics, Jews, Quakers, and Amish among others, came across the ocean to create a new society in the New World by fleeing political oppression to practice their faiths without fear of persecution or death.

In short, as minority religious groups in the United States, these groups share a great deal in common in terms of their ideological origins stemming from political turmoil in Europe. All these minorities lived on the fringe of European society; their history of persecution prior to arrival in America, their motivations for coming to the United States, and their experiences since arrival. They suffered bitterly at the hands of Europe's religious and political establishments. Subsequently, the promise of freedom from such persecution by moving to America was irresistible.

As immigrants travelled to the United States they depended on their religion and ethnicities to empower and unify their peers. Perhaps, a good example would be with the Amish who depend on their religion and cultural traditions to survive in a modern country such as the United States of America. In this country where the puritan ethos has shaped attitudes of all the religious denominations, the Amish alone have opposed a real cultural resistance by keeping apart from whom they call "English", that is the rest of America.

Even so, they have not managed to work off the recuperation or the re-appropriation of their image for ideological and commercial uses. The Amish have become just like a double-sided coin circulated in the country to define larger ideological positions. I shall come back to this problematic once the Amish history and culture has been highlighted.

The Amish History and Culture

It is crucial to understand the background of the Amish history and the importance this history has had in shaping them over time. Naturally, focus will be primarily put on the largest and most well known Amish congregation which is the Old Order Amish. The choice is justifiable on the grounds that the three films under analysis portray that affiliation. To understand the Amish as mediated images one has to be familiar with their culture and history, which have coalesced to determine their way of life in their society today.

A-The Birth of the Amish Society

In order to understand the historical development of the Amish, it is first necessary to understand the Anabaptist movement which arose out of the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth-century. The Anabaptist history is a history of revolt and reform which led to the development of numerous protestant groups, one of which, the Amish is the object of this study. In fact, at the time of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation in Europe, new religious groups opposing the old authority system were formed. Subsequently, new reforms were instituted by Ulrich Zwingli, who founded the Reformed Church in Switzerland (Hostetler, 1980:27-28).

This newly established Protestant group sustained the concept of a united church and state. It strictly demanded infant baptism, which was considered as unsatisfactory reform to the small group of dedicated persons in Zurich, namely Conrad Grebel, Felix Mann and George Blaurock (Ibid, 25-27). The former broke away from the Swiss Reformer over the question of a free versus a state church, and over the issue of adult “believers” versus infant

baptism. He sought to establish a new church which adhered more closely to the teachings of the New Testament. Thus, reformers in Zurich, Switzerland, outraged religious authorities by refusing to baptize infants and re-baptized one another instead in January of 1525. The latter date is generally considered the birth date of the Anabaptist movement.

The Anabaptists emphasized a literal interpretation of the teachings of Jesus. They rejected infant baptism. They argued that baptism should signify a voluntary adult decision to follow Jesus, and on that basis they proceeded to baptize one another in the movement. Because these radicals had all been baptized in the state church years earlier as infants, their opponents called them *Anabaptists*, meaning “re-baptizers”. Adult baptism signifies the transition from childhood to adulthood with accepting all the responsibilities and community ties. To borrow the words of Hostetler:

Baptism signifies repentance, total commitment to the believing church community, and admission to adulthood. This vow embodies the spiritual meaning of becoming an Amish person, an acceptance of absolute values, and a conscious belief in religious and ethical ends entirely for their own sake, quite independent of any external rewards (Hostetler, 1980: 77).

For these reasons, the group required a church free from state control and expressed displeasure at economic and social injustices. The Anabaptists sought new ways of reforming the church. Because of their insistence on adult baptism they were labelled by enemies as seditious, devil inspired nonconformists. So, in addition to the Protestant and Roman Catholic establishment, the state was also involved in the Anabaptist controversy:

The Anabaptists, of course, regarded the state as "worldly." And they believed that any religious organizations which received help from the government, or entered into agreements with the government, were corrupting themselves. As a result, the Anabaptists came to advocate complete church-state separation. As pacifists, they refused to vote or to serve the countries in which they lived in a military capacity, or to contribute in any way to any war effort (John C. Wenger, 1966:45).

Therefore, Anabaptists believed in separation from the world and nonviolence. Members were admonished to live "no-conformed" to the world, a belief that demanded that they dress simply and without signs of pride. They were also to manifest this religious

conviction by refusing to serve in any public offices. Even more radical for its day was the belief in non-resistance or nonviolence. Refusing to bear arms, Anabaptists asserted that Christians should not fight with swords but with their religious faith and commitment (David W, 2002: 11).

Both civil and religious authorities were threatened by the rapid spread of Anabaptist groups. Therefore, rebaptism of adults was punishable by death. Due to their radical beliefs, the Anabaptists in Europe encountered severe persecution. They were punished in a variety of ways including confiscation of property, imprisonment, torture, death or sent to Italy as galley slaves. The martyrdom of the Anabaptists continued and in some areas more than half the population had lost their lives:

The first martyr was dawned in 1525. Over the next few decades, hundreds of Anabaptists burnt at the stake, drowned in rivers, starved in prisons, or lost their head to an executor. Twelve- hundred pages *Martyrs Mirror* first published in 1660s records the carnage of the bloody theatre (Krybill D, 2003:5).

This persecution fortified the Anabaptist view that the true church would always be a minority, and it produced a countercultural ethic to separatism. The persecution, moreover, left a deep impression on the Anabaptists and their descendants. If they had begun by rejecting citizenship and refusing military service, they now developed a deep distrust of larger society and especially of government. Twenty-first century Amish still read and retell the stories of sixteenth-century persecution collected in their book *The Martyrs Mirror*.

Through time, a number of leaders were attracted by Anabaptist conviction. In 1536 a Dutch Catholic priest, Menno Simons, converted to Anabaptism. In time many of his followers became known as *Mennonites*. As a religious innovator, Simons renounced the Roman Catholic Church, disagreeing with its doctrines of the Mass and Transubstantiation as well as infant baptism (Hostetler, 1980:30).

Simons and other Anabaptists insisted that Christians be baptized as adults, in accordance with the Scripture. They disclaimed that infant baptism could purify a child from the stain of

original sin. They also insisted that the church become a voluntary establishment, possible only among mature, believing adults. Their stand on adult baptism struck at the very heart of Roman Catholic authority. Simons was famous for being able to unify various diverse groups. In fact, he was regarded as the most important Anabaptist leader in the Netherlands. His followers were named after him *Mennonites*.

A century and a half later, in the 1690s, another Anabaptist convert named Jacob Amman led a renewal movement in Switzerland and Alsatian region of France. According to Amman, Anabaptists in his area had deviated from their social standing. He, therefore, encouraged stricter social practices enforced by vigorous church discipline. Amman separated from the Mennonites in 1693. So that the newly established division of the Swiss Mennonites owed its name to Amman, whose followers were thus named *Amish* (Hostetler, 1980:47).

Obviously, the sequence of events leading gradually to the Amish origin was based on the three main controversies that had been presented by Jacob Amman. First, he suggested the communion service to be held twice a year, instead of a year frequency, which had been the practice. Second, he reintroduced foot washing into the worship service. He insisted that church members be dressed in a plain, uniform manner, and beards not be trimmed. More than that, Amman advocated the shunning of excommunicated members.

Sharing a common Anabaptist heritage, the Amish and Mennonites have been separate groups within the Anabaptist family since 1693. Hence, unlike other Anabaptist Mennonites, Amman believed in a strict observance to the doctrine of *Meidung*. The latter means a total shunning of excommunicated members of the church in case of not following an absolute discipline.

Following the teachings of Menno Simons, Amman taught that expelled members should not only be banned from Holy Communion but also shunned in daily life. Moreover, he took shunning (excommunication) one step further. This was when he required the spouse under

the ban to neither sleep in the same bed nor eat at the same table with the sinner until they had regretted and reclaimed their behaviour (Kraybill D, 2003:6-7).

Cultural minorities use a variety of strategies to protect their way of life. When things get too bad, groups may immigrate in search for a more serene setting. From the days of European persecution the Amish have done exactly that when faced with hard conditions. Provisionally, it has to be noted that many of the values defended by the older Order Amish are taken advantage of by modern America to defend various political agendas. These values, as it will be shown were transplanted to America through the process of immigration.

B-Amish Migration to America

In the first period of American history after the continent's discovery by Europeans, many of the first to make the New World a destination for colonization were groups of religious minorities who were unhappy with the religious climate in their home countries. Similarly, after the 1693 separation, the Amish were scattered throughout the German speaking parts of Europe.

There, they were highly regarded as skilful farmers; but on the other hand, the Anabaptist faith was not given legal status. To avoid severe persecution for the nonconformist religious persuasion, the Amish migrated to North America. To quote Donald B. Kraybill:

As progeny of the Radical Reformation in sixteenth century Europe, the Amish and their Anabaptist forbearers have faced severe persecution, even death, for practicing their religious faith. Indeed, practicing their faith "unmolested and undisturbed" was one of the lures that enticed them to North America in the 1700s. (Kraybill D, 2003: xi).

In the early 1700s small numbers of Amish began to migrate to the American colonies in response to William Penn's invitation to settling his colony. The Amish migrated in several waves, first in the mid- 1700s and again in the 1800s. Within a few years many families had moved to Lancaster County. Thus, the first Amish groups came to America within a much larger German speaking movement seeking religious freedom. They established settlements in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and eventually spread to other states (Kraybill D, 2007:202).

In Europe both Amish and Mennonites were being persecuted and martyred for their religious beliefs. This persecution also came as a result of these groups' advocations of adult baptism and their refusal to participate in war. This long history of persecution is referred to in the film Amish Grace. For instance, the Amish deacon says: "*For many years, we were persecuted for our faith. We were not afraid to die.*"

An escape from both this discrimination and famine sweeping across much of Europe became possible with a move to the New World:

With the discovery of the New World, many Amish left Europe in search of the freedom to practice their religion. In Europe both Amish and Mennonites were being persecuted and martyred for their religious beliefs, especially related to adult baptism and refusal to participate in war (Hostetler John A, 1980: 50).

Another major consideration is that as a group in the New World the Amish took on an outward identity they did not have in the Old World. In America they began to wear a common, distinctive dress and so developed a badge of recognition. As society evolved around them the Amish resisted all change. Thus, they become increasingly obvious, more conservative, and seemingly more "peculiar".

The challenge to traditional rules regarding technology and the questioning of some tenets of Amish theology led dissatisfied Amish to leave the church. Hence, there emerged congregations of New Order Amish, Beachy Amish, and Conservative Mennonites, which served to provide a less drastic departure for those leaving the Amish. At the same time, such groups simultaneously challenged the Old Order view of worldliness. As new groups, they claimed, like the Older Order Amish, that they were remaining separate from the world.

Nevertheless, the Old Order Amish who reside in Pennsylvania are considered the most traditional, conservative, isolated, and thus, the most interesting society of all Amish. Actually, the minority consisting of approximately one third of all Amish became known as Old Order Amish in recognition of the fact that they favoured retaining the old *Ordnung*. In this context, Donald Kraybill says:

The Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, are one of many Amish sub-groups in North America. Most Amish groups are also known as *Older Orders* because they place a premium on maintaining old religious and social customs (Kraybill, D et al, 2007: xii).

The term Old Order Amish is strictly American it came into being in 1865. This was when a minority of Amish Mennonites refused both new methods and new forms of social organization. Subsequently, it split off from the more liberal and progressive majority (Hostetler, 1980:84).

Indeed, one cannot properly speak of Old Order Amish without mentioning and explaining the concept of *Ordnung* as it is an extremely important part of Amish life. The term *Ordnung* comes from German and is translated into English as “order”. The latter comes from the sixteenth-century. It clarifies the basic principles of separation, non-resistance, apostasy, and exclusion, providing code for expected behaviour regulating Old Order Amish life in all aspects:

The "Ordnung" serves generally to keep the community intact and "different" in the face of pressures from the outside world to assimilate. The rules most rigidly maintained are those directed against elements of modern society which threaten the Anabaptist community. While manure spreaders do not disrupt the general tenor of agricultural life, autos and movies and telephones do and the latter, therefore, are more strictly prohibited. (Jager Edward C, 1984:120).

Though all Amish settlements are fairly similar in doctrine, Amish *ordnung* varies from group to group. These differences in practice are referred to in the film For Richer or Poorer. This is when Caroline who pretends to be an Amish asks Mrs. Yoder about the phone's place. Mrs. Yoder is surprised and starts to explain to the “English” couple the reason for adopting the *ordnung*:

Mrs. Yoder: You must come from a liberal ordnung.

Brad: yes, a very liberal ordnung.

Mrs. Yoder: Ours is one of the last remaining Old Order Amish communities in the country. We still do not receive any electricity or public works. We like to maintain our purity and independence from the government. We find it better to remain disconnected from the outside world, for corruption and materialism are so common place.

In fact, the *Ordnung* is another mechanism the Amish community has employed to ensure stability. These rules establish what is worldly and what is acceptable for a particular group. Regulations vary between settlements because the rules are determined by the leadership of each group. To have a more liberal *Ordnung* is to allow more worldly practices, more conservative less (Hostetler, 1980: 82-83). Disobedience not often but still occurs in Old Order Amish community. If an individual member is disobedient, does not follow the rules of *Ordnung*, he/she faces excommunication (*Bann* in dialect). The latter is followed by social avoidance, called shunning (*Meidung* in dialect) as the most extreme. Shunning is described as a disciplinary practice of limiting church member associations with excommunicated person. Shunning does not concern children and the young Amish who have not been baptized yet (Ibid, 85).

It follows that the Amish live by the *Ordnung*, a code of conduct that the church maintains by tradition. Eli refers to the *Ordnung* in the movie Witness when warning Rachel of her attraction to John. If a church member breaks the vows, he/ she risks being shunned by the other members of the community. This can include not eating with the person, as Eli warns Rachel. In addition, it can also include not accepting gifts from the shunned member. This happens, for instance in case of marrying to an outsider. That is what happens to Emma in the film Amish Grace. Gideon grows uncomfortable when he learns that Ida accepts gifts from her shunned sister Emma:

Gideon: What is this?

Ida: Emma sent it.

Gideon: And you accepted it? She is shunned.

In his book, The Amish Society (1980), Hostetler best illustrates the practice of shunning in the life of the twenty-three year old Amish man. The latter comes from strict Old Order Amish family. After three years of his baptism, he was excommunicated and shunned due to having met and associated with excommunicated members, bought an automobile and began to attend a Mennonite church. After a series of warnings from elders, he was finally

excommunicated and obliged to eat at a separate table with children (who were not church members) since he was no longer allowed to eat at the family table (Ibid, 86-87). In other terms, a member who breaks community rules is shunned until he or she acknowledges his or her sins and starts to submit to church rules. In case of not confessing, the person may be put under a lifetime *Bann*. In Amish Grace, Rachel reminds Ida to do not maintain contact with the latter's sister. Ida's sister was shunned since she married an *outsider*:

Ida: She is my sister, and it was a friend to you.

Rachel: She is shunned, Ida. You should not open her letters.

In this respect, Amish regulations are based on several key principles covering the whole range of daily life behaviour. These regulations include *Gelassenheit*, a German word that means yielding and surrendering to a higher authority. Any tendencies of self seeking or personal power over community needs are viewed as unsafe and even injurious. On the other hand, the *Gelassenheit* principle supports membership and strong cooperation within a community, always acting with simplicity and humility (Hostetler, 1980:85-86). The ways of *Gelassenheit* are difficult to comprehend in a world governed by personal ambition. Whereas modern culture heralds individual achievement, advancement, and personal recognition, *Gelassenheit* calls for hesitating and keeping a low profile. In short, it reflects the most fundamental difference between the Amish community and the modern American values:

The culture of Older Order groups rests on the bedrock of *Gelassenheit*. However, *Gelassenheit* is layered with many meanings. Self surrender and self denial, resignation to God's will, and yielding to others. The meaning of *Gelassenheit* is woven into the social fabric of the Amish life (Kraybill D, 1998:102).

To remain disconnected from the outside world, most Amish groups forbid using electricity from public utility lines. "*It is not the electricity that is so bad*", said one member. "*It is all the things we don't need that would come with it*" (Kraybill D and al, 2007:210). The Amish try to master technology rather than become its slave. They have shown the tenacity to tackle the powerful forces of technology in order to preserve their traditional way of life.

In fact, the Amish are cautious that the mass media and the internet will ruin their souls and lead to the demolition of their communities. They have consistently banned access to many forms of media, old and new, in hopes of preserving their collective souls. Drawing lines between themselves and the larger society, the Amish believe that the value purveyed by the new communication technology will contaminate their culture and lead to its demise.

Older Order Amish draw sharp lines of separation between themselves and the larger society. Separation from the world is based on biblical phrases. This is depicted in the film Witness. For instance, Eli teaches Samuel that mainstream cultural values are viewed as a threat to their religious faith and practice. He quotes the biblical verse: “*Be not conformed to this world, come out from them and be ye separate, saith the Lord*”. The restrictions placed on the mass media and the internet rest on the Amish principles of separation from the world. The media by their very nature provide access to the values of contemporary culture. Such access to mass media technology poses a serious threat to Older Order communities:

In broad terms, the older Order response to technology is threefold. They will (a) accept new forms of technology that are considered helpful benign to the welfare of the community, (b) adopt new technology that can be adapted to fit the regulations of the community, and (c) reject technology that will likely be detrimental to the community(Kraybill D, 1998, 102).

In this respect, the modern media are considered a menace that must be avoided lest they contaminate the minds of the faithful and lead to the demise of their community. In so doing they are able to maintain their viability as a distinctive sub-culture in American society. Every Old Order Amish community is divided into church districts that provide the basic form of religious, political, and social organization for Amish society. Each district contains from fifteen to thirty families who live in close proximity to one another (Ibid, 203).

Amish society is organized into self-governing local church *districts*. With geographic boundaries marked by such things as roads and streams, the district is the socio-religious home for twenty-five to forty households. The Amish do not have church buildings but instead gather every Sunday for worship in members’ home, rotating from home to home

around the district. The close physical proximity encourages face to face interaction in daily life Amish.

Other principles worth mentioning are those based on mutual aid and belief in the church being separated from the state. The former is obviously asserted in the communal barn raising or the best example is assisting of the church in paying bills for hospitalization in case of need. As anyone who has seen the movie Witness can attest, barn raising are a striking example of Amish mutual aid. The latter resulted in independence from state authorities including teaching Old Order Amish children in Amish schools according to its own curriculum.

Another aspect of separation from the larger American culture is stressed in the Amish use of two distinctive languages with their distinctive functions. First, the native dialect *Pennsylvania Dutch*, an informal, oral language used at home. It is a conversational speech of children born to Amish family and is considered to be a language of the most important function within a community. Second, English is the language taught to growing Amish children when they attend school. According to Hostetler, despite the fact that Amish came from different parts of Europe, their mother tongue is uniform. The Old Order Amish conversational speech is called *Pennsylvania German* or also *Pennsylvania Dutch* (Hostetler, 1980:238).

Both reading aloud and speaking English gives them little difficulty caused by certain influence of the native dialect. Nevertheless, English is spoken when being in contact with the *English* (at school, in town, or when encountering non Amish salesman or visitor), hence the term *Englischer (English)* or *Auswendiger (Outsider)* is used for someone who is not Amish (Kraybill. D et al., 2007: xv).

Actually, the principle of separation, having the roots in persuasion that the true grace can only be achieved if one lives in isolation from the non-Amish world, is evident in many

practices. This include, for instance, wearing simple clothes typical for the peasant Europe clothing of the eighteenth century and horse and buggy for travelling. In addition, the Amish believe that the private phone excludes the community and contributes to individualism. Subsequently, the Amish believe ‘worldliness’ keeps one from closeness to God. They do not have church buildings, but choose to worship in one other’s homes as a community of believers. The principle of separation is illustrated in the movie Amish Grace, in one scene in a prayer meeting, one of the Amish elders delivered a speech about a dialogue which happened between him and an “English” man (The Amish call to non-Amish Americans *English*). The Amish elder says:

I went to the horse auction this week and an English man said to me: “why do you keep yourselves separate?” well, I will tell you what I told him. We are separate so that we do not stray. Someone who boasts he is a Christian must walk in the path of Christ. Then, he said to me: “Can you not walk in the path of Christ and watch television too?” I said: “well, that would be quite a trick, how can we keep our minds on God if we’ve distracted by worldly pursuits?” The answer is “We cannot”.

Hence, the Old Order Amish are also well-known for rejecting the use of electricity, owning television, radio, computers or mobiles to avoid the excessive connection to world. They believe that worldliness withholds them from being in close proximity to God and to other fellow members of the church. The need of separation is also incorporated into Amish sermons; the following passage of the Bible is quoted most often:

Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What communion hath light with darkness? (Hostetler, J, 1980:75).

It is important to mention that the Amish don’t like having their photos taken. “*No photos please*” signs are common in Amish communities. Amish dislike zoo-exhibit treatment, and most avoid picture-seeking tourists and photojournalists seeking to capture their likenesses. At the same Amish completely refuse to allow themselves to be photographed. Posed photos

in particularly may be seen as a show of pride. In Amish Grace, Ida tells her husband her regret of not having a photo of her murdered daughter Mary Beth. He says:

Gideon: Why were you showing Rachel photographs of Emma's boys?

Ida: Rachel asked to see them. We agree that God probably wouldn't find us overtly proud if we had just one photo to remember our daughter by.

Gideon: You don't need a graven image to remember Mary Beth. God doesn't like us to be in pictures.

Despite the well-known reluctance of the Amish to be photographed, some visitors to Amish communities ignore etiquette and may aggressively pursue a photo. Signage outside of Amish businesses in tourist areas may reflect frustration that comes from being treated as an attraction.

In addition to the big exception of being excluded from paying compulsory health insurance which make them self-sufficient (Kraybill D, 2003:12). The Amish are exempt from paying security taxes, however, because they consider social security a form of insurance and refuse its benefits. The Amish believe that the Bible instructs them to care for church members who have special needs, including the elderly. Thus, although the Old Order Amish family does not exist in complete isolation from the outside, an integral part of their life style is separation from the world. Their religious convictions emphasize this deliberate separation, and their life style is clearly divergent from their non-Amish neighbours. This is echoed in the opinions of non-Amish who view the Old Order as nonconforming:

The Amish are often perceived by other Americans to be relics of the past who live an austere, inflexible life dedicated to inconvenient and archaic customs. They are seen as renouncing both modern conveniences and the American dream of success and progress (Hostetler.J,1980:3).

Amish people consider marriage as a sacred institution. At marriage young people know they are making a commitment for the remainder of their lives or until their spouse dies because the Amish do not accept divorce among their members. As one Amish bishop put it,

“*Amish marry with the intention of staying married*” (Schwieder, E and Schwieder D, 2009: 57). The Amish perception of the value of marriage is depicted in the movie For Richer or Poorer. The Yoders try to teach the *English* couple the value of marriage:

Samuel: well, all husbands and wives have periods of disagreement and heart ache.

Mrs. Yoder: But the harsh words the evil looks. The vow of marriage and the love, these aren't just words cousin.

Samuel: It is the commitment we live by and hold second only to God.

Mrs. Yoder: That is the beauty of marriage.

It follows that Older Order Amish couples considering marriage must make certain they are compatible and not merely infatuated with each other. The anti-Amish behaviour that might potentially result in shunning covers personal moral deportment such as infidelity or marriage to a non-Amish individual.

A variety of symbols articulate the non-conformity of the Old Order Amish community. The horse and carriage used by Amish symbolizes their rejection of the larger culture. These groups also require their members to wear distinctive garb which signals separation from the world and compliance with community rules.

Hence, significant in ethnic identification are the hair styles and the clothing of the Amish. For these characteristics are immediately apparent and notably set off the religious group from the rest of the world. In this respect, a sense of distinctiveness and identity is clearly evident in the clothes of the Old Order Amish, and a member is easily recognized by dress alone. However, during recent centuries as a larger portion of society began to place greater emphasis on modish attire, the Amish style of dress came to be a more notable factor in indicating their separation and uniqueness. Kraybill writes: “*The dress of the Amish, more than any other symbol, sets them apart*” (Kraybill. D, 1989: 49).

As for the Old Order Amish woman, their dress is of a dark, not necessarily black but solid colour, with no pattern, again made in a simple manner. Form fitting, silky or showy clothes are not permitted so as not to digress from the doctrine of *humility* and *modesty*. One

piece dress with long sleeves must be long, within eight inches of the floor. The dress is completed with apron and bonnet of proper size and colour.

All women even infant girls from the age of six months wear a bonnet or a head cap. Girls wear white bonnets at home and black bonnets on Sunday, while married women wear white bonnets all the time. They remove the bonnets only when going to bed; nevertheless they sleep with the night head cover instead (Hostetler. J, 1964:14). Although not confined just to the Old Order, the women's head covering marks them as belonging to some group within the Amish Church. The Amish follow the biblical injunction: “*But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered Dishonoureth her head*” (Good, M and Good Ph, 1995:28).

Likewise, in the film Witness, John and Rachel are attracted to each other and eventually fall in love. However, Rachel is an Amish and her religion forbids her to keep intimate contact with an Englishman. Finally, Rachel trespasses the rules in behaving more in a non-Amish way. This is illustrated for example by the scene in which she puts off her bonnet which symbolizes her faith before throwing herself between John's arms. This act is a sign of Rachel's rejection of her religious commitment.

In fact, gender, age and position within the community are recognizable according to the garb of an individual person. The persistence of custom, one of the distinctive features of Old Order Amish, responds naturally to the style of clothing as it basically did not change since times of Jacob Amman:

The key building blocks of Amish society are the extended family, the church district, the settlement, and the affiliation. Large extended families are the basic units of Amish society. Amish men and women assume traditional and well- defined gender roles. Husbands are considered the religious leaders in their families. Wives typically devote themselves to housekeeping and motherhood (Kraybill D and al, 2007:203).

Amish culture insisted full beards to be worn after marriage. When not married yet, the face of a man should be shaved whereas moustaches are forbidden for all Amish men. The noted restriction is applied to *non-resistance* principle. The association with militia is obvious as

moustaches were worn by army officers serving in the forces of Napoleon Bonaparte, expressing by wearing moustaches their severity and heartlessness (Hostetler, 1980: 234-237).

In For Richer or Poorer, Brad who pretends to be from a liberal Amish district is ridiculed by the Amish boy named Sammy. The latter grows uncomfortable because Brad is a married man who does not wear a beard. He says to Brad: *What happened to your beard?* Then, Sammy's father, Mr. Yoder tells Brad: *Forgive him, but in our Ordnung only the unmarried man go without beards.*

In the agricultural regions of Pennsylvania originally settled by German immigrants, the fashion in clothing generally tended to be simple, austere, and dark coloured. Initially the differences between Amish garments and those worn by the rest of the population were not so prominent. The man's ordinary coat is of a black colour. It is made in a simple manner with no outside pockets and the trousers completed with suspenders if needed since belts are prohibited. The most traditional and orthodox Old Order Amish feel association with nobility and pride in using the buttons and zippers to hold the clothes together, hence they use hooks and eyes instead. Buttons are allowed to be used only for a work coat by less strict Old Order Amish. Rachel in Witness explains to John why Amish men's clothes don't have buttons:

Rachel: This kind of clothes doesn't have buttons. See hooks and eyes.

John: Something wrong with buttons?

Rachel: Buttons are *Hochmut*, proud, vain, it's not plain.

Therefore, not only internal belief but also physical appearance complies with the *Ordnung*. The style of clothing and also other outside signs inherently belong to the typical Old Order Amish religious symbols. It is believed to be supporting the feeling of unity, keeping the member separated from the non Amish world, and serving to identify the person from outside. In his book, The Amish and the State, Kraybill summarizes Amish separation from the larger American culture as follows:

Amish separation from the world can be conceptualized along three dimensions: *Cultural, technological, and legal*. At the cultural level, Amish values and convictions differ widely from those of the larger society. Social patterns of interaction in

marriage, education, commerce, and occupation also diverge from modern ways. The Amish use technology, but they adopt it selectively. Their rejection of electricity from public power lines, of automobiles, and television illustrates their technological separation from the world. Based on their religious beliefs, the Amish reject the use of force in social life. They prohibit serving in the military filing law suits, and using the law to defend themselves (Kraybill D, 2003:12).

Apart from the *Ordnung*, the Amish obey another important rule, they stress the need to avoid *Hochmut* (pride, arrogance), and they place a high value on *Demut* (humility) and *Gelassenheit* (individual submission, composure, placidity). These concepts justify the Amish defencelessness due to which they are sometimes called “defenceless Christians” (Hostetler, J,1980: 84).

Rumspringa is a Pennsylvania Dutch term, having its roots partly in the German word translated to English as “Running around” outside the bounds (Hostetler, J, 1980:177). It is a period that begins at the age of sixteen, when the time for serious courtship opens. When being in *Rumspringa* period, the Amish youth are not subjects in the sense of permitted and forbidden behaviour to the rules of the church, since they are not baptized yet. Thus, they need not be afraid of being shunned by relatives and the whole community when misbehaving. As a matter of fact, in the period of *Rumspringa*, the Old Order Amish teenagers must make two great decisions. First, whether he or she will join the Amish church by accepting baptism and second, whom he or she will marry. The later derives from the non-written tradition that all Amish adults are supposed to establish family and nurture the children in the Amish faith (Shachtman T, 2006: 11-13).

Family is considered as the basic unit and is therefore given a central role in the Amish society. Having children, raising them in order to acquire behaviour, values, norms and social skills appropriate to their position in the Old Order Amish community are the principle functions of the family that has lifetime authority over the individual (Hostetler, J,1980: 145).

In fact, the core of the Amish culture is the family. One Amish authority asserts openly that the family is “the main force perpetuating Amish culture today”. He writes:

It is the writer's opinion that if the Amish fail to survive, it will be primarily the result of a breakdown of the Anabaptist family solidarity and cohesion (Smith, Henry, 1962:11).

In this respect, the Amish believe in family and community unity, brotherly love, separation from the world, humility, nonviolence, and peacefulness. *Non-resistance* principle refers to absolute non violence involving rejection of participation in military and bearing arms. They do not regard themselves as pacifists though since they are naturally not politically active in promoting peace (Hostetler, 1980: 78).

The Amish are taught to meet any verbal or bodily assault with silence. They take literally the Bible teaching to “turn the other cheek.” Even if others attack them, which unfortunately happens in some communities when non-Amish teenagers harass them, the Amish will turn away without responding. The difference between the Amish community and the larger American culture is well illustrated in the film Witness when the Amish are attacked by youth visiting the village nearby the Amish settlements.

In one of the scenes, youth try to ridicule the Amish men by smearing ice-cream on the face of one of them and throwing down his hat. The youth have fun of it because the Amish cannot defend themselves, and they consider it probably to be a kind of a game. John Book tries to respond with violence, then, the following dialogue takes place:

Eli: It's not our way, John. We'll have nothing to do with violence! John!

John: It is my way.

John (saying to the youth): You're making a mistake.

Daniel: Everything is all right, John.

John (saying to the youth): Pick up the hat.

The youth does pick up the hat, crumples it, stamps on it, and puts it back at a crazy angle on John's head. John explodes and hits the youth.

Local Man: Never seen anything like that in all my years. That kind of fight in them, never seen anything like that in all my years.

Daniel (covering): He's from...Ohio... My cousin.

The above incident shows how the Amish do not provoke fights. They live peacefully and try to eliminate problems with outsiders as much as possible. Because of this firm belief in nonviolence, they will not serve in the armed forces. Indeed, throughout the US, there is

evidence of harassment of the Amish, by buggy-slashing, hat-stealing, or more brutal assaults such as that portrayed in the film Witness. Often the incidents will go unreported and the Amish take a pacifist approach as we see in the film. The explanation for Book's behaviour is that he comes from Ohio, suggesting the different Amish traditions that exist. In Witness, the Amish serve as an object of curiosity for the townspeople. They live separately from 'The English' who are regarded with suspicion.

For this reason many Amish men were imprisoned and treated badly at the hands of the American government during World War II. Because of their religious beliefs, the Amish do not vote in elections, participate in government, or sue others in lawsuits even if they have been wronged. The Old Order Amish do not believe in missionary activity or persuading others to join their faith. Wittmer (1971) goes on to state:

It is especially popular to harass the young Amish men and their girlfriends as they travel along in their horse-drawn buggies. Many of these young couples have been seriously injured as the horse bolted and ran away after being frightened by a firecracker tossed by a passing motorist. It is also popular to 'egg' or 'stone' the Amish buggies and a young Amish boy was recently killed (March 1969) in Indiana when struck by a rock thrown from a passing car (Wittmer J, 1971 :152).

Harassment and violence against the Amish manifests itself in the Amish school shootings in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania in 2006. When a man named Charles Roberts entered a one room Amish School and killed ten Amish girls. This tragedy is turned into the film Amish Grace.

Compulsory school attendance laws were problematic to the Amish people for decades. The Amish felt that attendance at secondary schools, private or public, was contrary to their religious faith. Sending their children to high school, they asserted, would endanger their own faith community by preparing their children for a way of life outside the redemptive community (Keim A, 1975: 211).

The purpose of Amish education is to "*produce Amish Christians able to understand and contribute to the small events that will help perpetuate their community here and in eternity*" (John A. Hostetler, 1970:184). Teachers in Amish schools are expected to not only

teach their students to read and write, but how to live a Christian, Amish lifestyle. The Amish decision to privately educate their children came into conflict with several educational laws of the United States, namely the requirement of children to attend school until reaching the age of sixteen. Amish only desire their children to receive an eighth grade education. High school and other higher education is not acceptable for the Amish because they view the teenage years as years of vulnerability that should be spent with family learning a trade:

emphasize intellectual and scientific accomplishments, self distinction, competitiveness, worldly success, and social life with other students[, whereas] Amish society emphasizes informal learning-through-doing; a life of “goodness,” rather than a life of intellect; wisdom, rather than technical knowledge; community welfare, rather than competition; and separation from, rather than integration with, contemporary worldly society(Raley.G, 2011:687).

The conflict between Amish parents and the public education system developed out of this refusal to send Amish children to high school. Many frustrated Amish moved to settlements in other states, attempting to find a locale that would accept their decisions on education.

In Lancaster County dozens of Amish parents were jailed in the early 1950s because they refused to send their children to consolidated schools beyond the eighth grade. Eventually the U.S Supreme Court, in a case known as *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* of 1972, the Amish were given an exception from the National Education System and the United States Supreme Court confirmed that first eight grades of formal schooling are sufficient for Amish children (the decision was supported by the opinion that purely basic knowledge is enough to prepare one for leading successful Amish life). In this way, the Amish of Pennsylvania forced that battle into the public eye by winning their fight to preserve a rural form of education:

The Amish won the right to separate schools, but only by means of a public legal battle that further separated them from their non-Amish neighbours and gained them national attention. It was the Amish, not the modernizing and urbanizing efforts of other Pennsylvania Germans, that mainstream Americans found fascinating (David, W, 2002: 38-39).

As a result of recognizing the validity of Amish schools, the children coming from Amish surrounding have attended their own schools, supplied with Amish teachers. The one or two room schools are operated by a board consisting of three to six Amish parents, often fathers. The choice of the teacher and the curriculums are approved by the board.

Religion itself is not a formal subject; on the other hand it penetrates through all school activities. Reading, penmanship, arithmetic, grammar, spelling, history and some geography are included in the curriculum whereas subjects dealing with science and sex are absent. Cooperation, obedience, respect and kindness are stressed (Kraybill D and al, 2007:9).

Today, the majority of Amish children attend Amish schools, though a few Amish children living far away from their own school still attend the public schools (but are not allowed to wear school or team uniform). Amish children who have completed the first eight grades of formal schooling but at the same time are not old enough to obtain labour permit, subsequently attend the vocational school. The curriculum of which comes out from entirely practical directions combined with working on a farm (Hostetler, 1980:179).

The purpose for maintaining an own education is to limit contact with non-Amish world in order to preserve Old Order Amish culture. Unquestionably, the Old Order Amish school aims are to prepare young Amish girls and boys to be successful in both playing the role in Amish system. Thus, leading him or her in relation to the norms of the outside world in order to reject it voluntarily:

Some of the Amish face-offs with the state threaten the very core of their culture. To acquire Amish Children to attend public schools beyond the elementary years would not only expose them to contaminating cultural beliefs and foster friendships with outsiders; it would also erode historic Amish values and challenge traditional Amish authority (Kraybill D, 2003:17).

The Amish in America, on the other hand, developed differently than they had in Europe. Whereas in the Old World they were too mobile, scattered, and persecuted for much agricultural communal expression, in America their communities supported and reflected their beliefs about work, discipline and marriage. The availability of land meant that they

could live together on self sufficient farming tracts in integrated communities (Hostetler, 1977:355).

Therefore, in spite of their being at odds with the larger, dominant society, it would appear that the Amish are not about to be absorbed and disappear. In fact, they have more vitality than ever. The Amish, continue to double their population every twenty-three years which attests not only to large families, but also to little defection (Ibid, 352).

Culture, history, language and religion are aspects that shape the identity of a minority community. They help them to define their identity in comparison to the majority. However, sometimes, they may also foster the majority's perception of minorities as "different" and "other".

These situations arose as a result of cultural values that segregate and exclude minority groups from dominant societies. Most of the time, these minority groups are considered inferior and without full civil and legal rights. In the words of Eide A:

[w]here there has been conflict, the minority group's culture, history and traditions have often been subject to distorted representations, resulting in low self-esteem within the groups and negative stereotypes towards members of the group on the part of the wider community. Racial hatred, xenophobia and intolerance sometimes take root (Asbjorn E, 2004:213).

In fact, America is a nation of immigrants, many of whom brought distinctive religious traditions with them. The importance of religion in the founding of the European colonies, the experience of settling a frontier society with waves of immigrants, and the powerful social and political impulses toward Anglo-conformity and the continued centrality of religious cultures in contemporary American politics. All these speak to an "American" experience that has produced some distinctive religious forms.

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". So begins the First Amendment to the Bill of Rights. This shows how religion plays a crucial role in American culture today, especially when it comes to

religious rights for minorities. Granting these rights stem from an endeavour to transcend a politics of tolerance, of respect, and to treat them in terms of a politics of recognition.

Actually this is the main purpose of the present dissertation. The aim is to demonstrate how twentieth century films about the Amish minority, in particular Witness (1985) and For Richer or Poorer (1997) circulate the image of this minority for criticizing and unveiling the negative aspects of the American society. However, in the twenty-first century film Amish Grace (2010), the Amish are constructed as supporters of the dominant American cultural values.

In this way, the days when Protestants dominated American society, as they had in the nineteenth century, were fading fast. Protestants had to make room for others, especially Catholics and Jews, who had taken advantage of the Statue of Liberty's famous invitation "*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free*". Thus, there have been more instruments devoted to minorities within recent years, providing them with a variety of rights:

American Protestants not only had to deal with the presence of Jews, Catholics, and others within the United States, they also had to reconsider their attitudes toward those of different faiths throughout the world (Jon Butter and al, 2000:343)

In this context, as Jews increasingly became accepted in American society, particularly after WWII, however, they remain distinct from the dominant majority:

Jews too became outsiders of faith. To say that the Jews were marginalized because of their faith is perhaps only partly true, since Judaism formed the basis of Christianity. And in the course of the nineteenth century Jews moved from being a rarely seen minority to a conspicuous presence on the U.S. cultural landscape, especially in the urban Northeast. Yet the Jews remained distinct from the Christian majority (Ibid, 220)

There of course have always been different ethnic, religious and national groups in America that vied with each other for status and power in the places that they interacted. One example would be with the Mormons whom by 2010 have become less recognizable as a distinct culture. Prominent politicians like Mitt Romney who run for the presidency in 2012,

academics like Richard Bushman, and moguls like J. Willard Marriott blurred that line. Some of their theological beliefs still aroused suspicion among evangelical Christians. Socially, however, the Mormons were patriotic, hardworking, middle-class Americans. (Jon Butter and al, 2000:211).

Similarly, the view of the Amish has undergone a significant change. Hostetler summarized this change of the image of the Amish in the American landscape in his book Amish Society (1980):

A century ago, hardly anyone knew the Amish existed. A half-century ago they were viewed as an obscure sect living by ridiculous customs, as stubborn people who resisted education and exploited the labour of their children. Today the Amish are the unwilling objects of a thriving tourist industry on the eastern seaboard. They are revered as hard-working, thrifty people with enormous agrarian stamina, and by some, as islands of sanity in a culture gripped by commercialism and technology run wild. (Hostetler,1980:4) [Italics mine].

The position of minorities in the United States, an immigrant nation since its inception whose indigenous population was perceived as non-American, remains a volatile topic of debate that touches the core of American identity. In 1909, Israel Zangwill in his celebrated play The Melting Pot still spoke in the present progressive tense. This is to emphasize that religion can not constitute an obstacle for achieving the ideal of assimilation in American culture:

Here all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming ...God is making the American (Sydney, A, 2004:37). [Italics mine]

The Melting Pot recounts the New York City romance between David, a Russian Jew, and Vera, a Russian Christian, whose father had been responsible for the pogrom in which David's parents perished. When David discovers this, he is tempted to break off the romance. But in a melodramatic finale, love triumphs over European memories, and David reaffirms his vision:

Yes, East and West, and North and South, and palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God (Cited in Charles H. Lippy and Peter W. Williams, 2010:1126).

Israel Zangwill in The Melting Pot is the most important response to the ideology of Anglo-conformity. It envisaged a process whereby immigrants and Native Americans alike were thrown into the melting pot out of which emerged a new nationality, combining the best that each group had to offer.

However, Zangwill's rhetoric does not always correspond to the reality witnessed throughout American history wherein, most of the time, in a diverse country like the United States, individuals and institutions clash and the boundaries of religious freedom may need to be redefined. In Legacy of Hate: A short History of Ethnic, Religious, and Racial Prejudice in America, Philip Perlmuter argues that:

Although rightfully hailed as a land of opportunity, freedom, equality, and justice, America has also been criticized as a nation born, bred, and nurtured in interracial, interethnic, and interreligious rivalries and conflicts, wherein one group's well being was often achieved at another's expense from the time of America's discovery to the nineteenth century, old and New World conflicts were replicated and magnified. (Perlmutter P, 1999:3).

Philip Perlmuter's above quote supports my assertions that certain minority groups are used as vehicles to transcend American dominant values which were/are perpetuated and implemented in films. In Witness, For Richer or Poorer, and Amish Grace, some characters both "English" and Amish are represented as individuals struggling against their cultures. However, at the end of each film there is this triumph of majority values over those of the rebelling individuals. This conception is part of both Amish and American culture. Unlike Vera in Zangwill's The Melting Pot, the Amish woman Rachel in Witness is forbidden from marrying the man she loves just because he is "English" who belongs to another culture. Besides, the main character in Witness, John Book, who belongs to the American mainstream culture, is targeted by the police just because he is against the corruption of some police officers.

The Amish community, I study, is often represented as failing its citizens in similar ways as mainstream American culture does. The film directors, whether consciously

or not, explore the causes and effects of this cycle, including potential problems caused by repeating the mistakes of the past. In this sense, communities being sub- cultures or dominant ones fail some of their members who remain as voiceless and powerless since they constitute a threat to the very fabric of their respective community. This struggle around community and individual values resemble the American culture which has long held two competing visions of itself. The first is America as a haven for refugees who, seeking freedom and opportunity, come to the shores of the New World to become real citizens, adopting the language, culture and values of the historic, founding dominant majority. The second view is of America as a rich mixture of cultures and languages; a nation that celebrates diversity with the realization that what binds its citizens is its pluralism. In the same context, the battle over what constitutes authentic American culture goes back to colonial times. James Madison saw the multiplicity of different religious sects throughout the nation as ensuring religious liberty, in the same manner that the multiplicity of social, political, and economic interests ensured civil freedom (Reimer, N, 1968:38).

Hence, the power of religion for most of American history is seen through the occurrence of a denominational- struggle in society. As assimilation proceeded, ethnic group boundaries faded, but religious boundaries did not (Healey, Joseph F, 2003:52). As the so called “melting pot” sought to meld the ethnicities that separated the many communities of American society, religious minorities, such as the Amish prove the potential of religion and tradition to maintain communal separation.

Conclusion

There have been many critiques of the concept of assimilation and the *melting pot*. New metaphors have emerged that emphasize diversity along with harmony, such as the *salad bowl* or the *mosaic*. These new conceptions allows for the existence of ethnic groups like the Amish who have attempted to preserve their unique cultures by resisting assimilation

to the predominant Puritan ethos. Paradoxically, the Amish as we shall see in the next chapters, turned out to be a reserve of values which modern America has resorted to celebrate its conservatism at times and to criticise its modern excesses at other.

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Chapter Two

Chapter Two: The Amish Image as a Critical Metaphor of Mainstream America in Witness and For Richer or Poorer

Introduction

To identify themselves as members of a community, people have to define themselves jointly as insiders against others, whom they thereby define as outsiders. Culture as a process that both includes and excludes, always entails the exercise of power and control [...] only the powerful decide whose values and beliefs will be deemed worth adopting by the group, which historical events are worth commemorating, which feature is worth imagining. Cultures and especially national cultures, resonate with the voices of the powerful, and are filled with the silences of the powerless (Kramsch C, 1998:8-9).

The culture of any marginalized or minority group is often labelled a *subculture*, as Kramsch expands on the above quote, subcultures can have their effect on the dominant culture by contributing to the active hegemony of dominant ideology. However, usually, this only happens to the extent that a subculture's concerns can be adapted to the needs of the dominant ruling interests. In this way, every cultural production is thus a text that conveys the discourses and the ideological messages of both the culture that produced it and the period of its production.

In this chapter of my dissertation, I shall demonstrate that both witness (1985) and For Richer or Poorer (1997) speak for the political and social forces at work in late twentieth century America. It follows that the Amish minority in both films is used as a language for communicating the dominant majority cultural norms. Both motion pictures are narratives in which only American cultural attitudes and ideas are permitted the ability or power to represent.

Witness and For Richer or Poorer belong to different film genres. They are chosen for the purpose of emphasizing the point that the Amish community image is (re)appropriated in these two late twentieth century films to debate certain ideological conflicts within the contexts of their production. Before starting my analysis, a few words about the function of

film genre are in order. The latter exploits ambivalent social values and attitudes. To borrow the words of Bordwell. D and Thompson.K:

The fact that every genre has fluctuated in popularity reminds us that genres are tightly bound to cultural factors [...] Genre conventions arouse emotion by touching on deep social uncertainties but then channel those emotions into approved attitudes (Bordwell. D and Thompson. K, 2008 :326).

Thus, using serious elements of crime and drama in Witness, Peter Weir exposes a number of conflicting ideologies which were widespread during the Reagan era, such as police corruption, drug, and the rule of conservative and religious ideas. Likewise, in For Richer or Poorer, implicit messages are conveyed through comedy which provokes laughter. In this respect, powerful new forces were in play in America in the nineties. The latter, is a time in which moviegoers wanted old-time American family values in their movies. According to Stephen Greenblatt, each epoch is characterized by its mode of power and its attendant cultural forms (Brannigan J, 1998:66). Witness and For Richer or Poorer fall into different genres and cover distinct historical periods as well.

Conservative American Culture Through Amish Eyes in Witness

A brief synopsis of Witness is necessary for later discussion. The film plot includes Rachel, a recently widowed Amish woman. After the death of her husband she decides to visit some friends in Baltimore with her young son, Samuel. While waiting to change trains in Philadelphia, Samuel secretly witnesses a brutal murder inside a bathroom by a corrupt police officer. Detective John Book informs Rachel that she must stay in Philadelphia for some days because Samuel is a “material witness” to the murder. Thus, Rachel and Samuel, who come from the Amish world, find themselves stuck in the middle of a huge modern American city. Later on, while investigating the murder, John gets a huge break in the case when Samuel identifies the murderer from a picture on a poster. It is a well known detective in the Philadelphia police department. John suddenly realizes that the murder occurred because certain police officers are corrupted, and thus are working with criminals in the drug trade.

Then, after John is nearly murdered, he takes Rachel and Samuel back to their home in Amish district. He hopes to protect them from the police officers who are determined to silence both John and Samuel.

Among the Amish, John experiences a completely different world, with, among other things, no phones, cars or electricity. Over the next few days, John learns of the dignity and grace of the Amish people, and soon he falls in love with Rachel. Each learns much of the other's world, and indeed, how dissimilar their worlds are. All the while, John must do everything he can to protect himself and Samuel from the violence that threatens to spread from his own big city to the Amish community. However, after a final showdown, the corrupt policemen are captured and brought to justice. Besides, both John and Rachel return to their respective worlds.

Witness is a product of 1980s America. Although it is the best known fictional representation of the Amish community in the arts, it was not the first. Indeed, as American society became more technologically advanced the Amish way of life went into sharper relief. This became especially evident after the Second World War when the Amish lifestyle was untouched by the economic success of the rest of the USA. Many more portrayals of the Amish in cinema have actually appeared, such as: Violent Saturday (1955) directed by Richard Fleischer, and the musical Plain & Fancy (1955). Witness was not the only film which takes conservative ideas as its major theme in the 1980s. In fact, many movies concerning religion were made with a conservative religious bent. I can refer for example to, Chariots of Fire (1981), The Chosen (1981), The Mission (1986), The Last Temptation of Christ (1988), and Jesus of Montreal (1989).

However, in the 1980s, it was not only religion but also other themes, considered as marginal earned their place on the screen. Audiences were most often offered movies related to ethnicity, family, addiction, abortion, violence, gender, class, family values, or AIDS.

Films with these subjects are, according to Quart and Auster, deeply embedded in history and respond to the events, trends, and general moods of the time of their creation:

But, more important, fictional films reveal something of the dreams, desires, displacements, and, in some cases, the social and political issues that confront American society. Undeniably, films are a powerful and significant art form (Quart. L and Auster. A, 2011:2).

In this context, the politics of the 1980s were associated with the Reagan Era. The latter worked a profound transformation of American political and cultural life by moving the country in a rightward direction. Throughout Hollywood productions of the period, there were a number of recurring themes in major and minor films that articulated the key events and socio-political relations of the time. Indeed, many of these films resonate, and can be reread, within the history of major political conflicts of their period.

Witness offers a more convincing examination of issues related to the eighties such as conservatism and police corruption. More importantly, the film shows the hegemonic effects of dominant cultures and the authority they have in representing and speaking for the “other”. That is the case of the dominant American culture and that of the Amish which stands as a minority culture outside the mainstream. In this context, David W Zeacher in his book The Amish in the American Imagination states:

Representational issues proved complex, for the sectarians’ concerns were often mediated through outsiders who spoke on their behalf [...] still the circumstances that surrounded the movie *Witness* offer a valuable entry into a longstanding and continuing dilemma: discerning the views of a quiet people, who, unlike their noisy neighbours, rarely projected their voices (Weaver- Zeacher. D, 2001:154).

Indeed, for many Americans, the economic, social, and political trends of the previous two decades ranging from crime and radical polarization in many urban centres to the economic downturn and inflation of the Carter years engendered a mood of disillusionment. It also strengthened a renowned suspicion of government and its ability to deal effectively with the country’s deep-rooted social and political problems:

By 1978, the New Right had become a major force in the country, advocating ‘a politics of return’ to ‘pre-New Deal, pre-social welfare economics, to the traditional

male-supremacist family, to fundamentalist religious values and to a time when the United States was the most powerful military nation on earth. Reacting especially against the politics of the counterculture, this conservative movement (the outcome of which was the sweeping victory of Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election) found expression in a large number of popular films of the period (Tzioumakis Y, 2006:208).

The figure who draws all these disparate strands together was Ronald Reagan. In fact, the former Hollywood movie actor frequently used film phrases and quotations to promote his conservative agenda. As when he called the Soviet Union “the Evil Empire” and referred to the missile defence program as “Star Wars”, drawing on discourse from George Lucas’s popular films. Reagan also would directly quote Dirty Harry’s famous phrase, “Make my day,” to threaten a veto against Democrats in Congress in 1985. He later used allusions to Rambo to justify his aggressive foreign policy. Add to this, in 1983, he claimed “the Force is with us,” appealing both to Hollywood movie fans and his conservative Christian based agenda. Hammer. R and Kellner .D state that :

In November Ronald Reagan was re-elected as president of the United States in a landslide. It was perhaps the high point of Reaganite conservatism, and many popular films of the period articulated conservative discourses associated with Reaganism (Cited in Prince, S, 2007:107).

In fact, Conservatives after a long period out of power at the national level were well positioned to exploit this new mood. It was a time when many Americans were receptive to their message of anti-Communist sentiments, limited government, anti-feminism, and a protection of traditional values against what were seen as the encroachment of a permissive and often chaotic modern society. These themes which preoccupied the conservative agenda are given voice through the Amish “medium” who are used as an oblique critic on some issues which bedevil the 1980s conservative American landscape.

Anti- Communist Discourse

Minority groups voicing their needs play a crucial role in the self-definition of the majority group and society as a whole. In many ways, the Amish community in Witness fulfils the American anti-Communist feelings which characterise the ideological agenda of the

Reagan Era. Strong anti-Communist sentiments were inherited to conservatism. American Social conservatives opposed Communism since it was perceived as a threat to their respective interpretations of the American way of life. They were mortified by the threat of a competing “godless ideology”. Ronald Reagan seemed to fulfil long-standing conservative dreams of rolling back the economic and political reforms of Roosevelt’s New Deal. During his first term, he affiliated with the Christian Right and its efforts to infuse a religion based morality into American politics. This is well illustrated in the quote below:

Over the last two or three decades, the federal government seems to have forgotten that old-time religion and that old-time Constitution...It’s time for God’s people to come out of the closet. Religious America is awakening, perhaps just in time for the country’s sake (Quote by Ronald Reagan in Paul D, Erickson, 1985:73).

In the Cold War era, Biblical themes were attractive to an industry seeking to defend itself against the charges of Communist infiltration. The officially atheist stance of the Soviet Bloc meant that the foregrounding of religious subjects such as the Amish in Witness could serve as an assertion of loyalty to the American way of life. For instance, the youth who harass the Amish in Witness show disrespect for the Bible. It is illustrated in one of them saying in a disdainful manner: “*He is gonna hit you with his Bible*”. This young man is punished by John Book who is an “English” man disguising in an Amish clothes. In fact, this is allegorical; John is a representative of the American majority culture. This association implies that the dominant culture is disguising itself behind the Amish minority character. In other words, the Amish are employed as a mask to voice, validate, and transmit the majority interests and values.

Hence, the major interest in introducing the Bible in Witness is perhaps for espousing the Reaganite conservative rhetoric. As when the president reproduces in his speech the belief that America was founded by religious people:

America was founded by people who believed that God was their rock of safety. He is ours. I recognize we must be cautious in claiming that God is on our side. But I think it’s right to keep asking if we are on his side (Quoted in Bigsby, C, 2006 24).

Produced at the highest point of the Cold War hysteria, Witness is an avowedly anti-Communist film. This is done through taking the Amish attitudes as a medium for criticising the declining values of the American culture. For example, Eli considers handguns as symbolic of mainstream society's sin. In the following exchange, he teaches Samuel that using guns is wrong:

Eli: This gun of the hand is for the taking of human life. We believe it is wrong to take life. That is only for God. Many times wars have come, and people have said to us, "You must fight. You must kill. It is the only way to preserve the good." But Samuel there is never only one way. Remember that. Would you kill another man?

Samuel: I would only kill a bad man.

Eli: Only the bad man, I see. And you know this bad man by sight? You are able to look into their hearts and see this badness?

Samuel: I can see what they do. I have seen it.

Eli (quoting from the Bible): "Wherefore, come out from them and be ye separate" "Saith the Lord" and "Don't touch the unclean thing".

Eli's claims show the fact that Amish attitude towards worldly matters is derived from the Bible. Ronald Reagan declares just the same on February 3rd, 1983, when he says: "*Inside its pages [the Bible] lie all the answers to all the problems that man has ever known.*" (Cited in David B. F, 2012:182). The above negotiation over the use of arms and technology in general is a dramatization of twentieth century American society's fears. During that era, the country suffered from widespread criminal actions. This was, especially, common in urban areas. At various points in the narrative, Witness stresses that, Biblical non-resistance is the true attempt to "make peace". Thus, in this film, the Amish are constructed as the stricter anti-militarist society. In one scene, Rachel enters the room and sees Samuel handling John's gun. She is horrified and sends Samuel out of the room to wait for her downstairs. She says angrily to John: "*John Book while you are in this house, I expect that you will respect our ways.*" John agrees with her and asks her to hide it: "*Put it safe, somewhere where he won't find it.*" Rachel takes the gun from John by the very tip of its butt, as though it is infectious and dirty to hold. In the same manner, on January 16th, 1984, in a radio address to the nation, Reagan did indeed say that:

1984 finds the United States in the strongest position in years to establish a constructive and realistic working relationship with the Soviet Union. Together we can strengthen peace, reduce the level of arms, and know in doing so know that we have helped fulfil the hopes and dreams of those we represent, and indeed, of people everywhere. (Quoted in Hudson, C and Davies, G, 2008:85)

As I argue above, Witness inadvertently conveys the message that faith is the most powerful weapon in the Cold War. Trust, confidence, and goodwill would be difficult to establish with the Soviets in the Cold War atmosphere.

Masculinity and Femininity

Further ambivalence in the representation of the Amish relates to masculinity and femininity. It is well-known that Reagan Era was marked by the trend towards increasing conservative values and the influence of the Religious Right was set. Reagan was elected on a Republican platform that for the first time opposed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). All this suggests that it was not a particularly good period for women.

Criticizing hegemonic ideologies requires showing how certain positions in media cultural texts reproduce existing political ideologies in current political struggles. I suggest once again, that Witness is a product of its socio-political context. Subsequently, its anti-feminist tendency is an implicit exploration of one of the most divisive issues for conservatives of the time:

The knot of cultural notions which constitute and inform any one culture's concepts of sex, gender and sexuality are unusually difficult to unravel, partly because they are so seldom questioned, so integrated into societal structures, so taken for granted that it is almost impossible to uncover them without recourse to another means...Within this knot, however, it begins to be apparent that the cultural discourses of any society which include ideologies of the person, cosmology, folktales, 'common sense' and many others – are a crucial part of how a society is informed, in our notions regarding sex, sexuality and gender and how these can be dealt with.(Suthrell, C, 2004 :2).

Susan Faludi is largely correct that 1980s films represent the backlash against women replicating the anti-feminism of the Reagan Era (Faludi,S, 1990:113). The Supreme Court decision in June 1980s upholds limits on federal funding for abortion. The Republican platform also came out in favour of a constitutional amendment to ban the procedure. They

provided that any federal judge appointed by a Republican administration must be explicitly opposed to abortion. Reagan was aware that the country was divided on these issues. That's why he inserted a conciliatory paragraph regarding discrimination against women near the beginning of his acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention:

As president, I will establish a liaison with the fifty governors to encourage them to eliminate, wherever it exists, discrimination against women. I will monitor federal laws to ensure their implementation and to add statutes if needed (Malbin, Michael J, 1981:116).

In Witness, the female characters illustrate the same anxieties of American women during the 1980s. This debate over gender is embodied in the role of Rachel and John's sister Elaine. Though the latter belong to different worlds, Rachel is an Amish and Elaine is "English", both women share the common point in being victims of their respective patriarchal societies. They are mothers who lost their respective husbands, Rachel is a widow and Elaine is divorced. Elaine shows the energy of a woman who refuses to be a victim and who stands up for her right. Nevertheless, she cannot escape the male authority exercised by her brother who refuses to see his sister as a woman who enjoys sexual freedom. She cannot escape John's uncomfortable stance concerning her personal behaviour. This is represented by his criticism of her having a man in the house:

Elaine: How could you do this to me tonight? I told you I have company.

John: And you got a man in the house?

Elaine: That is none of your business.

The same can be said in the case of Rachel, who is a product of the Amish culture. She submits to the laws of her Amish community which excludes or shuns any member who decides to marry an outsider. Rachel's role and character are truly contained within a male dominated social order. Her father, Eli Lapp, reminds her of the rules of the church and warns her that the consequences of her rebellious actions would bring about her excommunication from the Amish community. Eli reveals that the church leaders have already talked about the

possibility of her being shunned. This scene comes after he catches her and John dancing in the barn:

Eli Lapp: Rachel! Rachel? What is it with you? Is this the Ordnung?

Rachel: I have done nothing against the rule of the Ordnung.

Eli Lapp: Nothing? You bring this man to our house with his gun of the hand. You bring fear to this house. Fear of English with guns coming after him.

Rachel: I've committed no sin.

Eli Lapp: May be. May be not yet, but, Rachel, it does not look... You know there has been talk. Talk about going to the Bishop and having you shunned.

Rachel: That is idle talk.

Eli Lapp: Do not take it lightly. Rachel! They can do it. They can do it just like that. You know what it means, shunning? I cannot sit at table with you. I cannot take a thing from your hand. I cannot go to worship with you. Child ... do not go so far.

Rachel: I am not a child.

Eli Lapp: But you are acting like one.

Rachel: I'll be the judge of that.

Eli Lapp: No. They will be the judge of that and so will I if you shame me.

Rachel: You shame yourself.

The above conversation reveals that Eli is a controlling figure in Rachel's life. His words show this when Rachel says: "*I will be the judge of that*". He replies: "*no, they will be the judge of that and so will I if you shame me*". Thus, even though Rachel's defiance of the patriarchal order of her Amish society seems as if it is a product of her freedom, yet this freedom itself is an illusion. She resists the authority while submitting to it. Certainly, at the beginning, Rachel resists her own father when she speaks to him rudely and refuses his opinion and advice. From every look and move, the viewer knows that she will finally violate the rules of *Ordnung* and surrender to John. This is illustrated especially by the scene in which she puts off her bonnet as a symbol of rejection of her culture as if it is a piece of clothes to be removed. Yet, at the end of the film Rachel chooses to serve her cultural beliefs at the expense of her happiness.

On this reading, this film reinforces the belief that men are the most important members of society. Masculine voice has the power "to judge" and control women's voices. They are entitled to greater opportunity and access to power which is considered as the "natural order of things". This suggests that Witness produces the values and norms of the American mainstream society. In one way or another, this movie espouses the conservative

social rhetoric. The latter claimed that women should stay at home to fulfil their “natural” roles as caregivers. The following dialogue between John and Rachel is an illustrative example:

Rachel: You have no right to keep us here.

John: Yes, I do, your son is a material witness to a homicide.

Rachel: You don’t understand. We want nothing to do with your laws.

John: Doesn’t surprise me. A lot of people I meet are like that.

The above dialogue can also be read as an exercising of male power over an oppressed female. John replies: “*Yes I do*”, an oblique support for the conservative ideals of anti-feminism. The latter, favoured a constitutional amendment to permit opposition to abortion and defeat of the equal rights Amendment for Women. This is again clear in John’s reaction when a young “English” man tries to emasculate the Amish by saying: “*Come on down, are you a man or what?*”. Unlike the Amish, John responds with violence hitting the man bitterly. This suggests that the Amish minority’s deployment of peace means helplessness and effeminacy. On the contrary, John’s reaction is that of a strong masculine protector.

Thereby, Witness supports more than it questions the *hegemony* of American patriarchy. The latter is an ideology that permeates the way most Americans think about themselves and the world around them during the 1980s, and which, in turn, permeates most American films. What appears as natural and self-evident to an audience focused on action and suspense could also be seen as a dubious ideological way to reassert the values of patriarchy and (white) supremacy during a period of acute economic and multicultural transformation such as the 1980s. Indeed, an opposition to the 1973 Supreme Court decision, *Roe.v.Wade*, which guaranteed a woman’s right to an abortion in the early months of pregnancy, was waged by large numbers of Catholics, political conservatives, and religious fundamentalists. The latter were prepared to support politicians who agreed with their position. An illustrative example would be with Rachel who tries to escape from one

oppressive patriarchal regime, with her father, to surrender to another in accepting to stay in her male governed community at the end of Witness.

The Amish cultural values in this film directed as an effective “medium” to criticise the liberal ideology’s advocacy of individual freedom. As “liberals” have been under sustained attack by “conservatives” for what is alleged to be a reckless disregard for traditional values and moral virtue. The fact that Witness emerged during Reagan’s first term, which coincided with a rise in Christian fundamentalism and the Religious Right, again demonstrates “*that resistant liberal forces existed in American culture at odds with the dominant conservative value system*” (Ryan M and Kellner D, 1988:259). While the modern world focuses on individual rights and personal ambition, the Amish see these very rights as an obstacle in the face of *Glassenheit*. The latter is part of the Amish culture and it means self- surrender and submission to community rules. Hence, in a community regulated by the virtues of *Glassenheit*, the group not the individual is the primary social unit. This Amish belief is adopted to critique the American liberal drive. This commitment is viewed in the film’s restriction of Rachel’s individual liberty and the triumph of her community laws at the expense of her personal desires. Witness uses Rachel’s behaviour as an effective instrument for power. While she appears to be “contesting” power, she is actually serving the needs and interests of the dominant conservative discourse.

The film perfectly reproduces the conservative discourses of its period. The meeting of Rachel and John’s sister Elaine shows an interesting clash between two cultures, with the two women outwardly having little in common. However, it is possible to see that the film is considering how both women are trapped by the conservative values of their worlds. This is reflected through pulling both women into alignment with conservative norms of gender. This seems to concur with the 1980s conservative social pressure to restore traditional gender roles and family values.

America's Urban Backstage and Its Distrust of Big Government

American history has been marked by swings between liberal and conservative policies. In liberal times such as the New Deal and the Great Society, activist government tried to reform society. In conservative times such as the 1920s and 1950s, concern for freedom led many to oppose governmental involvement. Such a swing in the 1970s led conservatives to take control of the government in 1980s. In Witness the Amish are positioned as an anti-government minority. They speak the feeling that dominated the American public in the eighties. This is clear, for instance, in Rachel's conversations with John Book:

Rachel: Where are you taking us?

John: Oh, I'm sorry; we are looking for a suspect. I want the little boy to take a look at him.

Rachel: You have no right to keep us here.

John: Yes, I do, your son is a material witness to a homicide.

Rachel: You don't understand. We want nothing to do with your laws.

John: Doesn't surprise me. A lot of people I meet are like that.

John Book as a police officer represents American law and government. He speaks in an authoritative way, as when he says "*Yes, I do*". John's statement suggests that the government has an absolute control over the individual. It follows that, the Amish characters are made to speak the American public's anger over the government's restriction of their individual liberties. Taking Philip Gianos's assumption that:

Movies are partly cultural phenomena; likewise, politics. Both grow from the same places, tap the same sources, and speak in the same powerful and ambiguous ways. Movies and politics are not the same, but neither are they entirely different. In their fashion, both play to the same audience. And in the United States, films play a unique cultural role. (Phillip L. Gianos, 1998: xii).

I assume that the film Witness speaks the same Reaganite language. In fact, in his first inaugural address, President Reagan expressed his optimistic view that the problems of the nation could be overcome with conservative policies. He embraced the Christian Right ideology and its moralistic agenda in the United States. For instance, at the heart of his

economic plan, was the concept that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” He explained this by saying:

We are a nation that has a government—not the other way around. And this makes us special among the nations of the Earth. Our government has no power except that granted it by the people. *It is time to check and reverse the growth of government, which shows signs of having grown beyond the consent of the governed.* It is my intention to curb the size and influence of the Federal establishment and to demand recognition of the distinction between the powers granted to the Federal Government and those reserved to the States or to the people (McNown. L, 2011:4) [Italics mine].

This distrust of the law was common in 1980s United States which is also articulated in John Book’s reply: “*Doesn’t surprise me. A lot of people I meet are like that*”. The American public rejected the idea that the federal government should be the primary solver of major economic and social problems. In the same manner, Witness reveals the injustice of the American government and the necessity to curtail its domain of intervention.

The characters who stand for the American government are working against the interests of the people they are supposed to serve. The police officers are shown as oppressive agents who subdue the public, especially minority groups such as the Amish, the African Americans, and women. These minorities’ struggles and failures in Witness are critical metaphor of the American government’s impotency to ensure a normal life for those peoples who live in the margin. In Witness, negative images of Blacks circulate widely, particularly those of irredeemable, violent criminals, and drug dealers. Even though the focus in this dissertation is not on the image of Blacks in the film, I find it useful to clarify the Black peoples’ portrayal in Witness. My purpose in doing so is to draw attention to the American culture’s perception of its minorities during that era. It is especially worth noting how both African American and Amish minorities are juxtaposed. Hollywood’s negative portrayal of blacks in films in general, and in Witness in particular during the Reagan Era can be interpreted as the resistance of conservatives to black demands for racial equality and increased power:

In some jurisdictions the jail sentence for possession of crack, the preferred form for blacks, was ten times the sentence for regular cocaine used mainly by whites. It dovetailed with the earlier broad Reagan administration message that the reasons your taxes are so high is because of government programs giving massive handouts to undeserving blacks—epitomized by Reagan’s fantasized stories of “welfare queens” arriving in Cadillacs to pick up their welfare checks and other benefits. It not only resulted in a justification for wholesale arrests, but allowed the argument to be made that imprisonment of tens of thousands of young African Americans made the country safer (Hudson. C And Davies. G, 2008: 54).

In fact, many in the New Right criticized the policy of *affirmative action*. Affirmative action required employers and educational institutions to give special consideration to African Americans, women, and other minority groups, even though these people were not necessarily better qualified. Many conservatives saw Affirmative Action as a form of *reverse discrimination*, favoring one group over another on the basis of race or gender. To members of the New Right, liberal positions on Affirmative Action and other issues represented an assault on traditional values. Endorsing this ideology, the black characters in Witness are all punished by death.

Further, Witness also shows that American mainstream culture discriminates against the Amish. In one scene, ordinary youth living in the village nearby the Amish settlements harass and try to ridicule the Amish. This disrespect is manifested in many ways, such as insulting them. However, John cannot remain pacifist. He approaches towards the youth trying to defend the Amish:

Eli: It happens sometimes. Do nothing, John.

Young man: Come on. Come on, Goldilocks. Don’t you speak English? You don’t hear very good. Do you? Come on down. Are you a man or what?

Young man (Another one): That’s right, no fight. They don’t fight for our country either.

Eli: It is not our way.

John: But it is my way.

Daniel: It is all right John.

Young man: He is gonna hit you with his Bible.

John: You are making a mistake.

The above scene, although in one sense, tries to portray the Amish as rejectors of violence. It also redeems the American dominant culture’s tyranny over the Amish minority. This is well illustrated when one of the youth who offends the Amish says: “*That’s right, no fight. They*

don't fight for our country either". In this context, Witness gives the Amish community's peaceful and defenceless tradition an unpatriotic dimension. The Amish are referred to as unpatriotic. Indeed, they appear as highly ambivalent figures. On the one hand, they are used as a metaphor for limited government; on the other hand, they are unpatriotic. This ambivalence was characteristic of the Reagan regime. The pursuit of these themes during Ronald Reagan's presidency influenced the course of both domestic and foreign policy.

This disrespect of people who show unpatriotic sentiments, such as the Amish in the above scene and many other scenes in Witness, has a symbolic meaning which goes beyond the Amish to cover all Americans. The Reagan Revolution of the 1980s sought to change Americans' attitudes toward their country, their government, and the world, as the United States emerged from the 1970s. Ronald Reagan entered the White House in January 1981 promising to restore Americans' faith in their nation and themselves, to shrink "Big Government," and to defend America more aggressively, especially against the Soviet Union.

Films show the cultural conditions that produced them. They focus on what it is in the culture that attracts audiences to them (Maltby and Craven, 1995:55). So, one way to read texts is to situate them into their historical context, to see how they fit into specific genres and promote certain ideological positions. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the 1980s conservative upsurge had many sources. A large group of Fundamentalist Christians regard the Bible as the direct word of God. They were particularly concerned about an increase in crime and sexual immorality. One of the most politically effective groups in the early 1980s called the Moral Majority which was led by the Baptist minister Jerry Falwell. Such groups among others were upset about the traditional and religious decline in America, especially in urban areas.

These conservative anxieties are referred to in Witness. The latter combines several sub-genres, most notably the gangster/detective, western and romance ones to explore the American society's illnesses:

The western and gangster film have a special relationship with American society. Both deal with critical phases of American history. It could be said that they represent America talking to itself about, in the case of the western, its agrarian past, and in the case of the gangster film/thriller, its urban technological present. (Leonard R J, 2003:282).

In the urban areas of America, corruption and violence are accepted as part of society. This is embodied in the behaviour of people such as Schaeffer, McFee, and Forgie. The hostility and aggression that are present in Witness's city are responses to the pressures and anxieties that many urban dwellers feel. So, one could say that the maladaptive behaviours that we see in the film, represent pathological responses to urban life. The more likely explanation, though, is that their criminal actions are response not just to the social environment in which they live, but to the capitalist system. The latter, more than merely reflecting their behaviour actually encourages it. The self-centred economics of capitalism not only makes opportunistic behaviour possible, it makes such behaviour desirable as well. Opposed to this ethic is the Amish's privileging of cooperation and sharing.

Another important point which is alluded to in Witness is the notion that those who question the dominant order will be ultimately punished. This suggests that individuals are not independent; they reside in a hopeless and doomed world. Subsequently, their actions must be consistent with the general law. This idea is alluded to by the corrupted police officer Schaeffer when he pressures Carter to tell him about John's location:

Why don't you tell me where is he? I just want to talk to him. You know, we go way back. John and I were a team once, like you two are now. I trained him. He is a fine policeman. I know he is with the Amish. God, I'd give anything to see him now. Can you imagine John at a prayer meeting? *We are like the Amish. We are a cult too. Well ... a club with its own rules. John has broken those rules as you're breaking them now.* [Italics mine]

We need to inquire into what the film's allegorical message is when we see Schaeffer who represents hypocrisy and corruption says about John: "*I trained him; he is a fine police man*". In fact, John is well trained by Schaeffer, which is depicted in his ready use and acceptance of violence. This is especially shown in the Happy Valley bar scene. It follows that the urban city has tainted its dwellers. Our only view of a Philadelphia street occurs in the scene in which Book and Carter stop outside a bar, looking for one of the murderers. The scene is unpleasantly dark and the street is dirty. Light from the street is cast onto Rachel and Samuel, who are in the back seat of John's car. Thus, brutality and violence are part of the equation which is also manifested in John Book's reactions. This happened when Eli advises him to avoid violence since it is rejected by the Amish:

Eli: It is not our way.

John: But it is my way.

Indeed, all the urban characters in Witness have potential for violence. The police officers Schaeffer, McFee, and Fergie want to sell at a profit the drugs that they have stolen. The Drug is sold to drug dealers, of course. Thus, officers in a government agency plan to sell drugs in order to further their own illegal aims. To conclude the link between these actions and certain events in Witness, the above characters' behaviours have a striking resemblance to certain events that occurred in 1984. During that period, a link was discovered between the Nicaraguan Contra movement, smuggling and trafficking in cocaine, and the U.S. Department of State:

Drug abuse had become a widespread social problem in America and did not discriminate by race or class anymore, especially with the prevalence of cocaine use among white, upper-middle-class professionals. The project was rejected by scores of potential backers but was ultimately given life by Avenue Pictures on a \$4.5 million budget (Prince, S, 2007:227).

In addition to violence, hypocrisy is another marker which characterizes the "English". Schaeffer is portrayed in several scenes at home with his family which highlights the contrast between his seemingly happy family life and his corrupt nature. Likewise, in Witness, Rachel

is also associated with some degree of hypocrisy. For instance, in many instances in the film, she displays that she respects the *Ordnung* while violating them secretly. In this sense, individuals often have difficulty coping with social reality, especially when they perceive that they do not have control over their lives and that they are dominated by powerful forces outside themselves.

This state of being can push individuals to resort to hypocrisy and even violence in order to escape and reduce their suffering. In Witness, it is made clear that the Amish community's rigidity and authority over its individuals is a negative aspect. It is compared to the way the American government restricts the freedom of its individuals. A point which is made clear in Schaeffer's words when he draws a comparison between the police and the Amish by appealing to a supposed "code" among the police:

We are like the Amish. We are a cult too. Well ... a club with its own rules. John has broken those rules as you're breaking them now.

It follows that the Amish in Witness are used as a metaphor for defining the problems of the American larger culture. All what is not Amish is "English". The Amish rural world is natural, ordered, and devoid of violence. In contrast, John Book lives in a dirty and seedy world where he goes, in Rachel's words, "whacking people". Besides, his life is lacking family and love. In this way, the American dominant culture sees itself through its Amish antagonist. Similarly, Brannigan John says:

Power can only define itself in relation to subversion, to what is alien or other, and at the heart of power is therefore the production and subsequent containment of subversion (Brannigan J, 1988:64).

The 'English' (modern American) is in complete contrast to the Amish traditional way of life. Urban America is portrayed as a Darwinian world where everybody is out for himself. There is a capitalist focus on money, property and individual success. In addition, Corruption, violence, intimidation, war and brutality are an accepted part of society as opposed to Amish pacifism. In fact, loud, coarse, and abusive language is a common part of life. For instance,

John swears at Schaeffer that he will pay dearly for his actions. The “English” characters speak the language of guns and violence. For them, the end justifies the means, regardless of the caused evil. In fact, at the very beginning of Witness, a police officer is slaughtered by his colleagues. Later on, another one named Carter is executed. On the other hand, the Amish have basic Christian beliefs. Their faith embodies their whole way of life and the Bible is taken literally. A major part of Amish life is serving the community and maintaining links with nature. John Book who embodies the conservative ideology is criticising “big government” through exposing its dark corrupted side. This is reinforced in his demonstration of the strength of his morality over Schaeffer’s corruption. As when he says to Schaeffer towards the end of the film:

What are you going to do Paul? Are going to shoot me? Are you going to shoot him?
[*grabs Eli*]. Are you going to shoot him [*grabs Samuel*], the women, me?
It’s over, enough... enough.

At this moment, John is shown as armed only by his moral justice. The latter is brandished at Schaeffer like a powerful weapon. Thus, the pointed finger and simple dialogue shows that John is morally superior. The main idea here is that Witness, is securing the conservative interests through adopting the Amish example of “pacifism” and criticising the mainstream American society’s violent tendencies, violence which is the consequence of giving too much power to the government. In similar vein, David Zercher in his book The Amish in the American Imagination (2001) says that Witness proved more useful in the following years in March 1989. This was when President George Bush went to the Amish region in Lancaster County in Pennsylvania to deliver a speech which would promote his conservative ideas of kinder, gentler, and drug-free American nation (Zercher David W, 2001:181).

Children are more open to questioning existing institutions than the adults who created them. Witness invokes an important vision, which is the meeting of two opposing cultures may cause the corruption of innocence. Children symbolize innocence and Samuel is even more innocent because he is Amish and completely naïve to the ways of the world.

Samuel witnesses the murder; he hides in the toilet to avoid being murdered. Besides, this little boy is forced to identify murder suspects and to become involved in life and death decisions. These are all ways by which he is corrupted, it could be said that he is forced to grow up ahead of his time, confronting as he does the evil that is part of human nature. Samuel is given a thirst for knowledge that is beyond him to understand which is illustrated in the scene where he talks with Eli. Samuel says he would kill only bad people. Therefore, urban America destroys innocence. Towards the end of the film, in the scene where the corrupt police men come to kill John, Samuel says:

Are they going to kill you?
But you don't have your gun.

Samuel's words show how he has been changed by his violent experience. He understands that John will need a gun to defend himself. Subsequently, he will never be the innocent boy again. He deviates from the Amish culture's humility and rejection of violence.

The scene where Samuel touches John's gun brilliantly evokes the idea that he has been contaminated by the illnesses of the "English" world. In short, an encounter between the mainstream American culture and that of the alien Amish, the result is the same: majority power is reinforced and the "threat of subversion" from the powerless is "eradicated". To quote Patrick Brantlinger,

Anyone belonging to a racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious minority, whether in the United States or elsewhere, is unlikely to be well-positioned in the social field in comparison to the majority population relatively powerless instead of empowered. This is especially true in a society which, no matter how devoted to freedom, once practiced slavery and also genocide (exterminating Native Americans), and in which racism has always played a major role (Brantlinger P, 2007:4).

This clash of the American culture and that of the Amish is established early in the film. The opening scene is a wide shot of green corn-fields moving in the wind. This immediately shows a remote setting with the accompanying music that suggests a more peaceful way of life. The use of music here fosters an environment in which life is centred on the community

more than the individual. A community based on spiritual reflection and peacefulness. In the same respect, Kalinak, K asserts that music in film:

Can establish setting, specifying a particular time and place; it can fashion a mood and create atmosphere; it can call attention to elements onscreen or off-screen, thus clarifying matters of plot and narrative progression; it can reinforce or foreshadow narrative developments and contribute to the way we respond to them; it can elucidate characters' motivations and help us to know what they are thinking; it can contribute to the creation of emotions, sometimes only dimly realized in the images, both for characters to emote and for audiences to feel (Kalinak, K,2010:2).

Music also acts as a motif for exploring culture clash in the barn dance scene. Book tries to fix his car with Rachel's help and turns the radio on. The two lovers start dancing to the 1950s song Wonderful World by Sam Cooke:

Don't know much about the French I took.
What a wonderful world.
I can win your love for me.
Don't know much about history.
Don't know much about geography.
Don't know much that I love you.
And I know that you love me, too.
What a wonderful world this would be.

Indeed, the music and lyrics of the above song used in this scene help to create a romantic mood. This enhances John's growing passion for Rachel. As John sings along with the song and leads Rachel into a dance, his love and how it is portrayed in modern culture is highlighted. Nevertheless, this nostalgic lament of the 1950s which is expressed by the film's reference to Sam Cooke's song Wonderful World should not be ignored. I suggest that this is a part of Witness's tendency to reinforce the conservative discourses of the 1980s.

The film relies on music to represent the fifties directly to the audience. In fact, many historians pointed out that in 1950s America a sense of uniformity pervaded American society. After the end of World War II, traditional roles were reaffirmed. Men expected to be the breadwinners in each family; women, even when they worked, assumed their proper place was at home:

During the 1950s, for the film centres on the conflict between the sexes on the workers' side as well as with class oppression. The miners have never thought about the feelings and lives of their wives, who are taken for granted, traditionally bound to

home and children. But as the strike develops, the women, who are forced to take the men's place on the picket line, assert themselves, asking to be treated as equals (Quart L and Auster A, 2001:52).

Sam Cooke's song comments on the narrative actions in Witness. Its familiarity serves to recall past times or specific historical moment that seems to be in the service of the production of nostalgia. The latter serves the film's overtly conservative agenda. Overall, the triumph and hegemony of the Right in the 1980s through the power of its ideas had become a major, and often the dominant, player in the political realm of America. These conservatives' call for reducing the size of the federal government, promoting patriotic ideals, and anti-feminism all are alluded to in Witness. On this reading, Peter Weir's Witness translates the eighties ideologies and discourses into specifically cinematic terms.

The Amish live almost exclusively in rural areas of the United States. Their traditional clothing and lifestyle, especially their horse-and-buggy transportation are reminiscent of rural America in the nineteenth century. Amish values focus on separateness from the world, commitment to tradition, family, and simplicity are deployed as we shall see in the next sub-chapter as to humorously satirize and critique the illnesses of "modern" materialist American culture.

Beyond Humour: The Amish Minority in For Richer or Poorer

The discourse of community includes a Romantic narrative that places it prior to "society," locating community in a long lost past for which we yearn nostalgically from our current fallen state of alienation, bureaucratization, and rationalization (Burgett, B and Hendler, G, 2008:56).

The film For Richer or Poorer is a romantic comedy. It opens with the New York English couple Brad and Caroline Sexton who continue to live the high life while maintaining the deception of wealth. Brad who works as a real estate agent learns that his accountant has balanced the books in his own favour and flown to South America. In order to escape prison, the couple decide to leave New York. Their first hideout is in Pennsylvania where they successfully fool an Amish community into believing that they are relatives from Missouri.

Disguising in Amish clothes, Brad and Caroline take on the aliases Jacob and Emma. Obviously, the Amish community is the perfect hiding place. However, it demands Brad and Caroline the suppression of their previous sophisticated lifestyle, as they attempt to adopt Amish attitudes and customs.

The Amish society is culturally alien to the American society with which it co-exists. The Amish reject, for instance, modern technology for outdated less efficient technology. They refuse to engage with the 'English' even when provoked. Their modesty and obsession with appearing 'plain' all make them appear strange to the average American. The Amish as ethnic subjects in the film For Richer or Poorer become useful venues for addressing controversial issues among the majority. To borrow the words of Ken Gelder (2007):

It is true that subcultures have been around in one form or another for a very long time. But they have been chronicled by others for a long time, too: documented, analysed, classified, rationalised, monitored, scrutinised, and so on. In some cases, societies at various times and for various reasons have legislated against them and attempted to regulate and/or reform them, sometimes successfully, often not. (Gelder.K, 2007:2)

According to the above quote, a subculture is a flexible classification for anything that is alien to the normative centre (the mainstream culture). Through using humour, comedy plays a major role in addressing issues which could be swallowed unconsciously by the viewer. The primary intent of For Richer or Poorer may well have been to entertain, but the film inevitably becomes satiric and dedicated in its content.

Satire can be defined as the humorous exposure of vice, hypocrisy or abuses to bring about a remedial effect on society. This film transcends the social context of the 1990s period and articulates future possibilities as well. Clearly, there was plenty of room in Hollywood during the period to shed light on conflicts, possibilities and anxieties that emerge when juxtaposing majority views and minority culture. This is true of the American culture and that of the Amish ethnic minority in the film.

The roots of the romantic comedy genre can be traced back to Shakespeare's comedies. The 'battle of the sexes', the misunderstandings and farcical situations, the happy ending, and disguises, are all to be found here. In for Richer or Poorer disguise is the comic device that relies on these differing levels of knowledge. It creates suspense as the spectator enjoys the consequences of the misunderstandings that ensue but knows that the characters risk exposure and even humiliation. Disguise offers Brad and Caroline a mistaken identity. Likewise, in Shakespeare's most famous pastoral As You Like It, wealthy members of the court experience an idyllic pastoral community only because they have disguised themselves as simple rural people. Martha Clare Ronk believes that Shakespeare was trying to invoke the memory of a golden past, before the greed and oppression of the 1500's:

As You Like It, for all its comic ingenuity, also conveys a sense of something erased and missing, some deep aspect of character, some golden world: the Robin Hood days of yore, the incarnation of the sacred. (Ronk, M C, 1997 : 276).

True to this form, Brad and Caroline steal some Amish clothing pretending to be cousins of the Yoder family. Brad's words make it clear that all New Yorkers have certain potential for hypocrisy:

Caroline: Ok, all what we got to do is pretend to be people that we've not.
Brad: to fool people we don't know in a situation we've never been in. We are from New York. How hard can it be?

Yet at the same time, comedy can act as an important component of the culture industry. Film comedy responds to the need for what Richard Dyer has described as a "utopian" form of entertainment. It can function as an escapist and often ideologically conservative response to the social conditions operative at different historical moments. This would apply to the film For Richer or Poorer as well, particularly during a period like the 1990s:

Entertainment offers the image of "something better" to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don't provide. Alternatives, hopes, wishes – these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized (Dyer R, 1992 : 18).

The Amish world offers Brad and Caroline possibilities of freedom not afforded by the tight confines of New York City life. Thus, Social displacement is the main source of humour in For Richer or Poorer. In the latter, the “English” couple come from contrasting social milieu, creating comedy through the clash of values and lifestyles. The displacement can become part of the destabilising process which challenges the couple, encouraging them to revise their priorities and worldview. All these, ultimately lead to recognition of love and the gaining of happiness. Likewise, Kathryn Rowe goes on to explain that the comedy revolves around liberation from:

A world wilting under repressive law ... through a temporary movement into a dimension [of] the carnivalesque ... of festivity and natural regeneration (Rowe, K. 1995:47).

For Richer or Poorer is created by a clash of values and cultures, which is exaggerated to maximise the sense of displacement and departure that is typical of the romantic comedy. Moreover, For Richer or Poorer can be read as the Hollywood response to the technological and economic boom which produces greed. The rich had to be represented as flawed, troubled, and the less-privileged. It follows that, comedy as a genre examines and critiques social structures and it can serve as an important facilitator or mediator of society’s attempts at self-critique. It allows mainstream audience to recognize certain weaknesses of their own culture.

A Critical View of a Conservative Culture Driven by Materialism

Amish life in general evokes popular images of an earlier America. Their old-fashioned clothing, horse-drawn buggies, and tidy farms remind people of the prints of Currier and Ives and the art of Grandma Moses. Their farming is conducted with what at first glance appears to be the technology of the latter half of the nineteenth century when most Americans were still farmers and before the automobile, telephones, and electric power transformed rural life.

As I have already mentioned, For Richer or Poorer contains a considerable amount of commentary on American society in the long 1990s. The rhetoric of consumerism and affluence interferes with the romance between Brad and Caroline, causing them to conclude that they cannot possibly be happy if they are not rich,

Caroline: I can't stay here. They don't have television or even indoor plumbing.

Brad: What did you expect! Room service and a Jacuzzi?

The 1990s was an era of spreading capitalism. For most Americans, this decade would be a time of peace, prosperity, and rapid technological change. Some attributed this to the "Reagan Revolution" and the end of the Cold War, others to the return of a Democrat to the presidency. The comedy movies of the nineties soon began to reflect and transmit tales of economic woe and social inequity. Obsessions with new fashion and appearance shaped the nineties morality. The New York couple often employ derogatory references to describe Amish appearance. This is illustrated, for example in the dialogue in which they mock Amish clothes:

Brad: You look like a Shakespearean whore.

Caroline: You look like an idiot in that suit.

The Amish culture is made to appear very flexible. The Amish women are shown as submissive under the patriarchal structures of their society. They are portrayed as dependent and voiceless individuals. Mrs. Yoder and her daughter Rebecca agree to abandon the laws of their *Ordnung* which shows their being tempted by Caroline's modern and liberated ideas:

Mrs. Yoder: Back in Missouri, you probably wear many colours, perhaps different lifestyles.

Caroline: Yes.

Rebecca: But here we are very limited.

Mrs. Yoder: Our leadership has taken the colour issue under consideration.

Rebecca: They always vote "No". They say those are colours, the only colours.

Caroline: Well, I'm sorry, but I think it's ridiculous. Black is timeless classic, but what's wrong with wearing pastels and soft earth tones?

Mrs. Yoder: We all share your feelings. Colour is present in everything else God touches. So, why not what we wear?

Thus, even though the Yoders explain that they belong to a very "conservative" Older Amish Order, the community quickly abandons its *Ordnung* once Caroline teaches them the value of

colour. The Amish women's decision, here, alludes to that of the traditional mainstream American cultural values as destroyed by capitalism and modernity.

Unlike the Amish women, The "English" Caroline is able to challenge and change the minds of the Amish elders. This is illustrated in the following debate between the elders and Caroline who acts as the spokesperson for the Amish women:

One elder: Colour?! What is next? Leave behind the horse and buggy?

Another elder: Where will it end?

Caroline: With all due respect, I hardly think that our wearing colourful dress is going to lead to tattoos or monster truck rallies.

One elder: In the Bible, it is written: "Women shall adorn themselves with modesty and sobriety without braided hair or costly array".

Caroline: But this is not about vanity or violating your... our beliefs. Our blankets are vibrant and joyful and we are forced to wear these little black drab numbers. Are not there mornings when you wake up and you think: "oh! I'm just in the mood to wear pink?"

In fact, both Caroline and Brad succeed in transforming some of the Amish community's cultural traditions dictated by the *Ordnung*. This transformation touches every Amish individual: the elders, the women, the children, and the youth. Henner follows Brad's advice in asking for Rebecca's hand for marriage. Her father, Mr. Yoder endorses the engagement immediately, thus, the Amish *Ordnung* is dismissed. It follows that, erotic love trumps submission to community rules. The elders, too, vote "yes" for granting Amish women the liberty of wearing different colours and designs.

From this point of view, this film's discourse contrasts the Amish traditional community with modern American capitalist society. The foundation of the Amish community is supposed to be based on religion and social values while capitalist society is based only on economic value and consumerism. For instance, the film opens with a montage of consumerism set in New York City backdrop. Close-ups on champagne bottles, jewels, and receipts for expensive purchases are intercut with images of Manhattan buildings inhabited by the rich and famous. While capturing the extravagant lifestyle, the montage shows only parts of the human body and hands presenting credit cards, as though to communicate the

dehumanization of the modern world. Bodies become defined by the commodities they purchase. Actually, this is what characterizes 1990s American lifestyle:

Ongoing productivity gains from the new technology and the capital-equipment investment boom of the 1990s countered the renewal of inflationary pressures. Moreover, the depressing effect of renewed budget deficits on national saving did not necessitate a return of high real interest rates to attract foreign capital. The American consumer market had become the engine of global economic growth. (Hudson, C and Davies, G, 2008:13-14).

At that, in For Richer or Poorer, virtually all aspects of human life and human relationships are reduced to a matter of economics, to the point that human beings literally become consumable commodities. It is by reducing other cultures to a form of knowledge to be consumed and used by the dominant culture that minorities such as the Amish cannot be known in their own presence, as being with their own culture and way of thinking. They must always have been the projection of the majority imagination and are always contained within the majority system of representation. In the same respect, For Marx, the ruling class employs cultural forms to depict its interests as the interests of all humanity (Marx and Engels, 1991:14). In For Richer or Poorer teaching the Amish modern ways seems to fall on the latter's interest. However, the Amish community here is deployed as a metaphor for debating and exposing the excesses of contemporary American life. The urban couple are shown as objects of wealth, and yet remain incomplete and imperfect. Materialistic thought, as we understand from the following dialogue, has turned wife against husband, husband against wife and friends against each other,

Caroline: How on earth can you owe that much money?

Brad: I don't know, but I don't owe it. We owe it you and I.

Caroline: Oh, yeah! Maybe if I testify against you, they will give me immunity.

Brad: Fortunately, they don't allow wives to testify against their husbands.

If community is created through personal contact and gifts of work, technology threatens to isolate individuals from one another and at the same time tie them unacceptably to a sinful world. This is the Amish attitude towards technology and material progress in general. To remain a separate people in a modern world, the Amish must both survive

economically and maintain their cultural integrity. Read in these respects, For Richer or poorer offers an oblique “back to the land” desire to preserve America’s agrarian heritage. For instance, after succeeding to tame the savage horse given to him by Mr. Yoder, Brad starts speaking with the horse telling it that the soil should be tilled:

Be submissive or be adhesive. You’ve a plough horse. There is nothing wrong with that. Show some self respect. They’re talking about you in the barn. Don’t be a failure the rest of your life, no. All right Big John let’s till the soil.

It is worth mentioning that the horse in the Amish culture symbolizes tradition and separation from the modern world and its technologies.

One Amish man explained, it’s just that if everyone owned a car, it would destroy their community. If you drive a horse and buggy, you stay closer to home and family and you rely more on your neighbours and local merchants for your needs. The horse and buggy has become a symbol of the Amish belief that they should be “in the world but not of it (Egenes, L, 2000:20)

The Film’s discourse here, then, is to reaffirm that the Amish represent so much of what Americans wanted to see in their own communities. Popular impressions of farming which America claimed to hold dear are lagged behind with the advent of industrialisation. American agrarianism, as originally conceived, was about the future, not the past (Walbert, D, 2002:17). In many ways, For Richer or Poorer engages in a sharp critique of the consumerist and commodifying tendencies of the modern American culture. The “English” characters are portrayed in this film as a perfect example of materialism. They are only interested in making more and more money irrespective of religious, moral, and family values.

Upholding Family Values

The family and family-related values have always been a major cultural element of the American Way of Life. Indeed, the portrayal of the family in popular culture is an issue of great social and political significance because of the mass media’s functions in the socialization for gender and family roles. During the 1990s, the majority of Americans’ political affiliations asserted their support for traditional family values. *New York Times*

columnist David Brooks suggested that the country was experiencing “moral self-repair”. For Richer or Poorer can be inscribed within this moralisation of the American way of life.

In a society in which human worth is measured by money, the marriage and the family may seem to be the last refuge of human values. This belief is especially strong in times such as that in the United States in the 1990s. The discursive field of For Richer or Poorer is both pro-family discourses and the articulation of social anxieties concerning ethnicity and family. The threats to middle-class security are, however, projected onto the figures of Brad and Caroline which allegorically serve as vehicles of the socio-economic forces that were pulling families apart and causing many to lose their homes. Brad and Caroline end by deciding to start a family themselves, having learned together from the Amish about the value of marriage.

The couple go through the comic process of displacement, resulting in destabilisation, leading to a stronger bond and even great happiness. This is the typical transformation accomplished by the comedy of remarriage:

Marriage is a means of restoring order and granting happiness to the characters, integrating them into society and resolving disruption and conflict. The romantic comedy is arguably more conservative than other comedies, as it respects society’s structures and dominant ideologies, offering a resolution that reinforces tradition and conformity (Mortimer. C, 2010:76).

Actually, Hollywood in For Richer or Poorer sought to uphold the institution of marriage to reaffirm and reinforce its value, and at the same time to criticise the misconceptions surrounding this institution. The role of the Amish image in this process is exemplified in the Yoder family’s striving to teach the *English* couple the beauty of marriage:

Brad: that’s not easy when you have facing prison Samuel.

Samuel: Marriage is hardly a prison sentence.

Brad: Marriage? My marriage?

Samuel: well, all husbands and wives have periods of disagreement and heart ache.

Mrs. Yoder: But the harsh words the evil looks. The vow of marriage and the love, these aren’t just words cousin.

Samuel: It is the commitment we live by and hold second only to God.

Mrs. Yoder: That is the beauty of marriage.

The change in setting leads to Brad and Caroline healing their wounds and finding the meaning of love amongst the Amish. That is the film For Richer or Poorer draws attention to family life and a return to more traditional gender role. Subsequently, the Amish in this film are projection of the dominant culture's *self*. Dirk Eitzen claims that:

The Other is always a kind of projection, more a reflection of our own preoccupations than the reality of the Other (Eitzen. D, 2008:47).

In many ways, Hollywood industry that has prided itself on celebrating the institution of the American family over the years is the same industry that often shows the dark side of this institution. For instance, the world of the rich is represented as flawed and self-indulgent, reinforcing the simple message that money does not buy happiness. On this reading, For Richer or Poorer contains utopian images of family, marriage, as well as socially critical visions of capitalism which articulate fears that unrestrained big business would inexorably destroy the environment and community.

Amish Against Which “English” Culture Defines Itself

The 1990s were marked by the return of a Democrat to the presidency. President Bill Clinton proposed higher taxes on the wealthy and increased spending on investments in education, transportation, and communications that, he believed, would boost the nation's productivity and growth and thereby lower the deficit. Clinton organized his campaign around another of the oldest and most powerful themes in electoral politics: youth and change.

For Richer or Poorer's political perspective is conveyed by the “English” characters' reactions in their encounters with the Amish. Throughout the film, many attempts to transform the Amish culture in order to be more acceptable to the larger American society are articulated. While Caroline strives to change the Amish women's 19th century fashion, Brad's concern is to change the Young Amish men's way of thinking and their practice of the *Ordnung*. In fact, American contemporary culture's glorification of fashion and all what is

new and “modern” is articulated in Caroline’s determination to change the colour and the style of the Amish women’ clothes:

Brad: Caroline, we’ve in trouble. Phil is gone. He won’t be for a week.

Caroline: That’s good! I need to get my designs in order. Brad, be serious. These women really need my help. This is what I always wanted to do. I can do this.

In another scene, Caroline says to Brad: “*Those people are not right. They are like children of corn.*” For example, the suggestion, here, is that the Amish are not mature but are like children who need the help of the adult “English”. Even when the Amish were portrayed as adults, their society could still be made to seem childlike. This film’s discourse is shaped by the larger American culture’s perception the Amish. While the Amish are not a racial ethnic minority, per se, they are an ethnic-religious minority that may be considered “marginal” in American society:

In popular perception, the Amish are regarded by most non-Amish as part of an agricultural society whose members feel uncomfortable in the modern world. The term “frozen in time” has been used to convey the idea of a backward-looking group unwilling to adjust to the pace, profit and pleasure of the larger society that surrounds them (Lowery S and Noble Allen G, 2000:26).

For Richer or Poorer’s placement of the Amish image shows how the Amish minority is used as a metaphor for mediating the fabric of social, political, and cultural formations of the dominant American culture under the Clinton regime. Clinton committed himself to a limited social contract that offered social reforms like national service, school construction, a higher minimum wage, earned income tax credits for the working poor, and welfare reform. These tendencies are embodied in Caroline’s policy in her attempt to convince the Amish community to change their “old-fashion” lifestyle:

Rebecca: They always vote “No”. They say those are colours, the only colours.

Caroline: Well, I’m sorry, but I think it’s ridiculous. Black is timeless classic, but what’s wrong with wearing pastels and soft earth tones?

Mrs. Yoder: We all share your feelings. Colour is present in everything else God touches. So, why not what we wear?

Another attempt to reform the Amish life is manifested, for instance, in Brad's suggestions. When he discovers that a young Amish man, named Henner, is in love with Rebecca, he advises him to follow his heart rather than the *Ordnung* requiring a two-year courtship:

Henner: Uh... you know ... here in our *Ordnung*, men don't speak much about certain things. Actually, they don't speak much period. So, I was hoping, because your *Ordnung* is so liberal, that I could ask you...um...I could for example, um...

Brad: Ok, what do you want to know?

Henner: Marriage.

Brad: You and Rebecca?

Henner: Yes. See I think about it constantly, I'm thinking, I'm practicing what I'm going to say. But in our *Ordnung* you cannot marry with at least two years of courting.

Brad: Ah, and you want to jump the gun? Take the plunge. Buy the cow. Idioms aren't your thing, are they? You want to get married right away?

Henner: Yes. But how did you court before you were married?

Brad: Six weeks.

Henner: You were married after six weeks? [Laughs] all that is needed is love I knew this in my heart but I was afraid to defy the elders.

Brad: uh, uh, uh...Don't defy the elders on account of me.

Henner: Thank you Jacob. Thank you for your strength and wisdom.

An important point which needs clarification in For Richer or Poorer is that the critique of the Amish way of life is not my focus in studying this movie. My argument is that the Amish are used just as a medium to criticise the conservative ideology's strong disapproval of change and modernity, and at the same time this movie can be read as a warning against the 1990s progressive ideas that may destroy America's long held Puritan ethos. In For Richer or Poorer, Brad and Caroline's journey to the heart of the Amish community results in greater self-knowledge and happiness. These upper-class heroes learn important life lessons by living amongst the Amish. They start the film as powerful, successful and free from the confines of the traditional family.

Brad and Caroline's values are overturned and they can no longer find happiness in their former lifestyle. Later on, they realise that their future must be with their significant Other, often seeking the confirmation of their new status within all the Amish traditional trappings of commitment. For instance, Caroline is busy working together with the Amish women for choosing new cloth designs. In addition, she becomes angry when some urban

tourists who thought her Amish try to take her a picture. She says to them: “*You need to show more respect*”.

In this respect, despite the couples’ estrangement from the Amish community’s 19th century way of life, however, they soon become attracted by the natural beauty of the Amish environment. This very non-conformist environment they struggle to transform in order to make it acceptable to themselves. In similar fashion, Miranda Joseph (2007) states:

Community concerns boundaries between us and them that are naturalized through reference to place or race or culture or identity; capital, on the other hand, would seem to denature, crossing all borders, and making everything and everyone equivalent. (Burgett. B and Hendler. G, 2008:56).

The boundaries between Self and Other which communities naturalize, as Miranda Joseph points out in the above quote, implies that those who are not part of a particular community are seen as somewhat different. It is in this way that the Amish image is deployed as a metaphor for alluding to broader issues, issues that are supposed to be the essence of the American character or *Self*. Therefore, one rational response to such a challenge of self definition in For Richer or Poorer is to expose in satirical mode some issues which bedevil mainstream American society such as the embracing of urban material progress and the throwing behind of the long held puritan ethos of community, hard work, and rural values.

The “English” couple is in its turn transformed by the Amish way of life. The industrialized city created divisions between lazy rich and uncultured poor. Brad and Caroline learn important lessons from the Amish. They learned how to work, how to be thrifty, how to be self-supporting, and above all how to do things with their hands,

Brad: It’s not that bad. We got free food, free longing

Caroline: Free food! My ass! I’ve never worked so hard in my life for a meal like am doing now.

In Amish society, the most important expression of love is in the ritual of work. Whereas a modern economy functions through an impersonal system of distribution of goods and services, the Amish household economy relies on personal gifts of work. Through hard work,

a person shows his or her love and commitment to the family and community. So, For Richer or Poorer's portrayal of the Amish is associated not only with the Amish way of life but with the tendency to equate rurality itself with innocence and, therefore, with the past. The Amish were made to represent values from the past that modern Americans had forsaken; their commitment to tradition, family, community, and God, as well as their apparent enjoyment of hard work, were held up as ideals for others to follow. The film's message seeks through the Amish medium to inspire its viewers with the example of Amish life delivering a jeremiad against the ills of modern life.

In the same respect, according to Shah, H (2004), if people view minorities as the *Other*, then they view the majority as the *Self*. Generally, the discussion of ethnicity is commonly linked to the concept of the *Other*. In other words, how one perceives someone other than self. In its turn, the film For Richer or Poorer integrates references to the Amish ethnic status as being 'Other' against which Americans from the mainstream define themselves. In fact, these views are also evident in the urban couple's exotic view of the Amish landscape:

Brad: So picturesque, it's almost surreal. Look at this! That is it Yoder. I can even imagine planet Amishwood. Here is the deal.

The Amish agrarian rural way of life still seems right and good, Brad's above attraction comes from the scarcity and disappearance of such a pastoral way of life due to economic and material progress of urbanity. Films such as For Richer or Poorer, are left to portray it in increasingly nostalgic terms. Great cities such as New York encourage disparities of wealth, crime, immorality, and the laziness of both the spoiled rich and the indigent poor.

Witness and For Richer or Poorer: Similar Uses of the Same Amish

Witness and For Richer or Poorer take the culture clash between the rural Amish and the urban dwellers as a problem to be solved, and as a material to be dramatized. In this way, they suggest the validity of linking of the Amish to American mainstream culture because of the need of the latter to look with a critical eye to its social woes.

The Amish world provides a unique window into the American fascination with rurality. This widespread American larger culture's exotic view of the Amish minority's traditional rural life is explained and responded to in the film For Richer or Poorer. For instance, Mr. Yoder, as a representative of the Amish voice says to Brad:

It is easy for people to take things for granted. The "English" view us as backward, as hiding from reality. But this is the reality. This is the process of life [*pointing to the corn harvest*]. We sow humility and we reap a great harvest. It is not we who are hiding from reality. It is those "English" always hiding.

Mr. Yoder's above clarifications would have perhaps solved Rachel's dilemma in the 1985 film Witness. She cannot understand why the "English" view her Amish people as unusual and old fashioned:

Rachel: Are you making fun of me?

John: No!

Rachel: Like the tourists starring all the time. Staring all the time, sometimes they come into the yard. It's very rude they seem to think we are quaint. I can't imagine why they'd think that.

Connections between texts are revealed as resembles which turn out to be a product of the same ideological discourse. In many ways, For Richer or Poorer borrows extensively from the plot of the film Witness. In their way into the Amish community, Brad and Caroline say that their view of the Amish is established or shaped by Witness:

Brad: Follow my lead. I know all we need about being Amish.

Caroline: Since when?

Brad: Since I saw *Witness*. Tiffany earrings? Dead giveaway. No! And the lipstick !

Caroline: Guess what, Brad. I saw *Witness* too and they didn't wear Armani shades.

The "English" characters of both films, namely, John Book in Witness and Brad and Caroline in For Richer or Poorer escape from their respective urban confinement. The flight into nature

comes to represent their freedom from a repressive and oppressive urban environment. The city was a web of interdependence and, therefore, of corruption. But the country was the home of sturdy farmer-citizens whose self-sufficiency and independence allowed them the moral freedom to stand by the good of the community rather than the interests of a private cabal.

Throughout both films, the “English” fugitives are juxtaposed against the repressive state forces that seek to control their behaviour. The only escape from social oppression is a retreat into nature. Besides, the fact that all these “English” characters are fugitives suggests that any balance they may achieve or any resolution they may represent would not be condoned by the society that exiled them. The two films, then, articulate the oppressive force of state. They depict an American society that is controlled by corrupt economic and political elites. However, they articulate the limitation of that vision as well.

In the end of each film, the repressive force of the state and community is once again asserted and non-acceptable actions are contained. In Witness the corrupt police officers are either punished by death or brought under justice. This is evident under the Reagan presidency which reflected the belief held by many conservatives that the law should be strictly applied against violators. In addition, Amish community rules run supreme at the expense of Rachel’s happiness. In similar way, in For Richer or Poorer the institution of marriage and family values is restored at the end of the movie. This is exemplified in the “English” couple’s remarriage and Caroline’s pregnancy.

Rural America because of its diversity as well as its connection to certain long-standing economic and political traditions provides a source of some potentially useful alternatives to mainstream culture. Indeed, the clash between the Amish rural values and those of the urban life in For Richer or Poorer and Witness are similar to Raymond Williams’ perception of city/countryside oppositions as being always invoked in the service of political

interests. In The Country and the City (1973), Williams argues that the mainstream project of British literature was to construct rural life as an *idyll*. These idyllic conditions helped to create what Williams terms a “structure of feeling” around our ideas about rural life. In other words, when we imagine rural life, we feel a sense of *loss*. He demonstrated the significance of the keywords “city” and “countryside”, establishing the simultaneously positive and negative inflections of urbanity. On the positive side were the values of learning, light, progress, civilization, cosmopolitanism, civil liberties, excitement and sophistication. Whereas on the negative lay the counter values of sin, darkness and noise, corruption, devolution, danger and violence. The place of the Amish in all this is outlined in Donald Kraybill’s book The Amish and the State (1993) as follows:

The Amish are often perceived by other Americans to be relics of the past who live an austere, inflexible life dedicated to inconvenient and archaic customs. They are seen as renouncing both modern conveniences and the American dream of success and progress (Kraybill. D,1993: 3).

In both films, therefore, as Greenblatt argues of Renaissance texts: *power reproduces its own subversion only in order to contain it* (Brannigan J, 1998:146). I would like to suggest here that the representation of the Amish in these films has more to do with constructing an American majority discourse than it does with the Amish people themselves. In many ways, we should note that the Hollywood film industry in some occasions does allow for the introduction of ideas that conflict with the dominant ideology in American culture. In fact, Witness and For Richer or Poorer are easy to place in the context of American culture. As I have argued earlier, at the beginning of their narration, both films appear to oppose the dominant ideology but any opposition they can offer to common ways of thinking crumbles in the end. In this context , Douglas Kellner (1995) states:

Ideological texts thus put on display both the significant dreams and nightmares of a culture and the ways that the culture is attempting to channel them to maintain its present relations of power and domination (Kellner, D,1995:111).

Every generation views its own values as givens, while every subsequent generation is tempted to judge the past from its own perspective. As the 21st century dawned world society has changed, and Americans generally have shifted their thinking about generally diverse peoples within their borders such as the Amish religious minority.

Conclusion

The American film industry uses the same Amish medium to lynch its critics of the mainstream American culture's illnesses. Witness deploys the Amish as a language to communicate the conservative discourses of the 1980s. This is done through criticizing the urban corruption. In the same vein, For Richer or Poorer provides allegorical representations that interpret, comment on, and indirectly portray some realities of the 1990s. In the 21st century America has tried to create a new and utopian nation built upon the promises of liberty and justice for all. There have been many attempts to render divisions invisible and inconsequential by the nostalgic drive to recover a lost America of unity and ethnic homogeneity. These transformations have marked America's post 9/11 cultural and political climate. This other side of the Amish coin will be discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter Three

Chapter Three: The Amish as a Supporting Metaphor of Conservative American Values in Amish Grace

Introduction

In a world where faith often justifies and magnifies revenge, and in a nation where some Christians use scriptures to fuel retaliation, the Amish response was indeed a surprise. Regardless of the details of the Nickel Mines story, one message rings clear: religion used not to justify rage and revenge but to inspire goodness, forgiveness, and grace. And that is the big lesson for the rest of us regardless of our faith or nationality (Krabill D and al., 2007:183).

If the Amish, as the previous chapter, argues are used as a medium for the criticism of mainstream modern America's excesses and sometimes its conservative rigidity, the same conservative America pays back its own critiques in the same coin. In other words it celebrates traditional and conservative values. This chapter makes a connection between the post 9/11 contexts and the movie Amish Grace (2010) with the Amish minority as its subject. I shall demonstrate that the Amish are once again deployed by the American film industry in a way that fits the dominant majority. My purpose in this chapter is to explore the rhetoric of forgiveness, unity, and reconciliation used by the mainstream majority and how they are used to represent the Amish experience and perceptions. The film constructs representations of Amish in order to accomplish any of several possible goals beyond the obvious desire to tell a true story.

The movie Amish Grace directed by Gregg Champion, is adapted from the book Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy (2007). The latter is written by Donald Kraybill et al. Its events are based on a true story that took place in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania on October 2th, 2006. In fact, a non-Amish man named Charles Carl Roberts entered a one room Amish schoolhouse and committed a tragedy. He shot ten young Amish girls killing five, and then he committed suicide.

In the midst of their grief over this shocking loss, the Amish community did neither cast blame nor did they point fingers, and they didn't hold a press conference with attorneys

at their sides. Instead, they reached out with grace and compassion toward the killer's family. The afternoon of the shooting an Amish grandfather of one of the girls who was killed expressed forgiveness toward the killer, Charles Roberts. That same day Amish neighbours visited the Roberts family to comfort them in their sorrow and pain. Later that week the Roberts family was invited to the funeral of one of the Amish girls who had been killed. And Amish mourners outnumbered the non-Amish at Charles Roberts' funeral.

The Quest for Traditional Ethos and Communal Unity

Those on the Christian Right, such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, viewed the 9/11 attacks as evidence of "*God's displeasure at America's having turned away from its Judeo-Christian roots*" (Thomson T, 2010:35). In its turn, the American film industry promotes artistic works that reflect the impact of domestic and international terrorism on American society and promotes values of freedom and respect for human life, and respect for individual faith and religion. In this respect, the tradition of utilizing films to dig deeper into the many political and social anxieties that confront the American culture continues to be more powerful than ever in a post 9/11 society. This catastrophic and world-altering event produced a number of issues and challenges to American people. Definitions of patriotism were shaken and the rethinking of the dominant culture's policies towards ethnicity was re-established. In their turn, the studios of Hollywood found themselves off-guard with a completely new audience as the events of 9/11 instantly changed the way Americans see the world.

Clearly, the role of filmmakers becomes more important than ever in communicating ideas about the concepts of terrorism, democracy, and patriotism. Thus, in Amish Grace Hollywood has renewed challenge of representing the concept of the Amish to a post 9/11 American public. The tragedy which happened to the Amish people at Nickel Mines resembles the 9/11 American trauma. An Amish man said: "*This was our 9/11*" (Kraybill D,

2007:17). Both of the Amish school massacre and the September attacks on the United States were almost universally condemned around the world. From the perspective of human rights organisations, in particular, these are crimes against humanity. It becomes apparent then that the first decade of the 21st century has witnessed a visual redefinition of scenes and themes. In turn, the context of the post 9/11 world known as the “war on terrorism” changed the way representations of the Amish are perceived.

There is a need to explore the way Amish Grace romanticizes forgiveness as particularly American. The film portrays it as a healing act, one that makes the American values whole and that has the potential to heal similar scars on the American psyche. The Amish are separated from mainstream society. Yet in traumas and pain as we see in the film Amish Grace America is constructed as a small town of traditional values, patriotism, duty with a shared hope for bridging the gap between marginal religious minorities such as the Amish and the “English”.

This film deals directly with the true event known as the Amish School Shooting. Nevertheless, it is more obliquely shaped by the decade’s politics and culture. There are many issues that confront American society after the events of 9/11. For instance, there was a need to redefine the meaning of American patriotism and national unity. By providing the public with narratives of forgiveness and unity, films such as Amish Grace give opportunity for Americans to contemplate and understand the need in the world context to new possibilities, to rethink how humans can live together in the global community. The words of president George Bush in the post 9/11 tragedy are particularly relevant for elucidating my argument:

Our great national challenge is to hunt down the terrorist and strengthen our protection against future attacks. Our great national opportunity is to preserve forever the good that has resulted. Through this tragedy, we are renewing and reclaiming our strong American values (quoted in Michaels, W, 2002: 331).

Amish Grace released in 2010s is an example of a response to the increasing need of the American public to understand the role of the government and its response to the attacks of 9/11. The Amish virtue of forgiveness is instrumentalized in such a means that could help define the American mythic vision of itself as a land of morality and common purpose. In other words, the film takes a true story as a device for the transmission of American values. To borrow Ken Gelder's words:

Every subculture – every social group, large or small, which can be considered as in some way sub-cultural – carries a set of narratives about itself, some of which are generated internally while others, usually more visible and pervasive, are developed and deployed in and by the society around it (Gelder, K, 2007 :2).

Further, Amish Grace deploys the Amish rhetoric in critics of American policies. In particular, it articulates frustrations felt by many Left Christians. The latter find Republican appeal to faith particularly appalling in light of President Bush's actions at home and abroad. The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre unified the country behind George W. Bush, which therefore enabled the administration to attempt the enactment of its vision of a Christian, capitalist America dominating the world. The public's reaction to 9/11 was the perfect vehicle for the promotion of these ideologies. About two months from September 11, President Bush gave a speech now called "Let's Roll." He said:

Evil is evil, and it must be opposed. Beyond all differences of race and creed, we are one country, mourning together and facing danger together. Deep in the American character, there is honour, and it is stronger than cynicism. Many have discovered again that even in tragedy — especially in tragedy — God is near. To save "civilization itself" will take more than bombing Afghanistan. It will take far more than demonizing Muslim radicals. It will take a level of American awareness, compassion, persistence, and resolve that cannot reside solely in its military, that must come from international view of truly global events and that results in a new set of national priorities, both political and economic. America may not be capable of doing so. Time will tell, and soon (quoted in Michaels, W, 2002: 332).

In similar manner, in Amish Grace when the Amish outnumber the "English" in Charles Roberts's funeral, an American priest delivers the following speech:

On this, of great occasions we cannot pretend that evil doesn't exist. We cannot pretend that even the most God-fearing of men cannot be swayed by darkness, not carry out evil acts, acts that have a terrible pain in their wake. But as our Amish

brothers and sisters have shown us, when we don't seek vengeance for our pain, when we open our hearts to the healing light of forgiveness, then the darkness is banished and evil is no more.

Both President Bush's political speech and the "English" priest declare in their discourses that the struggle is to be between "good and evil", "civilisation" and the "forces of darkness". Much of the imagery that they use is borrowed from the tradition of American fundamentalist Christians. Their words are designed to comfort and mobilise American domestic opinion. The word 'terrorism' was accorded almost evangelical power. The American public was invited to side with 'good' against 'evil', without regard for the complex issues and perceptions that lay beneath the surface of events. In Amish Grace, for instance, Roberts calls his wife Amy to explain his actions to her. He says that he was angry at God for taking their first child, Elise, a baby girl who died just twenty minutes after being born. He never forgave God for her death and eventually planned to get revenge. Yet, after he cold-bloodedly shot ten innocent Amish school girls, the Amish almost immediately forgave him and showed compassion toward his family.

Indeed, this true Amish tragedy has been rendered in support of the dominant American culture. In the Aftermath of the September attacks many of appalled Americans crowded the churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples, trying to relieve their sorrow and fear through prayer. The president of the United States stated that America was a good nation, attacked by evil men who wanted to destroy God's democracy and set up an empire of evil. Bush declared "war on terror" to free the world of evil, appealing to God to bless Americans. He called to fight to save mankind, as they did in the last century (Gentile E, 2008: 87-88). The majority of Americans were convinced that the terrorists wanted to destroy America in the name of God. Thus, the American president began the war against the "axis of evil" maintaining that God was on America's side, and the American nation was fighting terrorism to follow the plans of Divine Providence. He says:

This enemy tries to hide behind a peaceful faith. But those who celebrate the murder of innocent men, women and children have no religion, have no conscience and have no mercy. We wage a war to save civilization itself. We did not seek it, but we will fight and we will prevail (quoted in Michaels, W, 2002: 331).

In Witness the images of the Amish as an inspiring people with “the right values” demonstrating “true faith” are consistent with David L. Weaver-Zercher’s notion that the Amish symbolically function as “a saving remnant” within the dominant culture. In his book The Amish in the American Imagination (2001) Weaver-Zercher identifies the domestication of Amish people for sacred ideological purposes. That is, outsiders hold up “the Amish” as exemplars of superior spiritual values (Zercher, David W, 2001:185-189).

In the same vein, Amy Roberts takes part in the last grief counseling session in the movie. She doesn’t understand about the Amish ability to forgive her husband. She has been harbouring her own pain and anger towards him:

Amy: I don’t care if I ever breathe again. I don’t understand how he could do this to those girls, to me, to his children. I don’t know how to forgive. I don’t know.

Amish women: we will pray with you. We will help you. You are not alone, none of us is alone.

What is significant in the above exchange is how the Amish minority is empowered and the “English” are transformed into helpless majority. In the film For Richer or Poorer we have seen the view of the Amish as helpless in need of the “English” strength and wisdom. For instance, Brad and Caroline struggle to cultivate the Amish and teach them modern ways.

However, in Amish Grace we are invited to experience a completely different story. They are the mainstream majority who are in need of the Amish guidance. That is they are the Amish who are in the position of power at least during the tragedy. Similarly, in their book Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy, Kraybill Donald and al, write:

The Amish have long captivated outsiders with their tight knit communities and resistance to modern technologies, promoting some to wonder if the Amish have something good the English are missing. In the Aftermath of the Nickel Mines shooting, this tune of amazement played in a slightly different key. Not only did the Amish have something good that others lacked, but in many people’s eyes the Amish *were* good or at least better than the vast majority of their mainstream neighbours (Kraybill D and al, 2007:56).

This search for the lost American values such as unity and dignity are at great extent found in the Amish character. The latter serve to perpetuate and even strengthen the sense of the innocence of the community through the stories and acts of forgiveness that keep it intact. Amish Grace leads the viewer to realize that eventhough individualism is a supreme American value; the needs of the community must be respected, too. In the movie, Ida who is the mother of one of the murdered Amish girls is portrayed as reluctant to forgive Charlie Roberts. Her character is employed in the film for the purpose of displaying the human weakness in front of trauma. Ida cries into her husband's arms, "*I don't know how to be without Mary Beth.*"Evidently, this was how Charlie had felt and this is what led him to murder. Now Ida is at a crossroads. She can move forward, or stay in the hurt of her loss.

Ida's behaviour bears a striking resemblance with what was experienced by many Americans in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The latter also affected the Americans' religious feeling, that is, their attitude towards God, the meaning and aim of existence, and their idea of good and evil:

Where was God while so many defenceless people were being wiped out so ruthlessly? Was God perhaps absent, impotent, or indifferent? Was God perhaps not good? These were the questions that many Americans asked themselves after September 11. Some relatives of victims felt they were losing their faith, others felt angry with God (Gentile E, 2008 :27).

A year after the tragedy, the wife of a fireman who died at the World Trade Centre said, "*I don't feel like speaking to him anymore, because I feel so abandoned. I know God exists, I know I must forgive and go ahead, but I'm not yet ready to do so.*" A security guard who had known many of the victims was harsher: "*I think I'm a good Christian, but now I consider God a barbarian*" (Ibid). Ida in her turn struggles to forgive the man who murdered her daughter Mary Beth:

Ida: And yet you went to the house of the man who killed her and you put out your hands to his wife.

Gideon: Because it was the right thing to do. God commands it. We must trust God's wisdom.

Ida: what wisdom? Why God want a beautiful innocent girl to be slaughtered? Why?

Gideon: I don't know. All I know is that if we forgive God promises that peace will follow.

Ida: God had shattered my heart and I will not betray my daughter by forgiving the man who killed her. I will not do it Gideon, I cannot.

However, later on in the film *Ida* opens her heart for forgiveness and grace. This happens after learning from Rebecca, who is one of the surviving girls, the fact that Mary Beth volunteered herself, saying to her killer: “*shoot me first*”. In fact, because of their collective nature the Amish would sacrifice their individual spirits for the behalf of their community:

In the Amish faith, the authority of the community overshadows the freedom of the individual. In fact, a different understanding of the self is the deepest wedge between the Amish and mainstream American culture. “Individualism”, said one Amish father is the great divide between us and outsiders” (Kraybill D, and al., 2007: 93)

As Kraybill says in the above quote, contrary to the Amish, contemporary American culture tends to accentuate individual rights, freedoms, and creativity. From a young age, children are encouraged to distinguish themselves through personal pursuits and creative expression. These individually oriented values have contributed to a “culture of narcissism”, a culture of “self- love”. Nevertheless, after the 9/11 trauma, the American mainstream public starts to rethink the validity of this individualistic approach. The Bush administration recognised early on after the September events that it needed urgently to project its message of national unity and the importance of community:

America's national myth, like the Promised Land or Turner's frontier thesis “attempts to perpetuate peace with ourselves and our existence by conforming certain qualities and attributes. These could become the focus for attempting to define the “national character” and aspirations by suggesting that all people held beliefs as common and shared (Campbell, N and Kean, A, 1997:9).

As I have already mentioned, the Amish principle known as *Glassenheit* is a social process that recycles individual energy for community purposes. Gideon, for instance, grows uncomfortable when he finds out that *Ida* is reluctant to work collectively with the other Amish women after the tragedy. She starts cooking alone:

Gideon: There is no need for you to cook. Why not let our friends bring us food?

Ida: I don't want to see anyone else right now.

Gideon: *Ida*, we are a people that share our burdens. We are a people that come to each other's aid.

This practice of self-denial defies modern culture which is saturated with endless dreams of self-fulfilment. Although *Glassenheit* seems repressive to moderns, it is a redemptive gift for the Amish. According to the latter, a person who foregoes personal advancement for the sake of family and community makes a redemptive sacrifice.

The celebration of America's moral rebirth after the tragic events of September 11th was a rhetorical motif in line with the pastoral function Bush carried out. Comforting and encouraging the Americans to overcome the trauma of the terrorist attack by uniting against the new enemy. Coincidentally, the positive image of the Amish community in Amish Grace seems to be aligned with the Bush administration's call for every American to perform acts of patriotism,

Bush knew how to stir the innermost emotions of the American people at a time when they did put up a good show, with a renewed sense of collective solidarity, harmony, and national unity. Such was the patriotic impetus that it cancelled, in a second, the issues that had divided the nation during the past 10 years, with divisions so deep that there was even talk of "America's disunion," worsened by the results of the 2000 presidential elections (Gentile E, 2008:88).

On the other hand, the Amish minority in Amish Grace and their peaceful response which is grounded in granting forgiveness to their offender can be read as an assault against the Bush administration's new international strategy. Indeed, public trauma enabled the Bush administration to generate a pervasive fear of terrorism. This supported worldwide expansion of American power. It led to such policies as the pre-emptive invasion of Iraq, the detention and torture of war prisoners. Unlike the Amish the American government responded to their offender after the 11/9 with bombing and destruction. As a result, the sentiment of revenge and retaliation appeared to be the primary focus of the war on terrorism. The Amish are non-violent; they are against participating in war even if the fight is for saving the country. So, implicit message here is that for restoring justice and saving humanity the world politics have to turn out from the destructive consequences of revenge.

The Amish here are shown to be more patriotic since they inspire to the general good not only of the United States but that of all humanity regardless of faith or gender. In this sense, the Amish approach to trauma is a good topic for the general public. The Amish, as I have argued earlier, are deployed in the twentieth century film Witness metaphorically as unpatriotic because of their reluctance to fight for their American country. However, in the twenty-first century movie Amish Grace, they are revered as patriotic. This favourable view is the product of the political context of post 9/11 America. In the movie, Gideon makes the following statement:

It is not easy to forgive... The Lord does not set us on an easy path, but this I know: Faith when everything is as you want it to be is not real faith. It is only when our lives are falling apart that we have the chance to make our faith real.

From what we see in the film and the real event, the Amish response at Nickel Mines gave them an opportunity to reflect on their own lives and the American society. These reflections reveal a sense of unease about modern culture. In their book Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy Kraybill Donald and al. state:

Using Amish forgiveness, a few warning light, responses to the grace extended at Nickel Mines are overwhelmingly positive, so much so that pundits lined up behind the Amish to score points for their own causes. Soon both the shooting and the Amish response became raw material for making arguments about issues of national, even international significance (Kraybill D, and al, 2007:61).

Amish creed demonstrates that their traditional practices can bring healing to the modern world. The latter speaks the language of violence and war forgetting about the humanistic values such as forgiveness and peace. For this reason, the Amish are given a positive picture in the film Amish Grace. They are viewed to be more advanced than the vast majority.

Amish Grace's Forgiveness Discourse within an Arendtian Framework

In her classic work The Human Condition (1958), Arendt writes of forgiveness as related to action. Hence, I intend to present a dialogue between the ideas proposed by Hannah Arendt and the function of the theme of forgiveness in the film Amish Grace. Forgiveness is

essential for societies which have undergone violent conflicts to begin a new page in history. It is defined differently by different people. Thus, it is necessary to briefly review what Amish forgiveness is.

The fundamentals of Amish forgiveness are embedded in those two verses: “*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you: but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses* (Matthew 6:14-15). The Amish believe that if they don’t forgive, they won’t be forgiven. This forms the core of Amish spirituality and the core of their understanding of salvation: forgiveness from God comes from a willingness to forgive others. This is reflected in Amish Grace. For instance when some Amish men go to Amy Roberts’ house to offer forgiveness:

Amy: You forgive him?

Gideon: “For as you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also.”

Amy: Matthew 6:14

Gideon (nodding): We will not allow hatred into our hearts. We know that you will be facing harsh judgments and we would like to offer our help. We’re your neighbours and if you or your children should need anything, we hope that you will let us know.

This notion was never clearer to “outsiders” than in the aftermath of the Nickel Mines shooting. In a response to the misunderstandings about how the Amish could forgive, local Amish leaders provided an explanation in a letter:

There has been some confusion about our community’s forgiving attitude, [but] if we do not forgive, how can we expect to be forgiven? By not forgiving, it will be more harmful to ourselves than to the one that did the evil deed (Kraybill D, 2007:95)

Forgiveness is a regular feature of *Martyrs Mirror* stories. For instance, Dirk Willems is a 16th century Anabaptist Martyr well known and revered within every Amish community. In fleeing prison, Willems was pursued by a government agent, a thief-catcher. When his pursuer fell through the ice, Willems famously turned back to rescue him from certain death, thereby sacrificing his own life. His story of forgiveness is detailed in *The Martyrs Mirror* and love of one’s enemy becomes the classic martyr story (Ibid, 109). Actually, this sixteenth century story repeated itself in the twenty first century Amish School Shooting. Following

Willems' experience and many other religious narratives, the Amish offered forgiveness to Charles Robert's family. Besides, before their death the Amish victims prayed for their murderer. For instance, Rebecca one of the surviving Amish girls recounts the following:

After he got the gun, he was standing over me. I was so scared. Mary said: "shoot me first". So, he went over to her and she said: "You girls should pray for me". Sarah said: "I think you should pray for us", and Mary Beth said: "I will pray for you". She said she'd pray for him even though she knows he was gone shoot us with the gun.

Arendt's writings on forgiveness provide a potential explanation for such a widespread interest in the news of "Amish forgiveness". Her central claim is that forgiveness is uniquely related to action because the power of forgiveness lies in its capacity to free actors from the past, allowing them to act anew, not bound by the wrong that prompted forgiveness. She says:

Without our ability to forgive and move beyond such acts it would be impossible to continue forward freely; only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they [men/women] be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new (Arendt H, 1958:240).

This sort of process is what many Americans found moving and laudable about the Amish response to the shootings. Arendt's view of forgiveness is particularly relevant here as a light shed on how the story of "Amish forgiveness" is deployed in Amish Grace. Thus, if I have to speak with these Arendtian assumptions in mind, I shall say that forgiveness in Amish Grace has a clear social function. It is done for restoring a neutral or more positive relationship after a transgression. It is for the re-establishing of the Amish ethnic membership within the larger American society. It is the Amish victimized community which volunteers this action. In fact, after the tragedy three of the Amish men, including Pastor Levi and Gideon go to Amy's house. Amy asks if any of the men present lost a child. When Gideon tells her that he lost Mary Beth, the following dialogue takes place:

Amy: I am sorry you must be suffering deeply.

Gideon: It is a deep wound, but she is in heaven with her Father now and she is at peace. We're sorry for your loss too.

Amy: My loss?

Levi: You lost a husband; your children have lost their father. We grieve for you as well. We will harbour no anger at Charlie. He was known to most of us. We've come here to tell you that we forgive him.

Amy: You forgive him?

Gideon: “For as you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also.”

Gideon (nodding): We will not allow hatred into our hearts. We know that you will be facing harsh judgments and we would like to offer our help. We’re your neighbours and if you or your children should need anything, we hope that you will let us know.

From this exchange, we see once more how forgiveness makes it possible to amend the social statues of the Other. In this way, the film opens new story possibilities and thereby transforms the old memory. The Amish community re-work the weakness of the Other by allowing a new narrative of renewal. It appears from the above dialogue that the focus is on what forgiveness can provide for the “English” offender rather than for the offended. However, this action works to release the Amish, too, from pain and punishment. In this respect, Arendt claims that:

The alternative to forgiveness, but by no means its opposite, is punishment, and they have in common that they attempt to put an end to something that without interference would go on endlessly (Arendt, 1958:241).

Likewise, in response to Amy not understanding about the Amish ability to forgive Charlie,

Gideon says:

No! It’s all right. But you don’t understand. Our forgiveness is not about Charlie. Forgiving doesn’t mean forgetting. It doesn’t even mean pardon. We know that Charlie will stand before a just God, but we also know that if we hold on our anger and resentment, then *it is only ourselves who are being punished*.

Roberts’ act of murder seems to be the kind of wrong that would not have gone on “endlessly”, most conclusively because he turned the gun upon himself. Killing himself is a violent act which sweeps away any considerations of just punishment.

If the mythic “*Golden Age*” a purer, simpler past times when innocence reigned cannot be achieved, then the public longs for forgiveness because it offers the kind of freedom of which Hannah Arendt speaks. When Americans speak of a gift or a lesson coming from the Amish of Nickel Mines, I believe that, consciously or unconsciously, they seek this end. The mainstream majority see ‘Amish forgiveness’ and lamented the lost opportunity for a

forgiving response to the 9/11 attacks. This position is summarized in the words of Quart and Auster (2011), who wrote:

An entirely different dilemma confronted filmmakers about the events of September 11, 2001. It was difficult to make a film about an event whose apocalyptic images left a legacy of silent weeping, emotional ache, and sense of dread for many Americans. For months, it was hard to escape the haunting and traumatic nature and, at times, accompanying nightmares of September 11th. This was especially true for New Yorkers, who bore the brunt of 9/11(Quart, L and Auster, A, 2011:241).

The image of the Amish community in Amish Grace could be read as the mainstream majority's longing for freedom from the cold and unforgiving world of modernity. This can be achieved through an escape to the mythic time of unity lost in the past. Yet insofar as it relates to fatality, the current representation primarily reveals a longing for freedom from vengeance as well. In this respect, the Amish are viewed as relevant subject for the exploration of the world politics' need for *peace*. For instance, this is articulated in Amish Grace. At this moment, Gideon asserts through the use of the device "if" that peace entails embracing forgiveness:

Ida: what wisdom? Why God want a beautiful innocent girl to be slaughtered? Why?
Gideon: I don't know. All I know is that *if we forgive* God promises that *peace will follow*.

Gideon's answer in the above conversation is less of religious. He says: "I don't know...all I know is...". Here there is a sense that the Amish forgiveness is not only religious, rather it is also for the sake of amending public relations. I suggest that the Amish forgiveness in both the film and the real story frees the Amish victims from their burden of 'victimhood' and grants some degree of relief to the "English" who feel sorry for their actions. This action is manifested, for example, in Amy Roberts's crying:

Amy: I am sorry – you must be suffering deeply.
Gideon: It is a deep wound, but she is in heaven with her Father now and she is at peace.
Amy: I'm sorry, so sorry.

Accordingly, this helps to mend ruptured relationships. In one sense, forgiveness is taking control of the past in a way that allows both cultures to move on. It is here that politics comes

into the picture. Politics can be interpreted in different ways, in terms of struggle for power and the manner in which a society tries to achieve transformation of its lingering conflicts and move forward. In Amish Grace, during Charles Roberts's funeral, the "English" priest says:

But as our Amish brothers and sisters have shown us, when we don't seek vengeance for our pain, when we open our hearts to the healing light of forgiveness, then the *darkness is banished and evil is no more.*

The above articulation of the Amish role in the mainstream American imagination clarifies, that the film conceives of Amish forgiveness as an instructive lesson and a transformative gift. This transformation, in turn contributes to a shift in the majority perception of the Amish minority. In a sense, the Amish people have proved that they are not just actors in a mythic time of idyllic harmony, but when violence threatens their peaceful world, they respond in such a way that can benefit the modern American culture. So, it is no surprise to deploy the Amish minority by the dominant majority as "saving remnant" amidst the fallen and continually falling world of mainstream America.

Conclusion

Amish Grace uses the Amish minority trauma as a device for the function of power. The characters and themes that are (re)presented are the object of the majority discourse. The positive view of the Amish in this film is used to validate contemporary American political and cultural traditions. The Amish religious minority response is a pertinent tool to defend and promote values of conservative America.

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General Conclusion

The affirmation of American values along with a constant critique of them constitute the essence of mainstream American popular culture, and these tensions have been manifested by various minority groups throughout America's history. The present dissertation was an attempt to relate the thematic concerns of Witness, For Richer or Poorer, and Amish Grace, to the historical atmosphere and discourses that surrounded their production. The common point that these films share is that they are neither about the Amish minority nor for the benefit of the latter. However, the Amish community is instrumentalized by the American film industry to express the values of the mainstream American culture across different periods of history.

Media about Amish are written and produced by those people who are not of the Amish culture. These different portrayals vary in their motivation regarding Amish image. What messages mainstream society choose to tell reveal a minority faith that has a surprisingly robust voice in American culture and politics. The portrayal of Amish by non-Amish in American mainstream culture has followed two extremes: they are deployed either as a critical metaphor or as an epitome of American wholesome conservative values. The first set of values is illustrated in Witness and For Richer or Poorer, while the second set is spelled out in Amish Grace. These portrayals of Amish in the popular media may be entertaining, but they also confuse the reality and leave the public wondering what the true face of Amish really looks like.

The Amish represents a Jeffersonian ideal of the "yeoman". These yeoman farmers made up a free, stable, strong, and classless society. By comparison, the urban cities are hotbeds of poverty, vice, and social and political strife. Thomas Jefferson provided the most influential, if not the most consistent, articulation of this yeoman ideal "Cultivators of the earth", he wrote in 1785, "are the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to its

country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands.” America, Jefferson argued, should strive to remain agrarian as long as possible: “I think our governments will remain virtuous as long as they are chiefly agricultural when Americans get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, they will become corrupt as in Europe” (Cited in David, Walbert, 2002:17). Rural America’s diversity as well as its connection to certain long-standing economic and political traditions, provides a source of some potentially useful alternatives to a modern industrial culture.

The representation of minorities from a majoritarian point of view is one of the most critical issues with which any democracy must contend. American mainstream media by no means hold changeable attitudes towards these concerns about minority interests. Anxiety about the fate of minorities in this nation goes back to the Founders. James Madison is famous for declaring that with majority rule policy would “too often be decided, not according to the rule of justice and the rights of the minor party but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority” (qtd in Hamilton et al, 1961:77). The films Witness (1985), For Richer or Poorer (1997), and Amish Grace (2010), as I have argued, deploy the Amish ethnic minority politically and culturally either for criticizing or for securing the values and interests of the American mainstream hegemony.

The outside world in the Amish mind denotes the larger social system with its corrupted values, vices, and practices. Separation from the world is maintained by specific practices as well as special symbols. These cultural fences remind insiders and outsiders alike of the borders between the Amish and the dominant culture. As one Amish man said: “We believe in letting our light shine but not shining it in the eyes of other people” (Kraybill D et al, 2007:12). However, the ruling majority with its powerful media and industry are not willing to fulfil this rural religious minority’s dream to not let their light “shine in the eyes of others”. It is no surprise to see mainstream America intervening in the lives of its local

communities such as the Amish as the United States was cast in the role of the defender of freedom and liberty, and interventions in the world and world affairs.

It is relevant to suggest that power imposes itself on those on the margins of society in order to augment and replicate its cultural practices. It is a major factor in the relationship between the “Self” and the “Other”, between the dominant culture and the non- dominant culture. This is the norm that always authorizes the powerful to circulate the image of the powerless. The Amish coin is deployed as an important film subject. This is precisely because the Amish distance themselves from the mainstream American culture.

By the end of the twentieth century Americans were growing increasingly confused and uneasy about the varieties of religion around them. The status of number of minorities among which the Amish is one has changed over the history of America. America has an interest in rehabilitating the image of some of its minority communities today as part of its policies. Amish Grace revises the traditional definitions of the “Amish community” and “character”. The struggle for recognition, expressed in this movie as “We are equal but different”, seems to be based on an assumption of equal worth, where “I” and “you” can be “we” because we share a common purpose and can work towards the common good.

This favorable perception of the Amish by the mainstream majority is dictated by the post 9/11 context. Amish Grace attempts to communicate how human problems and cultural conflicts can be re-worked and rendered as positive aspects through connecting with each other in spite of potentially alienating trauma such as the 9/11 and the Amish Nickel Mines School Shooting. This favourable view therefore helps demonstrate that even a minority community can simultaneously help solve problems and heal traumas. This discourse helps to present America as a democratic melting pot where differences of ethnic origins are put aside for the common good.

Witness comments on the ideological agenda of the Reagan Era. The latter was a space wherein the individual is seen as both the cause and the agent responsible for solving problems. John tries to save himself and the Amish from the blind authority represented by the police officers who are drug dealers. He is shown as the only sense of morality who attempts to survive in an amoral and unstable mainstream American socio-cultural context.

There is the assumption that decisions made today might be found wanting and modified, replaced or eliminated at some future point in time. Unlike in Witness, the end of Amish Grace tells another message. Its final shot that remains in the mind of the viewer is of Amy Roberts and Ida, hand in hand looking with hope at the newly built Amish schoolhouse. This means that the “English” offender and the “Amish” offended act upon the past and give their respective cultures a new forgiven past which allows for new beginnings and ethnic homogeneity. The process by which it has been rendered in support of the dominant American culture is in its implicit nostalgia to “restore the belief in unity and bring the American people together”. An increasing attempt by Americans to return to an illusory permanence and security of the past, Amish Grace as its title suggests constructs from a real story that happened in the past avenue to comment on events of the present. As we have seen it uses the Amish Nickel Mines School shooting tragedy and the Amish response of *forgiveness* as a lesson to instruct the mainstream majority on how to heal their wounds such as those caused by the 9/11 event. In short, the Amish are deployed by the mainstream discourse as a metaphor for reflection on the social panics that these traumatic tragedies have produced. This is done in such a way that could help bring back or restore the lost belief in American value of community and unity.

The Amish subculture, looks and acts differently from that of the mainstream, and thus creates oppositional identity, defining itself against the standard model. Thus, it is relevant to show how various people’s voices and experiences such as the Amish are posited by Witness,

For Richer or Poorer and Amish Grace and struggles to aid in the articulation of diverse views and cultural forms. The dominant culture has the decisive voice in the major institutions of society such as media production and circulation. Minority rights and protections are, to a very great extent, what the majority is willing to allow or, at least, to tolerate. What a majority is willing to permit a minority to do or not depends greatly on the extent to which the majority is able to understand and empathize with the minority's problems or needs.

We have seen in analyzing Witness and For Richer or Poorer how cultural differences are used to criticise the dark side of late twentieth century American society. However, in a more direct use of a true event in the past to comment on the events of the present, Amish Grace seems to convey how over time some events bring changes in mainstream attitudes which render cultural difference a supporting rather than a merely critical factor.

For all of their differences and purposes, the films discussed in this dissertation have similar outcomes which answer many questions that are to be found in the ideological contexts out of which most Hollywood films have been produced. My study of the chosen films' larger issues is admittedly a partial one. Nevertheless, this humble work suggests how much we need to continue to explore how American values and American movies interrelate.

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Résumé

Cette thèse porte sur l'étude de la représentation des amishes dans trois films Américains, à savoir witness (Peter Weir, 1985), for richer or poorer (Bryan Spicer, 1997), et amish grace (Gregg Champion, 2010). Je tiens à signaler que mon travail de recherche a pour but de démontrer que ces textes sont le produit d'un contexte sociopolitique. Ils déploient la minorité religieuse Amish dans le but de reproduire les valeurs dominantes Américaines. L'étude de ma thèse se répartie en trois chapitres. Le premier chapitre consiste comme arrière-plan historique. Il commence par un aperçu historique de l'ancienne Amérique comme un refuge pour les minorités religieuses persécutées. Ensuite, un fond de l'histoire de la culture des amishes est fourni. Le deuxième chapitre est orienté vers la discussion de la vision des Amish dans witness et for richer or poorer. Witness utilise la culture des amishes comme un véhicule idéologique pour le renforcement et l'articulation de l'ordre du jour conservateur des années quatre vingt (1980). Dans la même orientation, for richer or poorer invoque le sens de l'Autre Amish dans le seul but de renforcer la centralité du « moi » de la culture Américaine dominante. Le dernier chapitre traite de la vision positive de la minorité amish dans le film amish grace. Ce chapitre examine le changement dans la vision des Amish par la culture dominante, on utilisant la théorie de Hannah Arendt, j'ai amené une recherche qui ma permis de démontrer comment les valeurs de la culture des amishes sont affectées par la majorité comme un mécanisme de guérison après le 11/9 États-Unis d'Amérique.