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# Globalization and Food Objects

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Most contemporary researchers agree that conceptualizing the many versions of global theorizing and analysis is an extremely difficult enterprise. This paper critically examines Robertson's (1992) notion of global consciousness, suggesting that it is important to consider the 'reality' of the world through the way in which global objects -in this case food- are incorporated into people's everyday life. This chapter focuses on the issue of people's consumption of objects. It begins with a brief review of some of the more interesting current work in the field of consumption, objects, taste and identity. This review provides a set of conceptual and methodological principles linking consumers and globalization. An analysis of the case of fresh fruit and vegetable consumption follows, exploring how global food is internalized by the active consumer, who support the globalization of agriculture through his/her purchasing

power. Next we examine the differential responses of actors engaged in the supply of fruit in Chile. Finally, we argue that global processes need to be translated by local actors in order to materialize. Although we should not personify globalization in the agency of local actors, we need to find which experiences and relations animate a person's global consciousness. In other words, we need to document how global processes are mediated, adapted or managed by the life-experience of people. The paper concludes by presenting key methodological issues arising from an actor-oriented perspective. These can contribute to the development of a research agenda in which internal and external relations are not seen as creating different orders, but rather as reconstituting fragments and parts, which constantly modify social life.

## Consciousness and Globalization

Robertson argues that the concept of globalization refers to a 'modern' compression of the world, coupled with an intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (1992: 1-15). I take this as a point of departure, but my emphasis

differs. I would stress that the consciousness of only some actors has been intensified, and these agents are able to populate the world as a whole. One of the main problems here is what is actually meant by consciousness. From Robertson's discussion one can infer that consciousness is no more than being aware of cultures other than one's own, and the sense of global interdependence (Robertson, 1992: 8-9).

This characterization is highly problematic if we accept Berger and Luckmann's (1987) position that consciousness is always intentional in relation to objects, and that we are only 'conscious of something or other': 'this is so regardless of whether the object<sup>2</sup> of consciousness is experienced as belonging to an external physical world or apprehended as an element of an inward subjective reality'. In other words, the significance of the notion of consciousness in discussions of globalization may constitute an attempt to find experiences and meanings in the process of compressing of the world. In brief, the common intentional character of consciousness can assist us in illuminating the manner in which global elements are incorporated into people's

everyday life. This may help us to avoid the highly abstract perception of the world as a global entity: 'the world being for-itself (Ibid., 183). I would argue that abstract entities are not significant in the way that humanity's agenda is thematised; what is significant is the ability of actors' to represent their emergent capacities and to imagine themselves as communities parallel and comparable to other communities. This in my view, is the contribution of Anderson, when he analyses the new world republican independence movement in the last quarter of the eighteenth century (Anderson, 1991: 192).

Anderson's argument is that the formation of the nation state in Latin America involved a rupture with the 'existing world', and spread new meanings to Europe. According to my understanding, this trope generated partial connections with European nationalism and languages, and created parallel and comparable globalities (one of these experiences was the self-conscious *indigenismo* that arose in south America; vide Anderson, 1991: 198). Returning to Robertson, and in contrast to his perspective, our notion of consciousness is a central connection

between the understanding of globalization processes and how different 'objects' present themselves in the life-world of individuals as constituents of 'different spheres of reality' (Berger & Luckmann, 1987:35). In accordance with Robertson, our notion of consciousness is part and parcel of a world people's experience unfolding globally, that is taken for granted. Hence, our concept of global consciousness is defined much more from the position of the actors than from the position of the researcher.

Everyday life in a period of globalization, as in any other period, is experienced as an ordered reality that is shared with others and often presented and perceived as 'objective'<sup>3</sup>. In the popular view, everyday life presents itself as apparently independent from the will of actors, being prearranged through cultural norms and institutional patterns. In this view, reality appears to be governed by global objects that determine human actions and behavior (for example, Toyotas from Japan, Coca Cola from the USA). This the normative way that people are held to make sense of global 'reality'.

Following Schutz (1962), we could suggest that global consciousness, as a

form of knowledge, is organized, valued and used in social practices forming the life-world (the here and now) of individual social actors. The social individual is located at the center of this organization of knowledge and consciousness; through his/her social practices, space and time are compressed into zones<sup>4</sup> with different degrees of relevance and meaning. In this construction of 'order', the social practices of actors are enclosed within parallel planes which cut perpendicularly to the axis of globalisation in order to organise everyday life, generating representations of how commodities, capital, ideas, values and social relationships rotate in the world. This generates a pragmatic view that can apprehend the 'instrumental reality' of the modern world but this does not exhaust the individual actor's capacity for making sense of others in remote areas of the globe. Having said this, an actor's interest in the far zones of this reality is less intense and can be seen to constitute a typification of global reality 'par excellence'. In this vein, an approach that analyses the life-world of social actors should not be based on modeling the factors that constitute 'the global-human condition' or the 'general features of life in

recent history' (see Robertson, 1992: 26-27). Perhaps, instead, we should study the processes through which individuals mediate and organize the often conflicting information they receive, and the manner in which they re-work this information through their social practices.

To take an example, agricultural producers in Third World countries today encounter a 'new style' of export agriculture. They are confronted by different representations of quality, diverse delivery access points, and complex processes that attribute economic value to their products. These trends expose the transformation of agriculture: from the production of standardized commodities, to the ability of producers to use agricultural knowledge to add value, simultaneously maintaining their own zones of reality and segmented knowledge about the way global markets operate. This knowledge is a far cry from the view of modernization as the diffusion of agricultural techniques or the improvement in communication between different groups of people.

A recent competition organized by the Dutch airline KLM (Bridging the World) invited a group of women flower producers from the Kilimanjaro region of

Tanzania to the Netherlands to observe and learn about the flower commercialization process.<sup>5</sup> They reached Schipol to await the arrival of their flowers and followed them to the auction. They observed the auction room in action, how the 'anti-clock commodity indicators' and dealers' computers were associated in a set of 'objective' practices to satisfy the demand of flower consumers in different world-wide markets.

The Tanzanian producers experimented with computers and even briefly learned how to be flower auctioneers. But the most important lesson, according to one observer, was that women finally understood the importance of quality in marketing flowers. The women had in Tanzania, been unable to understand why some flowers were destroyed. It was difficult for them to grasp the notion that only certain flowers with some specific quality characteristics could achieve a 'good price' on the market. The market, as constructed in the Netherlands, was remote and inaccessible to them, and they were unable to manipulate it. In the auction room, however, women could follow and make sense of the technical explanations and the importance of flower quality. They engaged in a

deliberate, although by no means easy, effort to internalize the value of flowers. A good price was a matter of adding 'quality value' to the Tanzanian flowers. This attribution of value was authorized by Dutch flower auctions and those 'unfamiliar' everyday practices taking place in the 'reality' of the auction room.

This global place (locale) of value construction and representation was the one that finally allowed or denied the right of passage' to some flowers. Computers, anti-clock auction indicators, numbers, lights, sounds and dealers' practices were all assembled to make flowers not just flowers, but visible objects of desire. These flowers were made into objects allowing consumers to realize their desires for 'quality flowers'. This quality that could then be consumed, transmitted and rotated globally.

According to this account, the women finally understood that the administrator running their flower co-operative in Kilimanjaro was not pocketing their money. They remembered the occasions when, she had explained, the Kilimanjaro flowers had been destroyed in Europe due to saturation of the market. This information made no sense whatsoever to the producers in terms of

the everyday world of Kilimanjaro. They did not share their 'reality' with the administrator and were unable to believe her, suspecting her to be dishonest.

Before coming to the Netherlands, the women producers could not make sense of Dutch market rationality. What was the point of searching for a 'source' of flowers miles away from Europe in which no one had pleasure? They loved flowers as producers, considering themselves the best because of their pleasure in and knowledge of their flowers. Producing flowers was about enjoying their freshness, color, texture, shape and size as far as they were concerned. They learned from the Dutch auction that quality was a set of physical and 'objective' conditions attributed to each flower. Dutch market flower classification did not include producers' enjoyment as a criterion of quality adjudication. The women were more surprised than disappointed to discover this variability of meaning at work. The paramount reality of the daily flower market in the Netherlands, and their own experience of producing flowers, transported women to a transitional zone between globalities. This zone has its own meanings and different orders, which is indifferently

connected to those of everyday life among Kilimanjaro producers or the valuation of flowers in Holland. Like African everyday objects which, outside their functional context, became pieces of art with an extra-value, Tanzanian flowers were incorporated into a process of adding value to flowers. This means that those flowers which do not come to quality standards have to be sacrificed in order to add value to the global quality stock of flowers.

The Tanzanian women learned that having the local knowledge to produce flowers and gaining pleasure from this activity was not enough. These attributes could produce flowers with the freshness of Kilimanjaro mountain and their own life-experiences, were unstable, incomplete and provisional in terms of adding commercial value to flowers. The women returned to Tanzania with a five year supply of improved seed and the promise of an annual visit to their cooperative by a seed company to provide technical assistance and monitor their quality commodity progression.

This illustration suggests that globalization as a process does not have a homogeneous impact in each place or for each actor or group of actors. It is

commonplace in the globalization debate to say that distant localities are linked in such a way that local events are cast by processes occurring many miles away. This organizational assumption concerning how societies and nation-states operate says very little about how, for example, actors interpret and translate new globally-oriented economic ventures. While we need to question the social implications of time-space compression in contemporary social life, we cannot assume a direct and unproblematic link between information/communication technologies and institutional reflexivity. As the above illustration indicates, actors' internalize and process information in different ways while generating a variety of reflexive practices.

Given the clearly uneven, fragile and heterogeneous nature of linkages in contemporary social change, people living in different zones have come to realize that the world and their zones are not unified systems. These zones cannot be controlled and administered by stationary technologies, the conservation and protection of classical styles of organisation, the domestic shelter of economic activities, the regulation of

transformation in the international markets, and the use of new large-scale mediation policies among international, national and regional contexts.

In their attempts at interpreting these world-globalities social scientists, also need to recognize a whole new range of conditions, uncertainties and socio-political responses. And in this manner, 'states', 'transnationals', 'markets', 'technologies' and 'global entities' themselves enter (de-territorialize and territorialize) actors' zones, where re-ordering processes are taking place. As a researcher, I recognise the complexity of conflicts taking place in Third World countries. This reality is quite different from the reports and newspaper descriptions of Third World conflicts on television (Richards, 1996). Hence, these parallel sets of global representations of people, conflicts and 'realities' introduce a high degree of tension into my 'global consciousness' and sense of 'one world reality'.

### **Objects, People, and Contested Realities**

The study of objects can contribute to

an analysis of how people see (or not) themselves as part of global processes. The circulation of commodities and the secular character of money appear as some of the measurable dimensions in which the universal character of globalisation is expressed and recognized as the social materialization of communication (this capture images of the world that McLuhan depicted in relation to the importance of communication and information). The present condition of capitalism is intimately bound up with the modern technical compression of the world; for certain authors (Harvey, 1989) the development of the financial aspects of capitalist organization, and the role that credit plays in global markets, has managed to provide a degree of stability to the present regime of accumulation. These kinds of transformations raise the questions of whether the financial nature of capitalism implies new ways of differentiating objects, of how people associate with one another, and how objects appear in individual life-world.

The rotation of objects contributes to an everyday 'reality' that is shared and partially internalized by individuals. This 'reality' is perceived as objective because



objects are consumed in pre-arranged cultural forms and according to cultural patterns by people. The consumption process is organized around the individual's practices of necessity and desire. Objects become valuable through exchange transactions. The movements of these objects, furthermore, creates 'trails' between social relationships, organizational linkages and networks of values. These trails, interests and networks become trajectories in the course of time, constructing diverse pragmatic views of the world which orient people's consumption practices. These views of the world establish processes of social differentiation and taste which, in their turn, can become signs and symbols with which to interpret the social order (see Veblen, 1957, Bourdieu, 1984). It is through the social practice of consumption that Bourdieu's 'habitus' helps us to identify 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as 'common' conceptions of classes. However, Bourdieu does not examine what people make or do with the objects they consume.

The social bases of how people interact with objects arranging and re-arranging them in their life-world (appropriating, or re-appropriating it, see de Certeau, (1984).

is something Bourdieu's analysis cannot encompass within the consumer categories of 'fan', 'supporter' or 'middle class'. Bourdieu's work highlights the importance of consumption in processes of social differentiation (du Gay, 1996: 75-95), but he is unable to show the differences in consumption between and among different middle class consumers. Miller's (1987) analysis takes a parallel, although rather different point of departure with regard to the 'projection of identity' (Thomas, 1991:26). Miller's argument concerning the objectification of collective identity through the consumption of objects is presented as singularly differentiated processes of active appropriation of different objects' attributes. The problem with this approach is that it implies a one-to-one relationship between objects and the consumers' feelings of belonging or difference (Thomas, 1991:25). Furthermore, it may reduce the complexity of the process to a 'chain of objectification and sublimation' (Thomas, 1991:26). I agree with Thomas when he suggests that we have to avoid 'any constrictive typology of object-meaning in an abstracted domain of man, subject, and object' (ibid.:26). We need to focus on

the varieties of connections and linkages that social actors have with objects in the conflictive, global context of the contemporary world.

It is important to identify differentiated practices of consumption in order to study the differential manifestation of global consciousness inside consumer groups. Studied together with actors' alternative and sometimes conflictive arrangement and rearrangement of objects, these differentiated practices may explain how people enclose themselves within parallel zones that are created by social divisions. Through this process of enclosure, people are able to position themselves at right angles to the axis of globalisation. These differential consumption practices are important if we want to understand how particular interactions between people and objects can lead to differential power relations among the consumer groups that populate the globe. We cannot assume that all consumers' global cognitive maps are the same for each individual. The contested reality of consumers, as well as their communication and exchanges, are extremely important for identifying global linkages and networks among consumers and other global social actors.

Paraphrasing Thomas, I would suggest that we need to produce a disjunction in our frame of reference, in order to analyze globalisation processes, instead of dividing the components of globalisation into a formalistic typology; we need to generate new forms of representing globally contested realities, objects and peoples.

### **Globalization of Agriculture, Consumers and Food Objects**

The foregoing analyses of people, consciousness and objects provides a basis for discussing on the globalization of agriculture. There is an increasing globalisation of agriculture and food in the rural context. The forms of food consumption associated with delivery, access, and the role of food in the reproduction of everyday life are becoming increasingly differentiated. Food objects go through a complex and diverse set of reconstituting processes organized from the local to global scales.

Agricultural land based production, while crucial, is just the start of a long and diverse process. Proportionally, it generates only a minor part of the total

value of the product in economic terms. In social terms, a large proportion of symbolic and constructed value is added at the processing, distribution, and retail stages. These stages not only regulate the flow and direction of agricultural products, they also actively reconstruct them into objects according to different and increasingly subtle time-quality episodes.

Agricultural firms have managed to gain control not only over land-based sectors, but also to package, extend, and redirect production time and manipulate the quality and content of the product. This allows for the specific regulation of time and value. Food is purchased from producers through electronic demand systems to maintain prices, supply and demand in balance. The use of contracts before food is produced guarantee specific forms and styles of produce cultivation and care, with the principal aim of ensuring quality, freshness and naturalness in the food objects. In the case of fresh fruit and vegetables, there has been significant technological development in the improvement of the supply side of the agricultural trade.

Various phases of food maturation take place during transportation and

distribution under strict controlled conditions whilst genetic and biological innovations aid the reconstruction of, for example, food freshness, color, and acceptable shape and size. The management of production time and the source and supply of a wider range of food products now represent much more significant elements in the food supply network than was previously the case.

The European and American consumer of agricultural produce has been characterized as an active enterprising actor, positioned at the quality center of the global agricultural market. What are considered necessary features in this agricultural market are judged by reference to the needs, desires and preferences of the consumer.

Global food objects are supplied worldwide to the 'enterprising' consumer as if they were recently harvested goods. Supermarkets, agricultural transnational companies, transformed State regulations and the individual activities of entrepreneurs each play a part in translating and organizing what we may designate as the food consumer culture.

This culture has promoted the image of a social actor who can organize his/her lives through their purchasing power.

This archetypal consumer makes sense of his/her existence and reality by exercising the capacity to demand and consume food objects from a global market. At the same time, the consumer portrays him or herself through the organization of an individual lifestyle which starts with the choice of food objects placed on the supermarket shelf.

A report on fresh fruits and vegetables in England, suggested that people have decreased their consumption of 'traditional' fresh vegetables by 20% over the last ten years (Market Review, 1981-1991). Potatoes, carrots and tomatoes have been affected by frozen and chilled ready-meals and washed, exotic mixed salad leaves. The need to consume convenient vegetables increased the consumption of lettuce and cucumber and mixed salad leaf packs by 36% between 1981-1991. Mushrooms were one of the success stories during this period, their production increasing by 80% during the decade. Similarly, exotic vegetables, such as mangetout, asparagus and aubergines have increased their market by 40%. The market share of imported fresh fruit has increased by 1.2%, now accounting for approximately 81% of the total share of the market. The

high level of imported fresh fruit, reflects consumers, choice for more *friendly fruits* such as apples and bananas, and *easy-peeling* oranges, such as satsumas and clementines. It seems, then, that consumers' choices in the British agricultural market have had an influence on the sales of global food objects during the last decade.

The consumption of 'traditional' vegetables, such as cabbages, sprouts and root vegetables have plummeted in the United Kingdom, mainly because their cooking time is considered too long and the smell too strong for the modern dwellings. This in turn has transformed the traditional 'meat and two veg' style of eating in the United Kingdom. Supermarkets, probably the most significant market places for contemporary consumers, have materialized these preferences by creating alternatives. The creation of ready-mixed salad packs and the constant supply of exotic fresh fruit and vegetables to high street shelves has reconstructed the aesthetic of traditional greengrocers and, in so doing, made a public display of people' lifestyles.

The vital role of the consumer in the globalization of agriculture is bound up

with new trends, and underpinned by the desire to maximize the quality of life. The consumer tendency toward healthier and lighter eating reinvented the character and arrangement of food objects in the life-world of consumers. The representation of food objects as 'convenient' for consumers is part of a language of measurement that has been molded by the market. This language attempts to encapsulate people's perceptions and expectations, their 'ephemeral' fashions (*modus*) and particular life-rhythms, and as such it has become a reality that has displaced producers from their privileged position in the market. In this way, consumer notions such as convenience have become a central element in transforming the agricultural market.

By situating the market for food in a larger ensemble of social actors and practices, which includes the active character of the consumer, the retailers' reconstruction of the 'managerial discourse of excellence' (Gay, 1996:119), the re-fashioning of the daily practices of fruit and vegetable provisioning, and also the incorporation of the 'new' available technology, I seek to present a description of how consumers, retailers and

producers have actively engaged in actualizing global flows of food objects whilst creating a multiplicity of interconnections that are shaping the environment and the organization of rural social life in the far production zones of the globe.

The global demand for food may be decisive in determining how rural producers respond to changing agricultural and economic circumstances. I shall next turn my attention to this issue, sketching some of the transformations that have taken place among certain export countries. Although the examples are from Latin America (Chile), they raise key issues in relation to the wider research agenda on the globalisation of agriculture and the production of food objects.

### **Globalisation, Producers, and Fresh Fruit: Illustrations from Chile**

The production of fruit in Chile was, until the 1970's, mainly oriented to the national market with practically no competitive advantage for the international market. Between 1959 and 1964, Chile exported 18.000 metric

tonnes per year, which had increased to 27.000 tonnes by the mid 1960s (FAO, 1959-1965). Average exports of fruit between 1971 and 1973 were not more than 46.000 per annum. This figure increased to 290.000 tonnes between 1980-1982, and to 415.000 tonnes between 1983-1985. The quantity of fruit exported continued to increase: to 590.000 tonnes by 1986, 880.000 tones by 1990 and 920.000 by 1991.

One of the issues to be explained here is how the constant increase in fruit exports was achieved. According to Contreras and Escobar (1995), private fruit producers were able to identify market opportunities for their produce from 1974, onwards, due to favorable global conditions. The neo-liberal economic model established in the country from 1974, brought dramatic transformations in the national fruit sector. The opening of international markets, the freedom of economic agents to make investments, and the subsidiary role of the state in promoting a free market model constituted a set of conditions that were used by fruit exporters to satisfy the demand of international markets.

The Chilean fruit exporters'

international strategy was to become members of local commercialization systems in the destination countries. This gave fruit exporters easier access to consumers long before their cargoes arrived in the places of destiny. Strong global competition in fresh fruits allowed Chilean producers to use the differential opportunities as they arose day by day in different markets. The development of communications made it possible for them to use the atomized way that fruit was transacted and distributed on the international market in their favor, while incorporating flexibility and dynamism into their commercial behavior.

The correctness of the fruit commercialization strategy constitutes an important topic in the debate about the future of the Chilean agro-export sector (Contreras y Escobar, 1995:160). On the other hand, several commentators, such as Jarvis, Montero and Hidalgo (1993), have emphasized the technological factor as the main reason for the successes of the fresh fruit sector. In their view, the introduction of technological innovation between 1975 and 1990 significantly improved processes of fruit production, packing and distribution. If we take technological innovation in the

production process, the re-location, design and management of orchards could be mentioned; as well as the introduction of integrated irrigation systems; harvesting, and the incorporation of certified genetic material. Technological innovations, such as the introduction of wooden 'pallets' at the beginning of the 1970s and the standardization of export fruit boxes replete with bar coded information, transformed the fruit storage and distribution process. For instance, technological improvement in pre-cooling diminished the time required for the fruit to be cooled and stored, whilst maintaining its color and quality for months. This was no small achievement if we consider that some of the main Chilean markets are at distances of at least 15 days away in the North hemisphere.

Developments such as those described above constituted a frame of action in which Chilean fruit could be located globally, as singular commodities. In other word, this fruit became food objects populating - at the right moment, efficiently and with reduced costs - people's desire to consume fresh fruit. These processes led to a process of

fragmentation in the international space for fresh fruit transactions. This was mainly transformed by the global demand of consumers. For instance, the success of the Thompson Seedless grape on the American market generated economies of scale and further technological improvements at the levels of production, processing and distribution. This leads me to suggest that the re-organization of the global fresh fruit trade was made possible through the reintegration of local spaces into the generation of new linkages in the transfer of food. Networks of European sourcing agents, retailers and producers of fresh fruit, generated 'new' market places for the fresh fruit trade. This was possible partly because of technological development which enabled actors in the trade to make sense of and to manipulate factors previously seen as external to international processes of economic revitalization: namely, the manipulation of time and space. This has ultimately generated significant 'compression' of the world in the case of the fresh fruit trade.

Global market compression of the fresh fruit trade world meant that Chileans represented the fruit trade in terms of competition with South Africa and New

Zealand producers. According to the Chilean discourse, these countries owed their position on the world market to their ability to supply consumers with high quality produce. The Chileans did not opt to commercialize fruit production through a national marketing board, as did both South Africa and New Zealand; consequently they could not compete with the long established national board institutions which enabled South Africa and New Zealand to operate and protect their trade in the consumer countries, using past cultural relations, language and contingent politics. However, whilst these national board institutions could reduce risk and uncertainty, they were relatively immobile and inflexible as far as responding to or predicting daily opportunities on international fresh fruit markets. Chilean producers also saw their chance of competing in terms of quality with other producing fruit locations, however they knew that fruit quality was not enough and that they needed to generate an added value for the consumer. This added value was found in the production and marketing of fruit that was mainly adapted to different consumers' taste, aesthetic and sense of convenience.

Chileans are concentrating on penetrating of the main European, Japanese and American supermarket chains in their bid to achieve a high international competitiveness. Nevertheless, the central issue was how to persuade an audience of potential consumers to buy your produce. The Chileans matching publicity with the quality of the fresh fruit saw as providing the 'edge' over their competitors. This they did by directing publicity to the preferred consumers in each country that Chile has the capacity to supply efficiently and at low cost (Times supplement, Chile, 14/10/96).

As an example, I want to reproduce a text from the 1993 period to demonstrate the sense of global market awareness in the country in relation to publicity and the nature of the products that traders needed to offer:

In this publicity we need to accentuate the color of the fruit, if this constitutes one of the factors influencing consumers when they purchase. A examples are the red varieties of apple in Italy, or certain varieties, such as the Golden Delicious; or the fashion for bicolor varieties of apples in the most of Europe; or the Ribier type of grape in Italy, Benelux and France; or



the preference for sweet and sour apples in Germany and United Kingdom' (my own translation, Errazuriz, F. 1993: 4-10).

The color of the fruit, its taste, and fashion are the main elements constituting the cultural perceptions of Chilean traders in this text. Fresh fruit, as world commodities, are reconstructed as singular food objects on the global fruit market. This process of constructing an image associated with the food object was linked to consumers' notions of fruit aesthetics and the attribution of fashion and convenience to a previously generalized commodities. The internalization of consumers' desires by Chilean producers played a part in turning domestic fruit into global food objects which were marketable and competitive because of their images and the re-organisation of the properties that constituted the shared reality of the fresh fruit trade.

When Chilean traders represented the global fruit market as open to challenge and competition, their notion of flexibility was not restricted to economic calculations. It was their acceptance of consumers' attitudes, and their authority to legitimize a mode of consumption,

which made them able to compete and flourish on global markets. It should be said that the fresh fruit market was highly volatile and reached the point of saturation during the 1970's. The Chilean case demonstrates that insertion into international markets was possible because of the combination and use of technology, as well as the ability to predict the food-objects that consumers would demand.

In this sense, Chilean exporters translated the needs and desires of the world-wide consumer enterprise culture. Chilean fresh fruits, as singular food-objects were able to display and embody local social relations miles away from their production localities, they were capable of representing consumers, consumption styles, as well as their notions of aesthetics and quality of life. The singularity of Chilean fresh fruit was thus its transformation into a food object in every sense global in scope, whilst technically strong enough to survive as a commodity with an added consumer's value on the international market.

The growing recognition of globalization processes of social rearrangement raises important methodological issues. Among these is

the significance of consciousness in locating and giving meaning to actions. The contextualisation of social processes by different actors can contribute to the construction of projects in a specific way; this may provide actors with different degrees of freedom to reorganize their shared 'reality' according to the possibilities or restrictions that may exist at local level. In the case of global processes, we need to explain how homogeneous international spaces fracture themselves and generate global - production and market - places in which re-organization of international markets and consumers, demands can occur. For instance, people working for the Dole multinational company have good economic and social conditions. In Chile, in 1994, I observed that they received transport and food from the company, and when I inquired about the management costs of these conditions, the manager said:

'We are not interested in making marginal savings in a company like ours, we want a labour force which performs well in the quality control and packing of fruit. We do not want them to organize a trade union here. So, if we want the workers to be part of our company, we

need to provide them with good working conditions. There are companies which do not pay workers a just salary, which means that the workers do not control the fruit according to the quality requirements. They fill the boxes with too few bunches of grapes, or they pass empty boxes as being full of apples. These practices can do immense damage to our name on the international market. So, to avoid these problems, we prefer to give our workers good working conditions. We believe that Chilean workers do not need a lot of training, but they do need to be kept apart from politics. Labour is expensive in Chile and this is one of the reasons why we are investing in current technology but, at the end of the day, we depend on the knowledge and care of the workers with the fruit. We maintain a computer data bank here with information about our workers, and those who are extremely good are recruited by the company year after year'.(Rancagua, fieldwork, notes, July 1994).

It is clear from this interview that a good relationship between the multinational and its workers derives from an understanding of places and markets far away from the area of

production. The association between workers, international markets and achieving quality standards for distant markets, takes on a local form in the multinational's managerial decision not to oppose workers but to enroll them socially in the global process of constructing quality. Workers, in turn, may or may not incorporate these sets of knowledge and practice into their life-worlds. We need to study the relationship between global social processes and actors' actions in order to identify diverse fields of global connecting activities. We need to develop in the assessment of the importance of actors' practices in the establishment of 'new' global 'realities' at local level.

Global 'realities' may then be seen as external processes which are locally internalized by actors in order to reconstruct commodities, producers' processes of organization and retailers' publicity (objectivisation). This local 'reality' is then shared, as an echo resonating somewhere else in the world, existing as a series of related courses of action potentially able to mobilize resources and generate value, shaping and reorganizing the world of commodity exchange. Resonances (Marsden and Arce

1995) between some sets of actions, for instance, the policies of the national board organizations intersect partially only with consumers' interests, and these dissonances were used by Chilean fresh fruit traders to position themselves in the global markets.

Resonances and dissonances not only suggest the metaphorical importance of communication in global processes, but also bring out the issue of how far local social actors are able to shape or mediate global processes through their local action. This is an important point in the debate about understanding how global consciousness is constructed. In the following interview, collected in Chile in 1994, an agro-exporter said:

'We have been in this activity for years. We started during the 1960s, when we had a lot of regulations, and I remember that only five or six companies used to export fruits and this was largely to the American market. We even exported during the socialist government of Salvador Allende. During that period, the state controlled the quality of the fruit and the export licenses, which were used politically by bureaucrats to control us. Our property came under attack and the agrarian reform agency wanted to

expropriate the land and distribute it among the peasants. But my father defended our properties and we managed to survive. With the arrival of the junta [at the back of his desk there was still a picture of General Pinochet], the overseas (ultramar) market opened to us. My father reorganized this enterprise around the family and each of us (three brothers and two sisters) took responsibility for a section of the agro-export operations. Our fruit was supervised by a family member from the field to the final destination. Today, we have a good reputation in Europe and America, our fruit is of good quality. Rotterdam or Milan are not strange places to us, we visit them at least two or three times a year. Our best business years are usually those which in Europe or America cannot produce enough quality fruit, for some climatic reason. Those are the years when we have to save for when our agro-exports will be affected by regulations or by international competition. During the good years of agro-export, a lot of Chileans - cowboys, mavericks - exported fruit and did much damage to the quality of Chilean produce on the market. Those people were not interested in constructing a reliable market, but rather in pocketing a lot of

money in a single operation. Agro-export activities are not as profitable today as they were in the 1980s.

Agro-export is a highly risky economic activity. Sometimes the international buyers do not pay the price they promised you or they may argue that a consignment of fruit arrived 'not in good condition', so that they had to sell it at a lower price. We learned from experience how to solve these problems. In the beginning, we traveled and examined the consignment in situ. Some of our Italian partners were surprised by our reaction to their complaints. Several times they said 'the problem was not a problem'. Little by little, we started to develop relationships based upon trust rather than an opportunistic way of using the market or the desire to obtain extra profits. More recently, we have started agencies to check our consignments of fruit in Amsterdam, and later in the places of destination. This was to avoid misunderstanding with our European counterparts. These agencies are organized by European and Chilean staff (Rancagua, field notes, 1994).

This interview shows the importance that the agro-exporter attributed to the historical political past of the country, as

well as to the family defense of their landed property. This political memory is coupled with processes of re-organization of the enterprise along the lines of the family. Knowledge of international market-places, as part of his everyday life, is another interesting dimension in his narrative as a fresh fruit exporter. These places are, in his discourse, centers of fresh fruit consumption that provide legitimization to his business. Physical carriers such as planes and ships made the transport of these food objects possible under particular social and economic global conditions. New types of agricultural export production rely on technological advances and the adoption of biotechnology, packing and transport techniques. But important processes of adaptation, which include political memories and the mediation of family relations for the success of agro-export operations, are very much part of the exporter's narrative. In this respect it seems that the globalisation process is carried out by local social actors able to represent the demands of the international market, who introduce new courses of action to build international linkages between and among places. Diverse factors, such as those present in

the history of the enterprise, were somehow put together by local actors so that their enterprise became part of a global network of fruit trade. The local actors have knowledge of the existence of other actors, as active distributors and consumers, as well as knowledge of different, individualized life-styles.

At this point, perhaps it is necessary to suggest that global processes must have an actual process of translation at local level. This means that global processes are not merely imposed on local populations, they are actively internalized and acted upon. Global processes are constantly being translated by actors; these translations differ. If the conditions of local mediation and adaptation take place, the global process will produce deterritorialization and territorialization of food-objects. The relevance of this process is given by the potential to relocate action and space into 'new' places of consumption and production.

The next issue concerns the conditions that local translators' need to translate global processes? With my next illustration I want to argue that to make the globalisation process work, there must be local actors able to build new encounters, plateaus (through their

biographies, life experiences, and political relations) which our technological modernity and organizational skills can reassemble in food objects (commoditisation, aesthetic, taste, colour, consumers' desires etc.). The individual entrepreneurial experience of some actors has evolved by generating streams and flows of actions through the market, personal circumstances, and trajectories of culture and communication. In this respect, individuals experience can be likened to the spread of a patch of oil, de-centering homogeneity as the pattern of social change, and exposing diversity as the arborescent feature of the globalisation processes. The multiplicity of nodes, which are not tied up with one single center of production or consumption, present us with an important aspect of how actors' inscribe their practices and individual perceptions within their singular life-experiences in a global era.

In Chile, in 1994, Don Guillermo Perez told me his life experiences as an entrepreneur, and I recall this interview as one of my best windows onto the anima of globalisation. Don Guillermo's life is the performance of an actor's actions onto the a cartography that

locates globalisation processes in a given personal dimension, but this itself becomes a multiplicity of actions that constitute a clue to how local actors have incorporated the issue of flexibility into their weaving of global processes. Don Guillermo's narrative should not be seen as an exercise to increase the reflexivity of our modernity whilst discursively normalizing local capitalism and excluding its 'other' representations of the Chilean agro-export sector. That is, generating the massive expulsion of peasants, the exclusion of agricultural laborers from the places where they used to live, and the creation of a country's proletarian laborers constantly searching for employment. (Arce and Marsden, 1993).

### **The Narrative of Don Guillermo Perez<sup>6</sup>**

Don Guillermo Perez was born on the 15 of August 1914. He did part of his secondary school studies at night in the Liceo of Rancagua combining them with part-time jobs. Don Guillermo had worked since he was 14 years old. First, as a sales attendant working in a drapery

store and then at a 'gentleman's' outfitters'. Later he took a course to become a tailor. Before he established his tailor's shop, he spent five years working in the copper mines in Rancagua.

He went there to administer a shop that was not producing very good results. According to him, this was a challenge; the mine held a captive market. The workers did not have their families with them and they could not spend their money on alcohol because the mine was considered a 'dry zone'(zona seca) by the government. Don Guillermo found it incomprehensible that the shop could not make profit. After some observation he, identified a market in heavy shoes for the miners. He organized the supply of 5000 pairs of shoes, which was an achievement in itself, since very few factories in Chile could deal with the size of this order at that time. He managed to obtain a substantial discount and organized the completion of the order in stages. A system of repayment by cheque every 25 days allowed him to recover some of the money invested before each new delivery.

He discovered that practically every night the workers went in large numbers to the pictures. This was one of the few

spare time activities in the mine. Don Guillermo made some slides and bought time in the miners' local cinema, to communicate with the potential buyers. He was able to advertise without any problem for a period of 20 to 30 minutes each night. He emphasized the qualities of the shoes and their price, which was competitive with the prices in Rancagua and Santiago. From this venture he came back to Rancagua with a substantial profit that eventually allowed him to establish his tailor shop.

Don Guillermo remembered Rancagua during the 1930's (a provincial city which, during the 1940s, was approximately 4 hours, during the 1960s 2 hours, and during the 1980s 1 hour from Santiago, the capital city). People were always formal in their mode of dressing, but there was a popular conception that a suit was a set of clothes only to be used on formal public or private occasions, such as the country's Independence day or at funerals.

Don Guillermo worked 8 years setting up his business to change this popular conception of the suit. First he established the confection of suits using patterns and making series. New machines, financial support and new

trade partners helped him to start with the construction of a credible discourse. He needed to make people believe that a suit was an object belonging to people's everyday life. Matching his words with action, Don Guillermo created a credit system, whereby people could pay an instalment of the total cost of their suit every week. He organized a raffle every Friday for the people who were not in arrears with their payments, and would personally hand over personally a suit as a prize. The winner of the suit was usually interviewed by the local radio, his picture published in the newspaper and Don Guillermo exhibited his picture for a week in the main window of his tailor's shop. The success of the raffle was such that on the day people waited in front of his shop for the result; traffic was interrupted and people witnessed and enjoyed the public spectacle in large numbers.

By the second year of his tailoring activities Don Guillermo had made people believe that a suit was part of their everyday life. He demonstrated that he had the ability to make people act in relation to an object. The suit started to incarnate part of people's reality in relation to luck, their sense of play,

individual publicity and a system of payment affordable for the average *à la mode* city individual. Don Guillermo had accredited himself and increased the production of suits from 10 per month in 1941, to more than 35 per month by the end of 1948.

Listening to this story, it is possible to suggest that people believed what they assumed to be real in the suit trade, however this 'reality' was constructed by Don Guillermo on the basis of individual consumer behavior; as a tailor he generated a set of actions which were inscribed by the market. For eight years he accumulated corporeal capital in the form of bodies, which he fitted with clothes while convincing people that their practices satisfied their desires in the 'real market'.

Don Guillermo became briefly involved in regional politics in 1941. He bought his first agricultural orchard in 1943. He found the fruit trees difficult to maintain because the property did not have an irrigation system. Using his imagination and bending the law, he managed to solve this problem and sold the property in 1948. He then invested in two motor car garages in Rancagua, and sold his tailor shop in 1948 to become involved with



other two people in a metalwork factory in Santiago. This venture lasted until 1958, when a fire burned the factory to the ground and he found that the insurance was not valid because one of his partners had forgotten to renew it. He was forced to sell a couple of houses and his garages to raise funds and restart his businesses once again.

Don Guillermo decided to work in agriculture. He bought 290 hectares of land on the 15th of March 1966. With the property came an administrator and 38 laborers who were living and working there. The first thing was to invest in roads and bridge in order to open up the commercial possibilities of the farm. He concentrated on dairy production, although the little equipment he had was out of date. He collected the milk at 4 in the morning to take it to Rancagua. It was on one such trip in 1967, that his pick-up collided with a lorry. The accident left him between life and death for four months, and he took more than a year to recover his health.

He managed to survive economically thanks to his friendship with the director general of one of the regional banks in Rancagua. The bank facilitated some fresh capital for investment needed on the

farm. In 1968 the laborers working on the farm asked for the implementation of agrarian reform (Frei government), and as a result of this he was left with the house and 80 hectares of irrigated land. After a long period of legal battles, he recovered most of his property on the grounds that he was working his farm efficiently.

In 1973/4, Don Guillermo planted his first 30 hectares of apple trees. This was the period, he recalled, when Chile began to export fresh fruits to international markets. He starting working under a three year contract with the main national fruit exporter, David del Curto, from whom he received technical assistance. He had to wait seven years before receiving any benefit from his apple trees. Don Guillermo realized quite soon that one of the bottle-necks in the agro-export business was the lack of local refrigerator capacity to store the fruit. In 1978 he invested in the construction of three refrigerators with a capacity of 11.500 tonnes. This capacity was the largest in the region in private hands. He rented this cool capacity to David del Curto who was by then exporting fruit under the name of Don Guillermo to international markets.

Don Guillermo wanted to expand his

refrigeration capacity; unfortunately the bank would not allow him to increase his debts, so that he was only able to build six new refrigerators. The export of fruit was excellent during the 1980s and there was not enough refrigeration capacity in the region, so that, as one of the few private owners of refrigeration capacity he was able to make a good profit.

The decision to invest in refrigeration capacity was based on an analysis of the advances in technology. Whereas previously he had needed two or three days to reduce the temperature of the fruit from 28°C to 6°C, and then other day to reduce it to 3°C, in order to start with the process of freezing, new refrigerators with a new system for extracting the oxygen could reduce the temperature of the fruit in hours from 28°C to 3°C. According to Don Guillermo, the new system increased the store capacity of the fruit in months. He saw the possibilities of these new refrigerators and decided to invest in another four. Don Guillermo realized that European Community protection policies were going to create problems, sooner or later, for the Chilean fruit exporters, and that they were going to need places where their fruit could be kept in good condition if they

wanted to sell it at good prices in Europe.

Don Guillermo assessed the advantages of the Chilean fruit on the international market as contingencies that could rapidly change. One of these was the significant decrease in maritime transport costs. Chilean liberalization of sea-trade legislation and commercial trade intensification with Japan, brought about a situation where merchant ships bringing cargo to Chile started to compete with each other because they did not want to return with an empty hold to their ports. This situation was used successfully by some Chilean exporters to reduce their transport costs. The other advantage was the price of the Chilean labour force. However, Don Guillermo thought that these two elements, which certainly increased Chilean competitiveness on the international markets, needed to be followed with investment in technology. His other considerations were, as he put it, his age and the difficulties that the agro-export sector started to suffer during the 1980s.

Don Guillermo said that because of his age and lack of time, he could not secure these international markets for his fruit. He therefore needed to rely on intermediaries (national and

international) for the sale of his produce. He was unhappy with the lack of transparency in relation to fruit prices and the final repayment scheme within the existing system of fruit consignment. Furthermore, the problem with the financial crisis of the private banks during the 1980's left him in debt to the central bank for the next twelve years. He laughed and added. 'This was a very good deal. The probabilities are that I will be dead before I finish canceling my debts' (He was 80 years old at the time of the interview).

Don Guillermo was mainly concerned with how he was going to pass control of his agro-export venture to the next generation. He did not want to keep growing, as an agro-export business. He wanted to protect his investment by keeping his family united. Don Guillermo associated the future prospects of his business very much with the problem of succession and how to convince his professional sons and daughters that they could manage the business in partnership if wanted to.

### **A Brief Comment on the Narrative**

Don Guillermo is the represents of a

local translator of the globalization process. Navigating through his life-experiences, it is possible to realize that the notion of flexibility was incarnated not just in his process of decision-making, but also in the way he was able to generate connections between market opportunities, technologies and commodities. This arborescent pattern of organization is very much part of the life experiences of Don Guillermo. Perhaps I could argue that in the life experiences of Don Guillermo we can find the organizing principles of his business activities. Nevertheless, Don Guillermo as a person is not part of a global entity, therefore he cannot as an actor be simply conceptualized as a global individual (cosmopolitan) with local relationships. On the other hand, we should not just personify globalization in the agency of Don Guillermo. If we think again, what we see in the life-experiences of Don Guillermo is our own image of globalisation through the interpretation and performance of an actor. As an actor he is constantly ensuring what people think about him. In the oscillation between an actor conceived as operating in national and regional markets, and an actor operating in international markets,

we can find the relationships, at once internal and external, which constitute the consciousness of a global actor. This in my view is the significance and relevance of Don Guillermo's case since it points to the experiences and relations that animate a person's global consciousness. We can conclude from this case that whatever makes a Chilean agro-export business actor socially and economically, also constitutes the practice which arranges the global production and circulation of objects as commodities. If we take the case of Don Guillermo seriously, we can suggest that there is a problem with some analyses of globalization more specifically, with those studies which keep trying to put the parts together, for the sake of having universal vision of humanity to restore, or for the benefit of having a world system to conceptualize. This can only amount to a sense of old-fashioned sentimental and arrogant intellectualism, that perceives internal and external relations creating different orders, rather than reconstituting fragments and parts that constantly modify social life. In this sense, if we take cases such as Don Guillermo's away from the process of globalisation, globalisation will not

endure in social science as a significant concept.

## **Conclusion**

We have tried to look at the significance of global consciousness within the concept of globalisation. Conceptualizing globalisation we confront a paradoxical problem. Do we privilege a spatial over the temporal mode of analysis, or the shift from 'industrial society to an informational world'? Yet many commentators would admit that the main challenge is to develop interpretations which are relevant to the different processes taking place in the world. In particular, those processes that enable them to share this reality with those who cannot spontaneously be considered as global. One of the few safe observations that can perhaps be made is that people combine partial social practices and experiences, and order reality, in a way they can share with others. Individuals usually mediate and organize the often conflicting information they receive and re-work it through their social practices. In short, the globalisation concept should not provide

us with a systematic and holistic vision; instead, the global image should generate diverse personal visions of the world.

This is obviously problematic and the study of globalisation raises at least two important questions which, we should be aware, although methodologically different, have the same epistemological root. The point concerns the status of the concept of globalisation: can globalisation as a concept endure in rural sociology? Can it do more than simply communicate the feelings that something is rather different in the world? Will globalisation simply be used as a vehicle to perpetuate a systemic view of world processes?

We may go part of the way by taking on the task of analyzing peoples' contemporary practices and elaborating an interpretation of how modernity is put to work. We somehow need to stress that globalisation as a process does not have a homogeneous impact on every place in the world or for each actor or group of actors. In this respect, the chapter has suggested that one objective of globalisation studies should be to abandon some of the more popular assumptions concerning how societies, nations-states and actors operate, since

these assumptions say very little about actors translate new globally-oriented economic ventures into practices which may have as a reference the axis of globalisation.

We may overcome the notion of modernist homogenization if we start assuming that time-space compression in contemporary social life is an extremely problematic process, and that the link between actors' everyday lives and information and communication technology in a variety of forms, generates a variety of reflexive practices, some of them very pessimistic ones.

However, the existence of a field of conditions generated by actors' social practices may help to explain the lack of correspondence which is usually presupposed between the image of global coherence perceived and built by the observer, and the inconsistency that can be discerned in the way local actors' organize and order their everyday reality using objects which are global in their commodity character but mundane enough to be incorporated in different ways by people in their everyday life reality. This paper has tried to describe the social field of consumption of food objects, as an example, that emphasizes

processes of objectification among the consumers.

The issue of the global transformation of agriculture appears as a significant phenomena in achieving the above aim. In this sense, the chapter argues that the main element constructing the social, technical and economic 'reality' of fresh vegetables and fruit consumption should be sought in the way consumers, retailers and producers have engaged actively in actualizing the global flows of these commodities whilst creating a multiplicity of interconnections that are shaping patterns of consumption, the environment and the organization of social life in different zones of the globe.

The paper illustrates, using the case of Chile, how these global processes are transforming the local production of fresh fruit. Commercial strategies, technologies and personal experiences are presented as part of the process of globalisation in Chile. The chapter has taken the significance of global consciousness seriously, and it has explored three actors interacting within globalisation. The first derives from a multinational (Dole) avoiding confrontation with the local labour force; the second is a case of a family enterprise experiencing a global

fresh fruit demand; the third is the case of a local entrepreneur who has incorporated the notion of flexibility into his life-experiences, showing us how to organize credible discourses to compress the market. This actor, linking different zones of the world, spatializes his own actions to portray the human dimension of global processes.

These illustrations are admittedly not universal social principles of a global taxonomy. However, I could suggest that these actors' experience might appeal to the existence of a shared global consciousness which can be recognized by all actors' engaged in these sort of processes, and therefore constitute a picture of the variety of ways in which actors' practices and experiences not only populate the world, but are actually socializing globalization processes.

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## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> Food objects are the singularization of commodities in a specific period according to something other than commercial value: for instance, aesthetic, taste, fashion, and size. These elements, which can be seen as constituting the object, are part of the shared objectivity of consumers and part of the cognitive map of how consumers interact with these objects in their everyday lives. This notion follows closely the commoditisation debate of Long (1986) and Bernstein (1981) in the mid-1980s, and the pioneering work of Appadurai (1986) on the political contest of commodities in the market. Thomas (1991) follows a stimulating line of analysis in

relation to objects and colonialism.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'objective' is understood to be the individual process of internalising 'concrete significant others' and a 'generality of others' that takes place within society. This produces an actor's identity, roles and attitudes and phases of socialization. 'Society, identity and reality are subjectively crystallized in the same process of internalization' (Berger and Luckmann, 1987:153). 'What is real 'outside' corresponds to what is real 'within'. It is important to add that: 'language constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization' (ibid: 153).

<sup>4</sup> Zones are understood to be a range of 'specific' possibilities that are distinguished as significant and meaningful events in the life-trajectory of an actor.

<sup>5</sup> This information was provided by Sabine Willems, personal correspondence 1996.

<sup>6</sup> I want to thank Don Omar Arce Vasquez for making contacts and introducing me to Don Guillermo. The interview was done in the summer of 1994 in Rancagua, Chile.