

Becoming Urban? Seeing Amish Legitimacy Versus Technocapitalism

Robert A. Williams
(The University of Akron, USA)
rwilliams@uakron.edu

Relying upon “ethnographic seeing” of Amish rural landscapes within an ever-urbanising Midwest state in the USA, this article explores questions and positions of Amish legitimacy within wider Ohio economic life. It is also an enquiry into choices that are simultaneously choices of culture-shared values legitimating different patterns of urbanisation of the rural ultimately to serve technocapitalism. In noting the longstanding phenomenon of the rural adapting to the aims of an ever-urbanising wider society, this article explores the limitations and obstacles Ohio’s Amish face from urban expansion and urbanized cultural logics that legitimate, limit or delegitimize their central aim for an off-grid approach to a sustainable agricultural subsistence lifestyle. It also explores how Ohio’s Amish maintain legitimacy and solidarity in the face of an often-hostile neoliberal technoscape. Comparisons to England’s early nineteenth century Luddites are also explored to expand upon the questions ethnographers and philosophical anthropologists ask when interrogating the theoretical assumptions about the nature and legitimacy of technocapitalism’s role and relations in Amish society, including its notable effects upon traditional subsistence farming and associated notions of sustainability, “off-grid” cultural logics and changing notions of socioeconomic relations under observable features of urbanising acculturation.

Keywords: Amish, cultural logics, “ethnographic seeing”, legitimacy, produce auctions.

Introduction

Using an established decade-old produce auction in Pennsylvania as a model, Holmes County Amish founded a wholesale produce auction in 1995 at Mount Hope in Ohio. Three years earlier, an entrepreneur built a produce auction in Geauga County serving the Middlefield Amish community (Blaine et al 1997). During the ensuing two decades, twelve more wholesale produce auctions were established in Ohio. In 2011 more than \$10 million in produce sales was transacted at Mount Hope. Although academic attention is rising on this Amish American social phenomenon, anthropological and sociological attention has been less than robust (Bergeford 2011, Johnson 2014, Jorgensen 2012, Ohio University and Rural Action 2010, Shonkwiler 2014, Tubene and Hanson 2002). This article seeks to explore questions and positions of Amish legitimacy within wider Ohio economic life with a descriptive critical focus and ethnographic investigation on urbanising acculturation of two 21st century wholesale produce auctions.

Based on ethnographic research conducted intermittently from 2004 until recently, this article seeks to shift the analytical focus from legitimacy as a descriptive normative category to legitimacy as a generative social practice. What do Old Order Anabaptists, or OOA, consider to be legitimate? This implies that twin modalities of legitimacy necessitate exploration — economic and social, as well as the relevance of these contexts for legitimacy. Something or someone has legitimate attributes in the eyes of social agents. As generational change in OOA societies unfold to reflect growing acculturation to the hegemony of dominating Anglo-western cultural logics, features of cultural hybridity and changing notions of legitimacy for wholesale produce auctions are recognizable.

Methodology

Informed by my initial participant role in 2003 as a buyer, and by 2005 a grower/seller, seasonal participant observation was employed over the past two decades as “a methodology for human studies” to explore unfolding urbanising acculturation of these wholesale produce auctions

(Jorgensen 1989). One of the founders of this ethnographic methodology suggests that fruitful analysis lies in the reflexive process of clarification of meanings and values informing “the immediate social and cultural contexts in which human life unfolds” (Jorgensen 2020: 11). A critical sociological mindset concerning Old Order Anabaptist (OOA) communities as a cultural subset was generated by my previous British postgraduate training in cultural studies. By reading and comparing reflexive logs and revisiting existing literature, analysis of data became a dialectical process of amassing and sorting data to uncover common themes. Further, subsequent collaboration with the settings’ principal interlocutors around these themes encouraged my eventual aim to clarify forms of cultural hybridity in urbanising acculturation of wholesale produce auctions, some of which are embedded within technocultural artifacts outside of individual awareness and therefore beyond conscious human agency.

Without entering current debates over relations between contemporary assumptions on identity, religion and work, this article seeks to reanimate a classical approach to cultural studies as it explores questions and positions of Amish legitimacy within wider Ohio economic life. From anthropology to history to sociology, the classical theoretical project of cultural studies draws upon a toolkit of interdisciplinary techniques to interrogate the connection between culture and power in contemporary sociocultural milieus and how capitalism manages resistance. In conceptualising urbanising acculturation of OOA produce auctions as a complex sociocultural activity of production, critical analysis is sought in this article by heeding Judith Butler’s call “to situate culture in terms of a systematic understanding of social and economic modes of production” (1998: 34). Reconsideration of Butler’s interest in the context(s) of culture, bounded by general and systematic processes and mutually conditioning structures, seeks to salvage heuristics that continue to illuminate usefully how the fluidity of meaning and symbolism is constrained by technoculture and other cultural dimensions.

The post-modern turn in cultural studies, however, seems instead to have centred on a cultural “circuit” project of consumption practices “as resistance” to the capitalist system of production (Gay et al. 1997: 120). These studies often focus on popular culture and members’ efforts to resist actively neoliberal society through symbolic politics. Hence, the role of classical cultural studies research in highlighting ways in which capitalism works through cultural logics to maintain unequal power structures is under-emphasized in contemporary literature. Further, Johnson noted that wholesale produce auctions have “yet to be critically analysed in existing academic literature” (2014: 2).

As generational change in OOA societies unfold to reflect growing acculturation to dominant cultural logics, Jameson reminds us that technology offers a privileged shorthand for a whole collection of networks of power and control that coexist with the third stage of capital (Shaw 2008: 24). This ethnographic investigation into urbanising acculturation of OOA produce auctions contributes to cultural studies and urban studies by “ethnographic seeing” and analysing under-researched OOA acculturation, cultural hybridity and changing notion of legitimacy through their relations with Anglo-western power and some of its urbanising forms (Krase 2012). Shaw (2008: 21) explains that “people accept the

established reality” and that rather than people changing the system, they change themselves to conform to the reality. This changing diversity of cultural logics among the varied segments of OOA has produced recognizable features of cultural hybridity and urbanising acculturation of wholesale produce auctions.

Cultural Logics and Hybridity

That “choices are simultaneously choices of culture-shared values legitimating different patterns of social practices” are long acknowledged, the concept of cultural logics nevertheless remains a rather muddled concept and therefore requires further explanation (Wildavsky 1987: 5). This article regards urbanising acculturation of OOA wholesale produce auctions as human social action, often collective and interactive, framed by cultural and structural forces that shape, at times coercively, how participants (re)produce culture. In doing so, Fischer (2001: 8) explained that “individuals exercise creativity, but only within certain cultural constraints that are intimately related to the larger processes (often conceived of as ‘structures’, yet themselves inherently dynamic)”.

Drawing upon multiple languages and even linguistic sub-varieties with their accompanying unique cultural logics, members of OOA groups socially construct presentations of self in everyday life. Some of these presentations of self in everyday life are a combination of various cultural pieces cobbled together to facilitate meaning through shared understanding within a given sociocultural milieu. Nonetheless, this notion of cultural hybridity often relies upon a view of cultural codes and conduct as previously pure or non-hybrid. Yet, these too generally represent the outcome of earlier rounds of cultural hybridity (Kollmorgen 1943).

The present research into urbanising acculturation of OOA produce auctions contributes to cultural studies by documenting and analysing under-researched OOA acculturation and their relations with Anglo-western power. Some of the questions driving exploration of this social phenomenon in this article ask how wholesale produce auctions are historically situated in Ohio. What are the purposes and sociocultural influences driving its production? To what extent do cultural dynamics of capitalist commoditisation in urbanising acculturation of OOA wholesale produce auctions function “to echo the logic of capitalism” (Gitlin 1997: 32)?

OOA social agents often cobble presentations of self from a position of marginality while drawing from a metaphorical bag of cultural codes, discourses and symbols to construct coherent discourses. In their efforts to communicate in everyday life, urbanising acculturation of OOA wholesale produce auctions are increasingly echoing commoditisation-centred goals. Further, the rationalisation of corporative cultural logics impacts upon shared meanings and practices in urbanising acculturation of OOA wholesale produce auctions. An understanding of the unfolding sociocultural contexts over time apprehends how “the initially enforced conditions are likely to have become if not the new social norms [...] at least the new social perspective, its everyday common sense” (Williams 1983: 187).

Setting and Topography

Ohio country emerged within the last ten thousand years as a region in the continent of North America after retreating glaciers made it not only habitable to humans but also exceptionally fertile for agriculture. According to Kern and Wilson, “Ohio’s fertile land and bountiful wildlife attracted its first inhabitants thousands of years ago, and they were the primary factor in drawing its earliest U.S. settlers” (2014: 18).

Fast forward 200 years brings this article to the 21st century scene of two OOA wholesale produce auctions located just thirty miles apart in latitude one in Richland County’s Blooming Grove Township and the other in Medina County’s Homer Township. Together they straddle “Ohio’s current ‘continental divide’ — a line that runs across the northern third of the state and marks the boundary between waters that ultimately flow to the Atlantic via Lake Erie and those that end up in the Gulf of Mexico — is a product of glacial action” (Kern and Wilson 2014: 11). These OOA produce auctions are flanked to the north by Ohio’s northeast conurbation of Cleveland less than an hour drive and to the south by Ohio’s central conurbation of Columbus less than an hour and half drive.

When the founding of County Line Produce Auction three miles south of Homerville Produce Auction put Homerville out of business, County Line nonetheless continues a trend of produce auctions straddling Ohio’s “continental divide”. With a sub-tropical climate during the growing season, Blooming Grove Township get 43 inches of rainfall a year, while this decreases in northern Ohio to 38 inches the closer one gets to Lake Erie. Half of this precipitation in Ohio comes during the growing season (Your Weather Service 2021).

Blooming Grove Township

Mennonites are the largest and most complex form of the Anabaptist religion with at least fifty varieties around three main types. These types — old order, conservative, and assimilated — exist along a continuum from ultra-conservative, world-rejecting segregationists to more liberal, world accepting, integrationists (Jorgensen 2012, Scott 1998). Old Order Mennonites (OOM), like the OOA, largely live apart and separate from the larger secular society in mostly rural areas. Their economic activities tend to be largely agricultural but generally involve limited industries along with a few trades and other business enterprises (Kollmorgen 1943). Their standards of dress and community conduct are Biblically informed to resist self-aggrandizement. In addition to speaking American English, OOM speak an informal German dialect as a first language and sometimes a formal German dialect for religious services (Kraybill 2010).

Historically, OOA communities have endured xenophobia. Nurtured during Europe’s Protestant Reformation and attendant wars, OOA thinking about pacifism and the legitimacy of militarism coincided with these social upheavals. In North America, Pennsylvania’s early non-Mennonite European migrant population grew increasingly hostile towards OOA segments befriending indigenous peoples. When their German missionaries were exonerated at trial, Indigenous American converts in Ohio country to the Moravian Brethren’s Christian style of

pacifism nevertheless suffered genocide at Gnadenhutzen, just thirty miles south of the largest concentration of Amish segments in Ohio today. Remarking on this rising xenophobia in adjacent Pennsylvania, Parillo noted that “[b]y 1750 the influx of German immigrants had become so great that Benjamin Franklin became quite disturbed” (1994: 145). Fearing their pacifism and objection to war in all its forms, Franklin particularly opposed the Mennonites, asking:

“Why [should] the Pennsylvanians [...] allow the Palatine Germans to swarm into our settlements, and by herding together to establish their Language and Manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them?” [Quoted in Smith 1970: 394].

In the 20th century, Ohio increasingly became a favoured destination for oppressed non-indigenous OOA groups. Most of Blooming Grove’s OOM members grew up three miles from Kutztown, Pennsylvania and attended government institutions of compulsory education. After their migration to Ohio during the 1980s, they built schools for their children so they would not have to endure the negative experiences they had encountered during their childhoods filled with compulsory state schooling in Pennsylvania. The complexity of various segments amongst the Shiloh OOM eventually became apparent when I went about my communities in 2004 looking for an OOM school to enrol my daughter. Such a request from a non-Mennonite was a first for them. He was sent to another segment’s school, then to another, and so forth until eventually a “car Mennonite” school was suggested. His daughter did not enrol but he was surprised by the number of various segments, each with their own school.

“English” buyers and sellers distinguished OOM from non-Old Order Mennonites by calling them “car Mennonites”. OOM in Shiloh were easy to differentiate from Amish because Amish grew beards after marriage whereas OOM continued to go beardless. Other OOM segments, such as Stauffer Mennonites in Bainbridge, Ohio, also grow beards and would be difficult to distinguish from Amish.

Except for the replacement of rubber tractor tyres with steel wheels, Shiloh OOM conduct farming with the latest machinery. [Joose] was gob-smacked, for example, I drove [Joose] and his 16-year-old son past an Amish farmer ploughing his field with a single plough drawn by two horses — “[Son], look at this” I said as both fixed our eyes on the sight and stared silently, then slowly shook our heads as I continued driving.

In the 1999 founding of the Blooming Grove Produce Auction, shares were open to “English” initially, then later reserved to Mennonites only. The formation of an auction cooperative is very compatible with Mennonite social values and organisation. Mennonite culture, unlike general Anglo-American culture, encourages cooperation but not individualism (Kraybill and Desportes 2001). Mennonite interdependence provides an observed advantage over the individualism of the larger non-OOA society in organising cooperative endeavours. These structural mechanisms OOM members have devised for the governance of their various institutions seem effective at deescalating interpersonal conflicts. By eschewing a corporate model and developing a cooperative one instead, they also seem able to preclude anyone from

racketeering at the expense of stakeholders. Nonetheless, personable non-OOA auctioneer Bill Baker from Clyde, Ohio was voted out of his position after ten years by an OOA faction within the association, who then promoted one of their own into Baker's vacated seat. Questions arise about authority, its foundations, characteristics and legitimacy.

At Blooming Grove and Homerville, separate tables are established for selling items in small quantities or single lots. On the warehouse floor is a second section for mid-quantities, and a third for bulk quantities. This is supplemented by a seasonal harvest-time double bay section for wagons of bulk produce, either horse or truck-drawn, and an additional auctioneer oversees this. It was difficult for me, as a medium-sized buyer, to run between all four sections to get the best deals. For some non-OOA attendees, the produce auction was a spectacle on the level of a county fair. Regular in their attendance, some attendees never bought or sold anything.

My growing friendship with competent interlocutors, such as [Joose] of the Blooming Grove Mennonite community and [Levi] of the Homerville Amish community, led to their valuable contributions as key informants. Prior to the 2004 planting season, I hired [Joose] and his teen-aged son to help me dismantle one of the steel-framed greenhouses that Endres Roses in New Philadelphia, formerly the largest rose producer in Ohio, were giving away as they were going out of business allegedly due to competition from Mexico. The long drives from Shiloh to New Philadelphia and back again, after a supper of turkey and mashed potatoes at the Dutch restaurant on Ohio Route 30, gave us plenty of time to become close friends. Not only was a relationship of reciprocal interlocutors achieved, but this friendship was also extended into the growing season when I became a wholesale customer for [Joose]'s bell peppers, sweet corn, and later pumpkins. [Joose]'s entrepreneurial awareness was exceptionally keen, allowing him to read the cultural landscape to spy disequilibrium and discover opportunities for trade within it. When I retired from retail farm marketing in 2011, [Joose]'s brother and nephew successfully replaced his vacant spot at Oberlin's Saturday Farmers Market.

Homer Township/Congress Township

The Amish separated from the Mennonites several centuries ago and are often more formally known as Amish Mennonites. Differences between them are complicated greatly by an extraordinary propensity for further divisions resulting in tremendous variation, if not great differences, within each segment. There are four general types of Amish, as well as further variations within each type. For example, former President Bush, Jr. allegedly garnered many votes from Ohio's Amish community for the 2004 elections at a time when Democrats were clueless to the tactic (see Kraybill and Kopko 2007). During my most recent fieldtrip to Holmes County in 2020, I counted thirteen distinct segments of Amish. Most of them reject many modern technologies, although the Amish Mennonites and Beachy Amish use electricity and machines, including tractors and automobiles, while still separating from the larger society and maintaining distinctive dress and customs (Kraybill et al. 2012).

Homerville Amish — a Swartzentruber segment that is shunned by other Swartzentrubers in Ohio — are very different from Blooming Grove's OOM and their

computerized greenhouses, tractors, tractor-drawn farm implements, and electricity. Swartzentrubers do without. The most onerous practice of Swartzentruber Amish, however, is shunning. It should be noted that economic incentives are limiting the deployment of shunning by increasing acts of forgiveness (or cover-ups) of digressions, at least in some cases of Homerville Amish. Fathers are reluctant to let a son-in-law inherit his farm because his own son went astray temporarily after the age of 16. Considerable collusion seeks to cover-up rare incidences of drunken bugging driving, attendance at Tonya Tucker concerts, renting a secular driver's living room for a couple of hours of video pornography on his TV, dealing in illicit drugs, and even buying sex with non-Amish females struggling with rural drug addiction.

While this segment of Swartzentruber Amish did not operate engine driven machines, they sometimes hired such machinery operated by others. Bergeford (2011) described them as white males, 30-49 years of age, who farm as a primary occupation. Almost all of them have less than 12 years of schooling and do not belong to any other farm association; and almost none of them obtain information from the internet. A little more than half report annual farm sales in the range of \$10 to \$50 thousand and a combination of organic and traditional farming practices, but mostly without seeking any organic certification — whether Oregon Tilth or USDA.

Information is acquired mostly from newsletters, newspapers and magazines, as well as regular communication among themselves; and they are aware of and reportedly sometimes use university extension services. The OSU extension agricultural farm in Wooster is very close to the Homerville/County Line Amish. Farming matters of the greatest importance to them include crop nutrition, insect and disease management, soil fertility, and food safety. I observed that Shiloh OOM use the Ohio State University Extension's services but cannot confirm the Amish doing the same.

Homerville Produce Auction was family-owned and operated by Fred Owen, a Welsh American, and his daughter who eventually became auctioneer. It was established before 1999 and thrived until 2013, when a competitor wholesale produce auction named County Line was established three miles south with easier access and modern infrastructure. Homerville Produce Auction is now defunct.

[Levi] of the Homerville Amish community lived outside Homer County in Lorain County's neighbouring Huntington Township. He sold his 38-and-half-acres farm to Eli and Annie Swartzentruber in 2019. His property taxes after deductions averaged \$2,000 yearly. Shonkwiler (2014: 79-80) reported that high property taxes in Pennsylvania were a push factor for some Stauffer Mennonites to migrate to Ohio.

Learning how to engage with Amish outside of telephone and digital technologies was a bit arduous for me. This aim was further complicated when I learnt that Amish do not make friends with non-Amish. Instead, they build acquaintances around work and business aims. Once, I stopped by [Levi]'s farm to inquire about potential roofing services. His wife said he was out while several children's heads began intermittently peering out various windows. It was easier to meet [Levi] during his spotty attendance at the produce auction.

During a labour shortage in Ohio for roofers, I was unable to track down [Levi] to hire his available roofing services. The eventual accumulation of knowledge in Amish-styled communications helped my brother-in-law Mike, co-owner of Reader Roofing and Air Conditioning in Cleveland, to seek out successfully and hire an Amish subcontracting crew who are transported to various jobs in a hired van. This Amish micro-enterprise crew was available for hire because other roofing companies during Ohio's roofer labour shortage did not know how to reach out to Amish roofers whereas roofers among the Mennonite community were long ago hired and unavailable. Amish micro-enterprises remain at a comparable disadvantage to OOM micro-enterprises due to Amish limitations on communications.

Legitimacy and Acculturation

The concept of legitimacy is interwoven with authority, socioeconomic conditions, and with issues of truthfulness and morality. This article began by overviewing the main historical trends for OOA wholesale produce auctions. Following that, some developments in the wider non-OOA society and their impact on OOA culture were queried. Legitimacy seems to be a human-made attribute to the extent that this attribute is confirmed and legitimated by social beings. The making of legitimacy through ethnographic seeing often appears as a process of collective self-confirmation with the intention of making OOA lives meaningful. This constitutes legitimacy-making as do debates over authority and power. Next, OOA wholesale produce auctions are considered in light of these social and cultural trends. Throughout, an attempt is made to demonstrate the historical relationship between the OOA wholesale produce auctions and non-OOA social and economic forces. In an interweaving of cultural and socioeconomic trends of society, the aim of this article is to show how these relationships are manifested in the market behaviours of two specific wholesale produce auctions.

Whose Entrepreneurialism?

This section mentions the demise of the Homerville Produce Auction in Medina County's Homer Township in the face of competition from the 2012 establishment of County Line Produce Auction just three miles south in Wayne County's Congress Township. I am left with the thought that he observed a trade war with a quick and devastating effect for the Welsh American family-owned Homerville Produce Auction (Homerville Ohio 2021). Quickly, the Swartzentruber Amish took their produce to County Line for increased profits due to higher volumes in sales coupled with higher per unit prices. Avoiding the irascible temperament of Fred Owen was also an incentive to switch produce auctions.

The founding of County Line Produce Auction also left an impact on Blooming Grove Produce Auction, just 30 miles west. As participant observer, I once was the successful bidder for a pallet holding a bin of hundreds of yellow summer squash fruits for a total sale of one dollar. The demand for yellow summer squash that week had been saturated by over-supply. Yet, I regret he did not call out ten or twenty dollars before the auctioneer declared "sold". Imagine the labour hours involved in handpicking hundreds of squash fruits and the despair of the labourer(s) to receive later a mere dollar at auction. The concept of "price taking" in

economics applies here where an OOA grower lacked sufficient market power to influence prices and simply had to take the highest bid even if that bid was no more than a dollar.

OOA as Passive Luddites?

A tendency within the academy, especially Science and Technology Studies, is to romanticize OOA agricultural practices, which seeks also at times to revere OOA farmers as passive Luddites. Robins and Webster, for example, argue that technology has a distinct role in isolating people or bringing them together because technology inevitably can change patterns in society and that “Luddism is more relevant than ever” as “a concept we cannot do without” (1999: 58). Further, publicity around “the second Luddite conference in April 1996 in Barnesville, Ohio” served to fuel international romanticisation of OOA communities as “a model” of resistance to the garrison state’s cybernetic imagination (Robins and Webster 1999: 62). Nevertheless, is this perception warranted?

With the rise of the industrial revolution, the requirements of new technology for warfare became very expensive. Feudal protection agencies found it difficult to grow enough food to feed all the people that needed to be fed to accommodate the demands of this new technology. Quickly the Netherlands, followed by England and other European countries, moved to a commodity-based commercial economy where the rulers could tax goods to fund their armies and navies. This move towards mercantilism meant peasants were uprooted and pushed off their land. Suddenly, land was more valuable for mining or for factories than it was for growing food (see Love 1986).

Rooted in the conflicts of the Protestant Reformation, OOA resistance to the Catholic Church was broadened to include the mercantilist technologies and Protestant hierarchy of rising garrison states (Nolt 2015). During the 16th and 17th centuries, OOA communities fled persecution in Germany, Switzerland, and later Russia. Their arrival in North America in the 18th century also brought xenophobic reactions from previous waves of non-OOA migrants.

It is important to the acquisition of a critical eye on the plight of OOA communities generally to review Luddism and Luddites. Contrary to claims made by a mere voting 3% in England that Luddites were “frenzied bigots” — a myth successfully perpetuated by the captains of commercialized civil society, industry, and mass media — “Luddites were not” (Robins and Webster 1999: 47). In 1889 Huddersfield native Albert Tarn explained:

“Sir John Ramsden, owns nearly all the land on which the town is built, and by his legal right, can keep people from building on any portions which are lying vacant, . . . which [is] Artificial Monopoly” (Quoted in Brooke 2010).

In short, Luddism is better understood as a reactionary protest by a disenfranchised majority denied access to law-making bodies perpetuating inequality. The subsequent machinations of a voting 3% to maintain hegemony over the remaining 97% of the English population saw the disenfranchised suffer their laws without the ability to vote against them until 1867. Luddite ideas against monopolies held by propertied elites fuelled four years of earlier Luddite liberation actions in Huddersfield and the surrounding villages of West Yorkshire. By 1815, Luddites were militarily quashed by the British garrison state.

“What the Luddites opposed was not technological and industrial innovation” explain Robins and Webster (1999: 62), but the “logic of techno-mobilisation” that arose to sustain the expanding capital needs of the British garrison state and empire. It is significant to note when contemporary academics and history teachers discuss British Empire prior to 1867, they are talking about the machinations of a mere voting 3%. Accordingly, two decades ago Robins and Webster invited us to reconsider “the early nineteenth-century Luddites precisely in terms of the attempt to sustain barriers to exploitation, in defence of social values”, and opposition to the unjust “technological and industrial articulation of the capital relation” to serve the garrison state (1999: 57).

We might extend Luddite motivations to the passive aims of Ohio’s OOA communities. “For example”, averred Smith et al., “even though non-agricultural entrepreneurial activity no longer means automatic excommunication from the church, Amish leaders do not want entrepreneurs to become too “successful” [...] to minimize the consolidation of power” (1997: 240). Examples of “price taking” help fuel generational change as young adults do not duplicate the produce production of their parents but instead switch to growing hot house flowers or, increasingly, go into the construction trades as working-class micro-enterprise entrepreneurs. In short, legitimation and authentication are ongoing processes. As Olshan and Kraybill noted nearly three decades ago,

“the Amish have become entangled with the larger society [...] [their] occupational shift toward microenterprises has directly tied them into the economic structure of the outside world” (1994: 14).

Wither Sustainability?

One “common perception” that has undergone little change is the non-OOA buying public’s notion that generally OOA farmers grow crops organically (Brock and Barham 2015: 234). As Jorgensen noted in his participant observation of OOM in Missouri, their “small scale agriculture, is an ecologically friendly, varied and sustainable means of” contributing “high quality, healthful foodstuffs to the local economy” (2012: 1). Apart from locally produced food, I found insufficient evidence to establish validity for this belief in Ohio and remains skeptical about this notion. Although a cooperative of Amish organic growers exists in Holmes County, members were reluctant to sell their organic produce at the Mount Hope produce auction (Mt. Hope Ohio 2021) “saturated with conventional produce” (Mariola and McConnell 2013: 147). Only one OOM farmer in southeast Huron County, who supplied organic milk to Organic Valley, was identified as an organic grower. This individual did not bring organic produce to the Blooming Grove auction.

Generally, the non-OOA customer brings her or his own symbolism of a healthy homestead to the wholesale produce auctions. When an individual OOA grower is questioned, however, on his use of chemical pesticides and fungicides, the response is usually vague:

“we try not to use them. But this is true of every non-organic farmer, whether OOA or ‘English’, who tries to expend the least number of chemical pesticides or

fungicides necessary to control pests and disease simply to keep their costs low.”

From my participant observations, “organic” means “bugs”, to which non-OOA consumers seem generally adverse. Those who farm without chemicals are at a comparative disadvantage when selling their produce versus other Amish and Mennonites who use chemical-based methods of farming. Most consumers do not like the smaller size, blemishes, and insect damage of spray-free produce, also known as “number two” produce. Lachance (2004) noted that produce quality and packaging acceptable to the following resellers: independent groceries, roadside produce stands, garden centres, restaurants, and individuals is essential to the success of a wholesale produce auction. Further, Ernst noted that “[s]uccess of auctions near Mennonite and Amish communities is often tied to community commitment to selling high quality produce at volume through the auction” (2020: 2).

In short, the produce auctions in Holmes County, Medina/Wayne Counties, and Richland County mainly sell produce grown with chemicals to control weeds, disease, and pests, and are based upon agriculture that does not support the aims of sustainability as I understand them. My findings concur with Mariola and McConnell that “[c]ontrary to popular perception, the large majority of Amish are not full-time farmers, and those who do farm typically use conventional, chemical-intensive methods” (2013: 144). In addition to product freshness, the primary reason most wholesale consumers bought at the wholesale produce auctions in Ohio was price — OOA “number one” produce sells for much less at their produce auctions than elsewhere. Facilitating this aim is that Homerville’s prices for each week of each month were found on their website and County Line continues to do the same.

The goal of most Blooming Grove Mennonite farmers was to attract contracts by large sellers who either do not have time for the produce auction or do not want to be outbid and left empty-handed. [Joose] landed such a contract for his Paladin variety of bell peppers from Heinen’s — a supermarket chain in the Cleveland area, much to the chagrin of his many buyers at the auction because he subsequently withdrew his number 1s’ from the produce auction, leaving only number 2’s.

The Paladin variety of bell pepper was the only root rot resistant variety available in the first decade of the 21st century. Root rot resistance permitted the growing of bell peppers in black plastic mulched rows irrigated with drip lines. The black colour warmed the soil in late Spring and the polyethylene plastic film dissuaded pests from damaging the plants and kept weeds from vying with the bell peppers for soil nutrients. In order to dig the row’s furrows for each side of the plastic mulch, [Joose] relied upon his welding torch to build a tractor-pulled plastic mulch laying contraption coupled with a disc on each side that graded the furrowed soil level again after the plastic mulch was unrolled. [Joose] tended to the unrolling of the black plastic mulch while [Joose]’s oldest son drove the tractor. It is important to note that the chemical herbicide glyphosate was applied to the field that would become the bell pepper patch to kill the weeds before tilling it. Tilling without killing the weeds first with glyphosate would result in weeds eventually popping up through the holes made later for the transplanting of the bell pepper plants and choking them.

[Levi] borrowed a “neighbour’s” black plastic mulch laying machine, sold in a catalogue produced by a Holmes County Amish business. [Levi] relayed in conversation that he hitched his two horses to pull it instead of a diesel-powered tractor. Notably, his vegetable patch displayed signs of tilling rather than spraying glyphosate for weed control between the rows. Cabbage, lettuce, and onions were observed growing in his rows of black plastic by the end of June.

Although [Levi] echoed [Joose] in alleging that it is practically impossible to prevent extensive worm damage to sweet corn ears without the use of pesticides, I was able to grow a small spray-free patch with much success. Thirty miles north of both wholesale produce auctions, he grew a small patch of spray-free corn in Pittsfield Township by planting *Incredible*, a hybrid variety of yellow sweet corn with exceptional disease resistance. After young ears emerged, he covered the ears with nylon “socks” or “footies” purchased in bulk. Moths were unable to penetrate the nylon socks to lay their eggs, resulting in spray-free sweetcorn without worms.

This pest practice was too labour intensive for large farms, but I could fetch a higher price for his spray-free sweet corn at the Saturday morning Oberlin Farmers Market where consumers ignored competitive chain store prices to buy and support local growers of higher quality fresh fruits and produce. So, it is possible to prevent worm damage to sweet corn if one knows a few tricks. There is also BT sweet corn, which is genetically engineered to release worm-eating bacteria that are harmless to human ingestion. This is what Richard Herr currently grows as I no longer rent his corn patch (Richard claims growing sweet corn, which he sells from a stand at the bottom of his driveway, is much less work than mowing an 8-acre lawn weekly).

Discussion

For today’s OOA families in Ohio, veiled costs come in the form of economic strain. Cultural studies theorists would say the economic order and attendant technology reflect the inequality of society with upper class dominance, which is apt when we consider OOA wholesale produce auctions as a pragmatic adaptation to the influence of corporate capitalism. Culture is not an unfathomable product of the creative human mind to form a series of social relations and traditional beliefs without grounding in natural reality. Rather, human action and the evolution of human society have an inherently material and pragmatic underpinning. Human action is always limited and, in some ways, shaped by the ecology of a society’s physical environment. In short, the wider non-OOA economic order drives acculturation, cultural hybridity and changing forms of legitimacy for OOA communities.

Conclusion

With culture theory’s traditional view that internalized individual beliefs and norms constitute culture, the notion that power and culture are fundamentally linked might seem counterintuitive. Nonetheless, Ohio remains a fascinating example of transformation under the U.S. garrison state and “the totality of the structural footprint [...] upon the cultural logics and agency of individual Americans” (Williams 2021: x). Commoditisation practices and

Anglo-western forms of the newest technology, especially digital, are transforming many OOA and OOM segments by unforeseen and unintended consequences on community members' interactions and changes in sociocultural life.

Whilst human agency has long been acknowledged to include simultaneously “choices of culture-shared values legitimating different patterns of social practices”, the concept of legitimacy nevertheless remains a rather muddled concept and, although not the only way to think about culture, requires further enquiry (Wildavsky 1987: 5; see also Pardo 2000). The dynamics that constitute legitimacy for human agency can generate effects upon morality and trust, and therefore authority, with wide variation in “localisms” (Pardo and Prato 2011: 11). Further, the global oil-based money economy serving the USA's global military-industrial complex, combined with the specialized division of labour to support the neoliberal system of rationality, has led to increasing objectification in global neoliberal culture(s) and a shallowing of individual experiences, subjective meanings, and human values.

This article in its brevity cannot fully pursue the wide breadth of understandings it suggests. Left unexplored, for example, is the push-factor generated tension between OOA agency and the need to fund health care throughout this exploration of urbanising acculturation of OOA wholesale produce auctions (Brock 2016). However, it serves as a reminder that adaptations and relationships occur over time and that the shape of any particular event at any given time is a product of these relationships. Many OOA studies fail to go beyond investigation of the present and its structural-functional relationships. Subsequently, these time-flat studies are incomplete in their historical and cultural appraisals.

Every enterprise and its society have a past. The ethnohistorical approach used in this article was helpful in discovering certain patterns that may not be obtainable from the employment of quantitative methods alone. Cultural and historical appraisals may prove more fruitful. Examples of corporate factory farming practices in the context of OOA wholesale produce auctions promotes a call for more ethnographic and historical work on Ohio's changing OOA economies, especially given the large and growing body of literature on economic anthropology from other regions of North America. Locating the experience of Ohio's OOA in the wider context of fifty-plus Anabaptist produce auctions nationally would help illuminate wider rural development trends resulting from urbanising pressures.

While [Levi] grew little more than a family kitchen garden to concentrate on avoiding the exchange of an hour's labour for wages through micro-enterprise subcontracting, [Joose] remains wary about the future of family farming in the face of cultural and economic changes taking place in Ohio. Yet, the Blooming Grove wholesale produce market has proven itself resilient. Despite precarity, new types of enterprise continue to emerge, such as hot house flower production. It is a form of entrepreneurialism in which OOA members need to read the cultural landscape with awareness to discover opportunities for trade and work within it. OOA communities often have no choice but to adapt to encroaching urbanism(s) “in a world where they regularly encounter their non-Amish neighbors” (Ems 2014: 44). Cultural hybridity and changing notions of legitimacy inevitably result from doing that.

References

- Bergeford, B. R. 2011. *Assessing Extension Needs of Ohio's Amish and Mennonite Produce Auction Farmers*. MS Thesis. The Ohio State University.
- Blaine, T. W., James, R. C. and James, B. H. 1997. The Effects of a Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Auction on Produce Availability and Distribution. *Journal of Food Distribution Research*, 28 (1): 62-65.
- Brock, C. and Barham, B. 2015. Amish Dedication to Farming and Adoption of Organic Dairy Systems. In B. Freyer and R. J. Binen (eds), *Re-Thinking Organic Food and Farming in a Changing World*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Brock, C. 2016. Personal communication with Robert Williams: Follow-Up report on joint fieldwork visit to Blooming Grove Auction in Shiloh. March.
- Brooke, A. 2010. Albert Tarn – Huddersfield's Son of Anarchy. *Underground Histories-The website of Huddersfield historian Alan Brooke*;
<https://undergroundhistories.wordpress.com/albert-tarn-an-anarchist-from-huddersfield/>, accessed 22 April 2021.
- Butler, J. 1998. Merely Cultural. *Social Text*, 52/53: 265-277.
- Ems, L. 2014. Amish 'Workarounds': Toward a dynamic, contextualized view of technology use. *Journal of Amish and Plain Anabaptist Studies*, 2 (1): 42-58.
- Ernst, M. 2020. Produce Auctions: CCD-MP-22. Center for Crop Diversification, University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment;
<http://www.uky.edu/ccd/sites/www.uky.edu/files/auction.pdf>, accessed 27 June 2021.
- Fischer, E. F. 2001. *Cultural Logics and Global Economies: Maya identity in thought and practice*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Gay, P., Hall, S., Janes, L., Mackay, H. and Negus, K. 1997. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. Milton Keynes: Sage/The Open University.
- Gitlin, T. 1997. The anti-political populism of cultural studies. In M. Ferguson and P. Golding (eds), *Cultural Studies in Question*. London: Sage.
- Homerville, Ohio. 2021. *Homerville Produce Auction*; <http://www.homerproduceauction.com> (homepage), accessed 6 April 2021
- Johnson, R. 2014. *Wholesale Produce Auctions: Assessing their viability in a changing food economy*. Unpublished M.A. thesis. The University of Guelph.
- Jorgensen, D. L. 1989. *Participant Observation: A methodology for human studies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Jorgensen, D. L. 2012. The Leadmine Produce Auction: Old Order Mennonite Sustainability in Missouri. (unpublished paper).
- Jorgensen, D. L. 2020. *Principles, Approaches and Issues in Participant Observation*. New York: Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition.
- Kern, K. F. and Wilson, G. S. 2014. *Ohio: A history of the Buckeye State*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Kollmorgen, W. 1943. The Agricultural Stability of the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49 (3): 233-41.
- Krase, J. 2012. An Argument for Seeing in Urban Social Science. *Urbanities-Journal of Urban Ethnography*, 2 (1): 18-29.

- Kraybill, D. B. 2010. *Concise Encyclopaedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kraybill D. B. and Desportes, C. 2001. *On the Backroad to Heaven: Old Order Hutterites, Mennonites, Amish, and Brethren*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Kraybill, D. B. and Kopko, K. C. 2007. Bush fever: Amish and Old Order Mennonites in the 2004 presidential election. *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 81 (2): 165-205.
- Kraybill, D., Johnson-Weiner, K. and Nolt, S. 2012. *The Amish*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lachance, M. 2004. Produce Auctions Expand Marketing Options. *Virginia Vegetable, Small Fruit and Specialty Crops Newsletter*. 3 (July/August).
- Love, J. 1986. Max Weber and the Theory of Ancient Capitalism. *History & Theory*, 25 (2): 152-172.
- Mariola, M. J. and McConnell, D. L. 2013. The Shifting Landscape of Amish Agriculture: Balancing tradition of innovation in a n organic farming cooperative. *Human Organization*, 72 (2): 144-153.
- Mt. Hope Ohio. 2021. *Mount Hope Produce Auction*; <http://www.mthopeauction.com/farmers-produce-auction>, accessed 6 April 2021.
- Nolt, S. M. 2015. *A History of the Amish*. Intercourse: Good Books.
- Ohio University and Rural Action. 2010. Chesterhill Produce Auction: A Case Study; <https://www.cannetwork.org/chesterhill-produceauction-a-case-study/>, accessed 27 June 2021.
- Olshan, M. A. and Kraybill, D. B. 1994. *The Amish Struggle with Modernity*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Pardo, I. 2000. Introduction-Morals of Legitimacy: Interplay between responsibility, authority and trust. In I. Pardo (ed.), *Morals of legitimacy: Between agency and system*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.
- Pardo, I. and Prato, G. B. 2011. Introduction-Disconnected Governance and the Crisis of Legitimacy. In I. Pardo and G. B. Prato (eds), *Citizenship and the Legitimacy of Governance: Anthropology in the Mediterranean region*. London: Routledge.
- Parillo, V. N. 1994. *Strangers to These Shores: Race and ethnic relations in the United States*. 4th ed. New York: Macmillan.
- Robins, K. and Webster, F. 1999. *Times of the technoculture: From the information society to the virtual life*. London: Routledge.
- Scott, S. 1998. *Plain Buggies: Amish, Mennonite, and Brethren horse-drawn transportation*. Intercourse: Good Books.
- Shaw, D. B. 2008. *Technoculture: The key concepts*. Oxford: Berg.
- Shiloh Ohio. 2021. *Blooming Grove Produce Auction*, <https://bloominggroveauction.com>, accessed 6 April 2021.
- Shonkwiler, K. D. 2014. 'Circle Letters, Produce Auctions, and Softball Games: Investigating the internal dynamics of the Old Order migration process'. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Ohio University.
- Smith, S. M., Findeis, J. L., Kraybill, D. B. and Nolt, S. M. 1997. Nonagricultural Micro-enterprise Development Among the Pennsylvania Amish: A new phenomenon. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 13 (3): 237-251.

- Smith, W. C. 1970. *Americans in the Making*. New York: Arno Press.
- Tubene, S. and Hanson, J. 2002. The Wholesale Produce Auction: An alternative marketing strategy for small farms. *American Journal of Alternative Agriculture*, 17 (1): 18-23.
- Wildavsky, A. 1987. Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A cultural theory of preference formation. *The American Political Science Review*, 81 (1): 3-22.
- Williams, R. 1983. *Towards 2000*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Williams, R. A. 2001. *Garrison State Hegemony in U.S. Politics: A critical ethnohistory of corruption and power in the world's oldest "democracy"*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Your Weather Service. 2021. *U.S. Climate Data 2021*;
<https://www.usclimatedata.com/climate/mansfield/ohio/united-states/usoh0549>,
accessed 6 April 2021.



Comments on the Paper Given at the Seminar

(in alphabetical order)

Jerome Krase

(Brooklyn College, The City University of New York, USA)

jkrase@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Robert Williams' study of the Amish, and other similar groups in America's near-Midwestern state of Ohio was a fascinating example of how different social life looks up close as compared to real and imagined views of minority religious groups. Of course, all generalizations are stereotypes, but some are more distorted than others, and some are also dangerous. Through close attention to the social and economic life of different families and congregations, it becomes possible to see how qualitatively different they are in their interactions with each other and outsiders as well. In doing so, the work points out the potentially glaring limitations of large-scale quantitative research that assumes the validity and reliability of samples. For example, here it was demonstrated that religious groups identified by the same or similar denominations can be very different from each other. In this case it became possible to see how even "Old Order" Amish, Mennonites, and related groups can be contemporized. Relatedly, Williams's study revealed how the adaptation to and adoption of more and less modern technologies significantly changes social and interrelated economic life. The result (permutations if you wish) is the production of a wide variety of individual, family, and group responses that defy simple generalizations. Works like these also make it possible for social scientists to understand not only the power, but also the limitations of grander theories and methods.

=====

Erin Lynch
(Concordia University, Montreal, Canada)
e.e.lynch.art@gmail.co

While I completely acknowledge the author's point that (for reasons of length) addressing questions of gender is outside the scope of this paper, I do think this element of Amish legitimacy and cultural hybridity might be an interesting topic for future exploration. My understanding is that there are gendered dimensions to Old Order Mennonite food production and preparation, and I am curious as to how the markets in question reflect this (if at all). How might this factor into the appeal of "authentic" or legitimate Old Order Mennonite forms of food production/preparation? Does that gendered dimension add a particular character to Mennonite or Amish women's performance of entrepreneurship? I was intrigued by the author's reflection that conducting interviews with a female researcher opened up new areas of inquiry (especially given the cultural context of the field) and would be interested to hear more on this topic.

=====

Giuliana B. Prato
(University of Kent, UK)
g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk

I found interesting the overall analytical focus on legitimacy and would encourage Williams to bring out more clearly the socially constructed dynamics of legitimacy in relation to specific aspects of his ethnography. In particular, I would like to see more explicitly linked the analysis of legitimacy as a generative social practice to the different generational and cultural approaches to urbanization, to the technological change and the adaptation to the new market dynamics of "technocapitalism" and to the cultural shift that the emerging individual entrepreneurialism among the Amish community might trigger.

I would like to know more on the challenges of doing field research in a (relatively?) "closed" community. Also, what difficulties/obstacles (if any) did he encounter, as a male anthropologist, in interacting with (and interviewing) Amish women? Interestingly, in replying to the questions raised around this gender issue, Williams mentioned that the presence of a female assistant facilitated interaction with women.

The historical comparison with nineteenth-century Luddism is intriguing. However, here Luddism is described as a reaction of a powerless disenfranchised majority to the inequalities perpetuated by capitalist monopolies and their policy-making allies; so, this was more than an opposition to technological innovation. I wonder to what extent the same logic applies to contemporary Amish's take on technological capitalism. It would be relevant to have more information on the Amish's position in contemporary North-American society. Do they exercise the right to vote? Are they denied any civil or political rights? What economic and/or political power do they have, or are able to exercise? Perhaps, the elements of comparison should be made clearer, bearing also in mind the different generational and cultural approaches to technological changes and market (techno)capitalism among contemporary Amish.

=====

Lakshmi Srinivas
(*University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA*)
Lakshmi.Srinivas@umb.edu

I was very interested to hear about rural Ohio communities' negotiation of change brought about by technology and urbanization. I had no idea about the diversity within the Amish population and would have liked to hear more about the details of the relationship between legitimacy and establishing boundaries with the "English" and related insider-outsider dynamics. The interactions between the Amish and towns and institutions, for example, the town's view of Amish metal-wheeled carts on the roads, Amish's "workarounds" and negotiations of vaccinations and hospitals and so on are fascinating. Perhaps the article will have more such details?