

**PROBLEMS WHICH CONFRONT A SCIENTIST
INVESTIGATING NICHE COMMUNITIES.
ETHNOPEDAGOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE
COMMUNITIES OF THE OLD ORDER AMISH IN
PENNSYLVANIA IN THE US**

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ABSTRACT

THE PRESENT TEXT REFERS TO ISSUES RELATED TO METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN IDENTIFYING NICHE COMMUNITIES - THE OLD ORDER AMISH LIVING IN PENNSYLVANIA IN THE UNITED STATES. THE RESEARCHER CONDUCTED HER ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY IN A CLOSED, HERMETIC COMMUNITY OF THE CONSERVATIVE ANABAPTIST. HIDING COMPUTER, CHANGING CLOTHES AND BEHAVIOR WERE SYMBOLIC PLEDGE OF LOYALTY TO THE HOSTS. THE RESEARCHER TREATS THE AMISH AS A NICHE GAP IN THE PRESENT, AND THEIR EDUCATION - DEFINES IN THE TERM ENDEMIC EDUCATION.

KEY WORDS: ENDEMIC EDUCATION, ETHNOGRAPHY, ANABAPTIST, CLOSED COMMUNITY, CONSERVATISM

INTRODUCTION

The area in the strict sense of the word. Field studies on the backend. In this way this conference has been called by the organizers, therefore, as a person delivering a lecture I should follow these words. What then was the area that I want to describe you and what smells prevailed in the kitchen? What difficulties I faced conducting my research? Who exactly are these niche Amish and why getting to them was almost as hard as for a woman enter the gate of the Camaldolese or Carthusian Order cloister?

Amish roots date back to the time of the Reformation. It is assumed that the Amish are a splinter of the Alsace- Swiss-South German Anabaptism, which was the result of a schism made by extremely radical Jakob Ammann of Erlenbach (in Germany), the leader of the Church of the Swiss Anabaptists, who wanted to religious laws govern all possible spheres of life. Anabaptism is a religious movement that was created and developed in the sixteenth century, among heavily oppressed German peasantry and urban plebeians. Characterized them: strict discipline, religious and socio-religious radicalism. They rejected all social differences, postulated the community of goods and assets. This preacher Jakob Amman, pointed out sins of his coreligionists: luxury, the pursuit of worldly goods, curiosity of the

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world, he reminded also of the need to renounce violence, the need for modesty, humility and hard work obligation. It was Amman, who, in 1693, created a new community - Amish. For the United States the first Amish arrived in 1720.

I ran for a few weekends ethnographic research in the old Order Amish congregations in Pennsylvania in the US (Region Lancaster County). The trip to Pennsylvania was preceded by a multi-month and painstaking efforts to establish contact with the scientific community that has developed around the research center on the Anabaptists - The Young Center Anabaptists and Pietist Studies, which is a part of the Elizabethtown College. Thanks to the recommendation of one of the Amish respected professors, an author of many excellent publications on the history and culture of the Amish and thanks to my perseverance and determination I could barely go to the vestibule of the researched community. It was the first and the most important step. I found myself in the Beachy Amish family home, so in a place where custom and dress is closer to American neighbors. It is the community created by people from many other denominations of Anabaptism; running a small family business, rearing horses, connected to the Internet and using modern technical equipment. They were pious, extremely family and friendly people, a little amazed at my audacious research plan. Consistently tried to discourage me to the idea of entry into the world of the Amish of Old Order (law), the world tightly closed, inaccessible, hermetic and above all inhospitable.

The news of the visitor from Europe who wants to write a book about the most conservative, peaceful mainstream of contemporary Anabaptism spread through the grapevine. I was slowly gaining their trust. I was committed to attending on household chores, worked with dedication to livestock, worked hard and as best I could. Often, I looked to the neighboring farms of the Old Order families, and I was building the foundation of trust. Sometimes I was entrusted to the care of children. Finally, I lived in the house of an Old Order Amish family. I just knocked on the door and asked if I could stay, and I got a permit for two days. The next morning I got up at dawn to work together with the hosts. It's probably convinced them and they let me stay longer sleeping in the kitchen, getting to know the test area just from the kitchen. I was creating a portrait of the inside and from the inside. The Amish kitchen mingled odors of everyday life. Not all were bearable for a European. It is the center of their world steeped in the smell of modest, mainly vegetable and cereal dishes, the smell of children and sweat of adult busy people. Once these are the smells of old wooden furniture and a dried soap, which covered the edge of a small metal bowl used for Saturday baths. Another time it is mold fruit and effect of washing in considerable intervals.

Old Order Amish are a niche, and maybe even a crack. And, that's how I perceive them -as a niche in a niche or/and an oasis giving breath of life and life-giving fresh moisture - the medium of life. Why niche? Dictionary definition explains that the niche is a small semi-circular or rectangular recess in the rock / facade of the building, in which are placed cult objects, mainly images of saints. In a recently published book on phenomenon endemic Amish education I wrote that I treat Amish niche as the conscience of modern times, a kind of examination of conscience, which is done in silence and the soothing tranquility. Indeed, everyday life of these people is away from the rush of civilization, is a conscious departure from the arrogant, unstable by its speed world. Amish everyday is attentive and rhythmic, and its rhythm is given by weddings, pregnancies, births and deaths of loved ones. This is inviolable and unchangeable order. Amish consciously refrain from the world, where (and with whom) one can speak be a name, retreated into their recess to their secure slit. In the name of what's important and good in their eyes, for the sake of their own identity their resigned from the world of rotting manipulation, politics, common banditry and symbolic, ritualistic rape of children. That's how I understand the niche, it is devoid of sharp

edges concavity, a place at which you can stare and listen to. With astonishment, rising higher than usual sight to see compass in proud form that clearly and without introducing chaos of relativism leads the way. The Amish are such a gap in the present day, which I think of as a refuge from the noise that causes insanity, from the fetish of speed in the race for nothing, nowhere, with nobody. They live slowly. This niche lines the Amish identity, something not to be underestimated. Obedience, inner peace, family, devotion and unbelievable modesty and plainness. Once Professor Alexander Nalaskowski called simplicity plainness. He wrote that, in order that the man was really rich internally, his education must be simple. That's what I understand Amish niche plainness, as an attribute of enriching, giving space for the wealth coming from the inside, as a privilege. This plainness is a greyish background on which it may emerge vividly, what is really valuable and important.

Why oasis? Because, just in the oases is crystal clear, spring water at a height such that it could reach plant roots. Here, the identity of the Amish is such a thriving white tamarisk, depending on the life-giving oasis moisture. This oasis is seen as a carefully waited promised land, as a place providing shelter, releasing from desire, a place where you can be born again.

Let's go back to the area when viewed on the backend. What was this area? In the beginning was invented, unrecognized and therefore mysterious. I knew little about the Amish, their environment and culture, so I naively figured them myself. It was a bland and painfully romantic image taken from movies that do not reflect smells, for example. Fortunately, that image was shattered quickly in Pennsylvania, blurred by the Amish roughness, distrust and plainness. It disappeared into the surprising everyday. And the thing became fascinating. Sources of my research are based on a very simple premise, which corresponds to the classical school of anthropology of M. Mead and B. Malinowski: as a researcher, I explore and describe, in the name of my home environment, the exotic, inaccessible community. Above all, very little known. So, I took part in the natural everyday rituals of community that has created its own culture. My few weeks and complete, in the sense of the fulfillment of the community tasks and daily chores, stay, resulted in a rich collection of empirical material. The vast majority of this material are field notes and memories, members of the community did not let me register any of the discussions on electronic media. Need of taking pictures also caused insurmountable difficulties. I repeatedly asked the Amish about this possibility, almost every time obtaining the same answer. Refusal. When I asked about the decision reason, I was repeatedly obtaining the same answer: *because I'm Amish*. After all, it's so natural! Only a few times I was able to get permission for photos. I thought that in these studies, images play a role similar to the role of sketches in the early work of Bronislaw Malinowski; verbal description here seemed to be too poor, so I sought for photographs with real determination. I was explaining calmly that the image is necessary to tell the members of my community about the Amish. Necessary was tact and patience. From the working these studies were lined with the conviction that *the slower, the faster*. Therefore, I trod the penetrated area with caution and prudence. Almost with deference. This area was full of twists, places where it is not difficult for tipping, which would make my further stay pointless. A slightest falsehood and cunning would jeopardize the whole project. The gesture of pity or ignorance. Laziness and other sins for which orthodox Amish find not excuses.

I ran ethnopedagogical research, where the central object of study is a man in a particular situation, called - *educational*. I have visited many Amish schools, each time knocking on inhospitable doors and asking for granting a moment inside to speak with a teacher. I won the pious and industrious people by the truth. Always revealing the real purpose of the visit, never dodging between shapely lies.

I focused my attention on the first experiences, letting myself to be surprised, letting for astonishment. I resisted observations on the image (as Malinowski did), on the "first contact" and a very strong sense of alienation. What previously was only imagination, over time, with every step that allowed more accurately see the area, was now subject to skew and deformation. Ideas gave way to observation. I treat my fieldwork not only in terms of story, but primarily in terms of meticulously analyzed images and scenarios. Each observation I was writing down in the diary, writing down single words and whole dialogs. That observation, understood as an act of perceptual phenomena and recording them I have done my dominant research technique.

Observation in the community completely unknown from autopsy was based on the entrance, recognition and total submission to the rules prevailing among the Amish. And, just this total submission caused me the majority of problems. It meant a wake up at 4:30 am and the day filled with long hours of hard work. It was a very quick succession of breaking habits. This meant changing clothes, hairstyle and hygiene rituals. Suddenly, from the young woman with manicured hands I have become a marked spinsterhood, dusty, not very clean and constantly sleepy babysitter. I quickly abandoned jeans and all other elements of the outfit betraying that I had come from the outside. It also meant giving up makeup. In return, I received a modest, traditional Amish dress and a black practical apron. Smoothly combed hair, worn in a tight bun. A bath once a week, preceded by painstaking preparation: first the water had to be transported to the home, then at least slightly warmed. Change of clothing, careful hiding of my computer, obedience, redefining the word "hygiene", were my accelerated and at the beginning painful initiation to the Amish environment, but above all it was a kind of symbolic oath of loyalty to my hosts. It was surprising that after some time the above-described problems become were less and less burdensome. This Amish niche, or this world, which is far from stringent hygiene standards over time became very friendly. Living in a community that so lovingly cares for its own identity, so safe and uncompromised can be engaging and addictive. Escape to so strongly seducing niche, provided that it is devoid of signs of gibberish, tourism expansion marked by violence and conquest, cannot be forgotten. While conducting my research I was obtaining more and more evidence that the boundaries set by the Amish are impassable, and non-transferable. This consistency and orthodoxy is very appealing. Reservoir and a key medium of these attributes are just great and multi-generational Amish families.

SHUTTLES INTERTWINING

This is important to note that this intricate weave must be seen as a finite whole, in any case, do not watch the alienated fragments of tissue without taking into account the structure and functioning of its parts because the weave has sense only as a part of a whole complex of smaller, interrelated pieces. This sense (just like all others) is formed by the essence, the structure of the values and structure of the duties of the whole. It's a job for the whole body. It is intricate and thoughtful unblocking the shuttle between the warp strings.

Returning to the weave: **firstly**, weaving shuttle is a school. School children's education is based on the unshakable belief in the sanctity of a teacher's words, on the belief that laziness, disobedience and ignorance is a sin. For this type of sins orthodox Amish find no excuses. In the Amish school the most important thing is work, it shapes and prepares children to become a full member of the community. Fixing the duties at the school is an exercise before adulthood, which is filled with: work, prayer, family and community responsibilities. So the school is seen during daily meals and evening family prayers. This belief stems from the family, increases in subsequent generations conveyed not only through words, but also through a number of gestures towards the school. An indispensable condition

for the successful education of the young Amish is to teach children to respect adults because on it is based the entire education system. School education leads to a smooth purchase of more packages of behaviors that make up the so-called pedagogical deposit, namely: obedience, self-reliance and responsibility. Finally, so constructed school sets the path which transmits the values that build an identity of the community. Amish school is a kind of polytechnic educating future engineers-builders of a social order which cannot be upset. Solid foundations and stable design effectively prevents any deviation from the right angle.

Secondly: language. Language is without doubt one of the shuttles weaving the fibers of defense against external influences, but it also can be called a storehouse, in which are kept inaccessible to the rest information on community life, family rituals, history, and so things rooted in a particular place. This is a kind of invisible and robust fence, providing conditions for the continuity of tradition. All members of the community speak *pennsylvania dutch*. This language is a combination of German, English and native dialects assigned to a small geographical areas. It is endemic formation, assigned not only to that particular place, but above all, to a small group of residents. This is a product that sets limits, but is completely useless outside the designated boundaries of the community. English is only used to communicate with *englisch*, i. e. the non-Amish, with people from the outside, and the children learn English only in school (like German). *Pennsylvania dutch* does not work in the pages of any dictionary, it is not written anywhere, no one gave its words alphabetical order. In *pennsylvania dutch* one increases, it is the language of a home and of first words, steps, prayers. In this language, maybe for the first time in her life, young mothers murmur over the cradles of their children.

Thirdly, home, so the shuttle weaving the thread of family life. *Ordnung* is a word of German origin meaning order, i. e. a set of rules by which the Amish operate. Hence, comes the word *ordo* or *order*, *order* or *law*. This is the key to understand this community. It means a way in which they organize their social reality. The Amish are in some way a variation of an order, to which also applies a specific set of rule, treated as a *guideline*, a *constitution*. This rule makes the Amish live away from the world and builds the fear of the world, separates from it.

It points the limits, behind which there is sin, and behind which there is no return. These limits are transmitted to future generations through cultural transmission. It is impossible to ignore at this point the classical text of Margaret Mead, who described the ways in which it comes to the transmission of culture. She mentioned three models (ways): post-figurative, pre-figurative and co-figurative. In the Amish culture reproduction takes place without any doubt in the post-figurative way, where about the formation of the younger generation decides older, passing previously recognized values and standards. In the language of the European tradition we would find the equivalent of this in Thomist order. Home is here the source of value and structure of the standards. Culture is then vertical dimension, which allows its members to root out, to set in the world in which they grow. This allows the contact with the past, and the past of the adult Amish is the future of the youth. Every piece of cultural behavior is carried out according to the same pattern. With a surprising straight literality. The continuity of the system of values is based here on meeting the expectations of the older generation of parents and grandparents. Post-figurative community formulates ready answers to the fundamental questions: *who am I, how to live, speak, walk, love and die?* These responses are universal, non-negotiable and not open to discussions, tradition formulate them and protects against malicious modifications.

CONCLUSION

There are other parts of the weaving, which continuously protect the identity of the old Order Amish groups against undesirable. You could talk about the school course content,

Amish relation to the common in the US obligations to the state (taxes, military service, health care), and finally, more specifically on the shape of a tailor-made school, school of choice, where every single piece is created with a view of specificity of the recipients, in which education has nothing to do with education of "equal opportunities". It was in fact converted to consciously uneven. Niche, endemic, requiring not only special material conditions, but above all social conditions. Intergenerational agreement fits this community in a specific niche, making it endemic. This community (like other species of endemic fauna, for example marmot, or marine iguana and of flora, e. g. dwarf birch and ginkgo) cannot tolerate even the slightest variations in ecology, and its endemic education understood as the use of justifications and persuasion leading to the empowerment of specific values shows characteristics of narrow specialization.

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