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Source: *The Pluralist*, Vol. 14, No. 1, SAAP 2018 Conference Proceedings (Spring 2019), pp. 47-54

Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/pluralist.14.1.0047>

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Barbaric, Unseen, and Unknown Orders: Innovative Research on Street and Farmers' Markets

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PROFESSOR MORALES'S COSS DIALOGUE LECTURE demonstrates the utility of pragmatism for his work as a social scientist across three projects: (1) field research studying the acephalous and heterogeneous social order of Chicago's Maxwell Street Market; (2) nascent research on how unseen religious orders animate the lives of im/migrants and their contributions to food systems; and (3) large-scale longitudinal research on farmers' markets using the Metrics + Indicators for Impact (MIFI) toolkit. The first two sections of my paper applaud and build upon Morales's first two projects, and my extremely brief third section raises some questions about positivist specters that may haunt the MIFI project insofar as it is conceptualized, described, and deployed using the terms favored by mainstream social science.

Barbaric Orders: Racist Dimensions of the Problem of Order in the Americas

Professor Morales charges positivist social scientists with baking no bread because they generally fail to move past dissection and facile explanation. Morales's great hope, which he names *pragmatism*, is that social scientists would not just dissect and better explain but actively foster acephalous and heterogeneous orders like street markets and farmers' markets. Citing half a century of theorists, Morales presents these markets as potential organs of self-government, as places that can promote maturity and responsibility, and as vehicles for building community across boundaries of ethnicity, race, or gender. Such nourishing bread! I share Morales's hope that philosophy and social science can help us better understand how this bread is baked and foster conditions for baking more of it.

Morales sketches two basic models of order. The first looks back to Hobbes and forward to the positivists who believe that the only alternative to the war of all against all is “for individuals to surrender their liberty to a body that can produce cooperation and predictability” (Morales, “Food Systems” 30). The second model of order looks back to Montesquieu and forward to pragmatists like Mead who believe that “social order is composed of a system of ideas and behaviors that people learn, use, and modify according to their own purposes” (Morales, “Food Systems” 31). Given these two models, the most fascinating period of Chicago’s Maxwell Street Market occurs when the city abandoned its vendors to their own devices. The result? “With neither a policeman nor a City official in sight . . . as many as 1,100 businesses coexist[ed], Sunday after Sunday, with hardly a hitch” (Morales, “Food Systems” 26).

This is only miraculous if we assume—as so many people do—that there is something unnatural or unlikely about acephalous and heterogeneous orders. To understand why people are shocked that a large urban street market could be successful without formal governmental regulations or the threat of police force, we should attend to the fact that such markets are typically run by people whose socioeconomic position is presupposed to make them disorderly and generally unfit for self-governance. Street vendors are typically im/migrants or other people of color who lack postsecondary education, that is, people that our existing socioeconomic orders relegate to the bottom of the pyramid (Cross and Morales). Over 80% of the vendors at Maxwell Street during Morales’s fieldwork were black (~26%) or Latino (~57%) (Morales, “Woman’s Place” 108). American hegemonic orders were built on the principle that such people are only fit to be governed, not to govern. African American vendors like Louis co-govern and cooperate in a country that considered his enslaved ancestors bestial and barbaric, and where the color of his skin is still associated with criminality and the need for more forceful order. Hispanic vendors like Pancho co-govern and cooperate in a country that historically only wanted him to provide low-wage labor overseen by whiter, wealthier, and better educated folks.

Variations of this racialized order were violently spread across all of what came to be called the Americas. Race was only one component in this ongoing experiment to construct a New World Order, but suffice it to say that before the arrival of Europeans, indigenous societies were not lacking in order. Rather, what sociologists later came to call “the problem of order” emerged in its modern form precisely as Europeans began conquering, colonizing, and categorizing millions of diverse peoples as members a single race of barbarians that they confusedly called Indians (Dussel).

In Valladolid, Spain, from 1550 to 1551, the official historian of the Spanish crown, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, debated “the Indian problem” with the Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de las Casas. Sepúlveda, who had never traveled to América, argued that the Indians

are barbaric, uninstructed in letters and the art of government, and completely ignorant, unreasoning, and totally incapable of learning anything but the mechanical arts . . . and are of such character that, as nature teaches, *they are to be governed by the will of others*. (qtd. in las Casas 11; emphasis added)

The standard rationalization for Europe’s conquest and colonization of the Americas linked the “problem of the Indian” with the “problem of order” and offered this political solution: the ignorant and barbaric non-European peoples would provide labor and be governed by “properly educated and trained” Europeans. Sepúlveda also denigrated the interpersonal orders of the Indians, claiming that they “do not cultivate friendships” (qtd. in las Casas 32). Their commercial orders were similarly presented as nonexistent:

They do not engage in civilized commerce. They do not buy, they do not sell, they do not hire, they do not lease, they do not make contracts, they do not deposit, they do not borrow, they do not lend. (las Casas 32; emphasis added)

In short, Sepúlveda presented colonization as the solution to the problem that “there is no order among [the Indians]” (las Casas 33).

Of course, indigenous peoples were not lacking in governmental order, interpersonal order, or commercial order. They simply ordered their relations in ways that Europeans like Sepúlveda did not recognize as order. There were exceptions, like las Casas, who countered Sepúlveda’s arguments as follows:

[A]mong our Indians . . . there are important kingdoms, large numbers of people who live settled lives in a society . . . persons who engage in commerce. . . . They are not ignorant, inhuman, or bestial. Rather, long before they had heard the word Spaniard they had properly organized states, wisely ordered by excellent laws, religion, and custom. (las Casas 42)

This sixteenth-century philosophical debate prefigures how scholars today perceive (or fail to perceive) social, political, economic, interpersonal, and religious orders in the Americas. Logically, sixteenth-century European scholars had four options: (1) deny that the indigenous orders were orders at all, (2) acknowledge that they were orders but stipulate that they were *perverse* orders, (3) recognize that they were orders but theoretically assimilate them

and seek to practically develop them as more familiar European orders, or (4) recognize them as orders that diverged from their previous experience and knowledge of possible orders. Sepúlveda took the first two options; las Casas took the third (and occasionally the fourth).

What I find so valuable in Morales's pragmatist research is that he studies and theorizes acephalous and heterogeneous orders in places like street markets where traditional social scientists and economists only see a lack of order, disorder, perverse order, or perhaps at best, order that needs to be more fully developed. Morales looks for knowledge, order, and commercial innovation among people who are often presumed to be *necessarily* deficient with respect to knowledge, friendships, and commerce. His social scientific research thus represents a truly radical empiricism.

Consider Morales's ethnographic account of how Pancho learned the social order of the Maxwell Street Market. Ordinarily, we might think that a street market is "messy" and "inefficient" so that the police, or other city officials need to "clean it up" or "fix" it. But Pancho learns precisely through messiness and failure. He doesn't appeal to a higher legal or bureaucratic power, but rather cultivates relationships with the very same vendors that initially kept him out. Morales concludes: "Pancho's example demonstrates how embedded relationships secure space and even evolve into friendships" ("Food Systems" 29). I interpret this in the scholarly lineage of las Casas's refutation of Sepúlveda's claims that the barbarians are so lacking in order that they are even incapable of friendship. Morales exhibits a powerful theoretical imagination, refusing social scientific premises whereby order is assumed to be tantamount to *colonial* order or *official* order or *bureaucratic* order. When so many of our present orders are hostile to im/migrants and people of color, we need theorists who help us resist a Leviathan-like security state or neoliberalism as the only roads to order and progress. Morales's research helps us to see and perhaps even foster alternative orders, including what he calls "acephalous reciprocal relations among people," which we might also call by the old name of democracy understood as a way of life.

Unseen Orders: Religious Commitments and Symbolism in American Food Systems

To further understand and hopefully foster such orders, Morales begins to consider the unseen *religious*, *spiritual*, or *symbolic* orders, exploring the relations that people have to the unseen. Although Morales does not explicitly mention William James, his language evokes the claim that religion

consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto. (James 51)

Morales illustrates with the story of his father's Stetson hat, which is inhabited by an unseen image of La Virgen de Guadalupe. In his father's words: "What makes the hat special is her, she's always going in front of me" ("Food Systems" 35–36). In James's terms, Morales, Sr., believes that his "supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting himself" to the path laid out by Guadalupe. She is thus real to the extent that belief in her produces real effects. Even if others do not see her, *la virgín* is part of the religiously ordered relations that structure the identities and activities of millions of people, and there is more there than a surface-level awareness of images would suggest. For example, Guadalupe is the Aztec mother goddess Tonantzin underneath her Catholic dress, and various indigenous attributes inform her religious identity, veneration, and use (Anzaldúa; Elizondo).

Morales's pragmatism leads him to say that the "hopes that people hold" are very real, and he offers his "nascent interpretations of the symbolic corollaries of concrete behavior" ("Food Systems" 37). Because the symbolic corollaries are unseen (like Guadalupe on the inside of the hat, or Tonantzin on the inside of Guadalupe), they are presumed to be unreal, but pragmatist philosophy of religion works to restore the unseen to its rightful place in the real. This is particularly important work in light of the fact that im/migrants and people of color in the United States are disproportionately religious (Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," "Religious Affiliation of U.S. Immigrants"). For social scientists to take them seriously demands an attentiveness to the realities of their religious experiences, practices, and commitments. To illustrate, I sketch how the unseen contributes to the unstudied ordering of farmers' markets in the borderlands of the Rio Grande Valley, where I have lived and worked for the past eight years, as an anecdotal but nevertheless powerful confirmation that Morales's emerging research is likely to bear fruit.

My story centers upon on Miguel Angel and Maria Hernandez, from whom my wife Mariana and I purchased our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) share of produce each week during the growing season. Just a couple miles north of Mexico, the city of San Juan, Texas, population approximately 33,000, is best known for its Basilica and Shrine to Nuestra Señora de San Juan del Valle, which receives more than 1 million visitors each year. But the Hernandez family belongs to a tiny church, La Iglesia Menonita Buenas Nuevas, whose pews can accommodate perhaps fifty people. Back in roughly 2005, the church's pastor, John Garland, and his wife, Abbie, began

working with immigrant families to start their own gardens. They partnered with the community-based organization A Resource in Serving Equality (ARISE), which was founded by Gerrie Naughton of the Sisters of Mercy in 1987 to work with poor *colonia* families to bake some of the bread named in the first part of this paper: self-government, maturity and responsibility, and pluralistic communities. Its motto is “ARISE does not do for the people what the people can do for themselves” (www.arisesotex.org/). This interfaith collaboration came about in part because some of the ARISE members were Mennonites who migrated from Central and South America. The Garlands soon convinced Yona and Gayle Deaner, the owners of the land upon which the church was built, to let them start farming the lot next to the church. Members of the Mennonite community, along with ARISE members and some AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers cleared tons of waste and debris and brought in compost and manure. “Mennonite Acres . . . operated as a ministry of land-stewardship and to provide meaningful employment to low-income families” (“Mennonite Acres”). Church members Maria and Miguel Angel Hernandez soon became the main stewards of this land and continued selling produce. This was not easy more than a decade ago because the Rio Grande Valley did not have regular farmers’ markets back then.

What makes the business venture of *la familia* Hernandez so interesting in relation to Morales’s research is that it was founded as a ministry of their small Mennonite church. While the socioeconomic conditions of church members and their neighbors benefitted from the extra income, it would be misleading to reduce their aims to merely making money. Moreover, this religious community’s history at the time provides a beautiful illustration of acephalous and heterogeneous order. Rooted in the Anabaptist tradition, Mennonites worldwide tend toward acephalous orders that are neither top-down nor bottom-up, but relational and based on cooperation. As German-Dutch im/migrants who fled religious persecution or sought religious freedom, Mennonites ended up all over the world, but the heterogeneity of the congregation at Buenas Nuevas is especially striking, since members hailed from across the Americas: Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central America, and South America. Some spoke English, some spoke Spanish, some were bilingual. Their legal status in terms of immigration also varied, but they were bound together by their relations to the unseen. Moreover, these expert bonders and bridgers were well connected to the land and their neighbors. Their farm ministry, driven by the religious ideal of stewardship, could also be said to have grown out of an environmental commitment to the land, or a social and economic commitment to the people who lived on it, whether they were

religious or not, whether they spoke Spanish or English, and whether they were documented or undocumented immigrants. Because *los menonitas* were so embedded in their locale, they were even joined by people who had no historical, traditional, or familial connection to the Mennonite Church: a handful of English-dominant AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers from all over the United States attended services and social gatherings with Spanish-dominant ARISE members, making for a remarkably acephalous and heterogeneous order bound together by the unseen.

When Mariana and I moved to the Rio Grande Valley in 2010, a colleague gave us contact information for the Hernandez family, and we began driving about twenty minutes to pick up our weekly CSA share from what had been renamed Jardín Hernandez, even though it was still in the same lot next to the Mennonite Church. Today in 2018, we pick up our share at a Saturday farmers' market with a dozen or so vendors at the McAllen Public Library. There are also other regular farmers' markets in half a dozen cities in the Rio Grande Valley, and to judge from their business names, many other vendors are religiously oriented. I don't know their stories, but they include Yahweh's All Natural Farm & Garden, Abundant Grace Farm, House of David Produce, and God's Garden. I can only imagine what someone like Morales could uncover if he or she used a social-scientific methodology like the one Morales used in his three-year study of Mexican American Women Entrepreneurs in the Maxwell Street Market, that is, participant observation and structured interviews designed to understand the unseen religious orders in which their identities, activities, and businesses are enmeshed.

Unknown Orders: Positivist Specters in Morales's MIFI Research

I must admit that I found my own pragmatist hopes disappointed by the way that the unseen religious and symbolic orders completely drop out of Morales's lecture right after being revealed as real. Morales is not a positivist, but he presents "Metrics + Indicators for Impact" in largely positivist terms: the repeated emphasis on measurability, data collection, and analysis implies that only the measurable/scientific is real. I recognize that, rhetorically speaking, Morales's audience for his successful grant project consists of the USDA and mainstream social scientists, but the orders that MIFI is *not* designed to measure are left unseen and hence unknown. Metrics + Indicators for Impact privileges knowledge about economic development, but *what else* accounts for the 180% increase in farmers' markets in the United States from 2006

to 2012? What religious, spiritual, or otherwise symbolic orders animate vendors and buyers? The Rio Grande Valley may be an atypical case, but an adequate understanding of how it went from basically zero to half a dozen farmers' markets in less than a decade would need to reckon with religion as one of the driving forces.

In sum, I don't see how the MIFI project coheres with the first two parts of Morales's lecture. As Morales continues to develop his research, I hope to see projects that aim to understand and even foster the unseen aspects of the religious, spiritual, or otherwise symbolic ethoi that philosophers and social scientists are so often blind to, but that nevertheless infuse the creativity of people, places, and practices like farmers' markets.

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