

Performative regional (dis-)integration: Transnational markets, mobile commodities and bordered north-south differences

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Performing regional (dis-)integration: Transnational markets, mobile commodities and bordered north-south differences

Abstract: Being implicated in an ambivalent play of both border crossing and drawing, global commodity chains are an ideal organizational field to analyze the fundamental paradox of global connectivity. Approaching the contingency of borders from a perspective informed by the performativity approach to markets, this paper starts from the assumption that this paradox is particularly salient in the context of commodity chains which connect the global south with the global north. Taking the example of one single agro-commodity, the tomato, and two border regions (Morocco/EU and Mexico/USA), we follow the links and heterogeneous associations that stretch from the border to the fields, supermarket shelves and standardization agencies to migrant labor, quality control apparatuses and so forth. By reading commodity chains from their literal limits, that is, from the border and from the margins, we focus on an element of this global assemblage that is normally taken for granted and excluded from academic and public discourse.

Introduction

Confronted with an imperfect reality, proponents of free trade demand the erasure and dismantling of all obstacles to the free movement of goods, people and financial capital. The utopian aim is a perfect global market, a homogenous economic space without borders and frictions. In order to reach this ideal state it is necessary to fix market imperfections and do away with trade distortions, aligning the really-existing economic world to the laws and norms of the free trade model. Free traders therefore advance a radical, but consistent position. For them, the focus is solely on the essentials: the free movement of goods with as little interference as possible from non-economic actors.

For a long time now critics have commentated on the seemingly unrealistic character of this reasoning. In the real world, it is argued, demands for the unregulated movement of goods, labor or capital are naïve and betray a complete misunderstanding of how the market really works. In a stylized way, there are two varieties of this critique. Socioeconomists point out that markets cannot be separated from their social and institutional context, arguing that the embeddedness of economic processes brings about variation. Political economists dispute the vision of the free trade argument, challenging the utopian dream of the benevolent effect of free markets by pointing to the destructive nature of the (neo)liberal ideology (see Berndt and Boeckler, 2009 for a discussion of different heterodox approaches to markets).

At the heart of these critical interventions is the relationship between abstract free trade/free market discourse and concrete economic integration realities. We acknowledge this critique but remain unconvinced of the underlying dichotomy between an economic model core, and social context or uneven economic realities with open borders for capital and goods and closed ones

for labor respectively. It is ironic that both free market zealots and their heterodox critics draw a sharp line between model and real world. Market purists use this dichotomy to immunize themselves from criticism, blaming unwelcome external infringements (social, cultural, political etc.) for “imperfect realities”, critics reject the model, turning to its entanglements with social, cultural, political etc. forces.

Our aim in this paper is to better come to terms with the processes by which the free trade logic translates into concrete integration realities. It is obvious that the world outside is never a one-to-one translation of the model. But it is equally obvious that the utopian dream of free markets is extremely powerful and successful. Providing the rationale for regional integration projects around the globe, the free trade model actually works pretty well. We approach this tricky question from a perspective informed by the so-called performativity approach to the economy. Work in this tradition rejects the artificial distinction between model and external reality, and is interested in the twisted ways in which theoretical or scientific models leave their “laboratories” and see to it that the conditions outside resemble the laboratory world as closely as possible. For instance, Bruno Latour famously discussed the example of Pasteur (Latour, 1982) and Donald MacKenzie made a brilliant case-study about the Black-Scholes formula of option pricing (MacKenzie, 2006). In both cases the argument is how “models of the world” turn into “worlds of the model”, to use Nigel Thrift’s (2000, page 694) words.

In this paper we apply an approach to the performative market economy developed by the French sociologist and actor network theorist Michel Callon. Termed the “study of marketization” (e.g. Caliskan and Callon, 2010: 3) he conceptualizes the configuration of markets as an ambivalent play of framings (i.e. shaping the outside according to the logic of the model) and overflows (i.e. irritations, disjunctures and paradoxes which surface when heterogeneous actors practically enact the model). The economic entities (markets, firms, commodity chains etc.) which emerge in this double process only ever acquire stability temporarily.

We propose a particular geographical translation of these ideas and connect the framing/overflowing argument with the question of spatial borders (see Barnes, 2008 for a broader discussion of performativity and its application to economic geography). To take account of the observation that these are equally necessary for the construction of global markets and trade systems, we use the term b/ordering (see also van Houtum et al, 2005). We are particularly interested in north-south b/orderings, that is, the question of how global south and global north are being produced in and through these processes.

Our paper is structured as follows. Section one briefly spells out our specific approach towards the economic geographies of our global age. We term this approach “geographies of marketization” and introduce both key processes: framing/overflowing and b/ordering. In the second part we apply our conceptual framework to the process of regional economic integration. Choosing two paradigmatic north-south border contexts (Mexico/USA and Morocco/EU) as our examples, we develop our argument around a particular agricultural product and its commodity chain.

1. Geographies of marketization

Being part of a wider interdisciplinary research project, “geographies of marketization” offer new perspectives towards the emergence of market orders and their continuous expansion (= marketization). At the heart of this research project are the concrete translation processes that see to it that economic and social realities are brought into line with the laboratory conditions, in so doing allowing the radical project of neoclassical economics to realize itself (Callon et al, 2007; MacKenzie et al, 2007). It was early actor network theory (ANT) which came to the conclusion that scientific facts don’t work because they describe an eternal and objective reality somewhere out there, but rather because scientists transform the very reality they pretend to explain (Latour, 1988). In short: science and technology is about “intervening” (Hacking, 1983), it is about “doing something,” it is about performing.

If we turn to economic processes and economic knowledge, the parallel is obvious. It is not merely the aim of neoclassically-oriented economists or neoliberal free trade advocates to better understand and explain the world. Rather these theories should better be understood as projects that transform the world (MacKenzie et al, 2007). This may happen in multiple ways: The intervention of economics may translate into the intervention of economists themselves, as is the case of academic economists who act as consultants to a particular firm, marketplace, government, or regulatory body. In other instances, economists produce tools and instruments (such as pricing formulas or macroeconomic models) which are then put to practical use by market actors or policy makers – “economists in the wild” in the words of Callon (see Garcia-Parpet, 2007).

It is important at this point to briefly clarify some of the misunderstandings surrounding performativity. There is more to the concept than the idea that economists engage in social engineering, making “the economy more like its description in economic theories” (Santos and Rodrigues, 2009, page 985). Underlying the notion is a radically different understanding of how to make sense of the (economic) world. First, markets and other economic entities are combinations of human beings and physical objects. In these constellations equipment matters, “it changes the nature of the economic agent, of economic action, and thus of the entity in question” (MacKen-

zie, 2009, page 13). Second, supposedly natural economic facts are the result of what is called distributed agency. This means that agency goes beyond the skin of the individual person and that cognitive and calculative processes are “distributed” in the sense that a given task is performed by multiple human beings, objects and technical systems (Hutchins 1995; MacKenzie, 2009, page 16). Third, performativity is not a one-way, unilinear process. Economists in the wild may change the world in such a way that their models become successful. But there is also what is called “counter-performativity”. In this case, it is in the very process of their application that models change the conditions of the world in a way that the situation gets out of hand. And some models might not change anything at all. Whatever the outcome may be, however, apparent “failure” does not change the performative condition of the economy. It is a misunderstanding to reduce performativity to the question whether models are successfully transforming reality or not. Fourth, saying that economics is performative is not the same as saying that ideas from economics influence people. Economic models may have effects “even if the users of the system don’t believe the model, don’t understand it, or even don’t know that it exists. Economics is embodied in procedures and physical artefacts, not just in ideas” (Mackenzie, 2009, page 31).

Accordingly, if we consider (neo)liberal thinking on global trade as a set of practical associations – a network of people, skills, datasets, techniques, procedures, tools, and so on – that has been built around the idea of a perfect market as the most efficient tool for the coordination of economic processes (see T. Mitchell, 2009; Traub-Werner, 2007), then the questions that need to be tackled from the performativity point of view are the following: How precisely is the world outside the confines of economics being transformed into a borderless, unbounded *market*? Which processes see to it that the world outside conforms to the laboratory conditions of neoclassical economics? How are the frames guaranteeing the working of abstract market models established practically?

Investigations to this end have to acknowledge, however, that everyday realities are notoriously stubborn, the practical translation of models never constituting a simple unidirectional process. Human actors, for instance, may resist the prescribed atomization of social life, or may not fulfill their subjective needs under conditions of perfect rationality. A powerful source of irritations concerns those social and economical differences that materialize in the form of political borders. We will argue in this paper that borders can be conceptualized as complex preconditions of global markets. As necessary impurities of a perfect model world borders are externalized in neoliberal discourse as “market failure”. Their naturalization as barriers on the way towards a perfect world of unhindered exchange of goods, people, capital and ideas hides from view their ambiva-

lent role in concrete integration projects: Borders always “work” in contradictory ways, they are performed in an ambivalent double-play of bordering and de-bordering, or in the language of ANT and Science and Technology Studies (STS), of framing and overflowing.

1.1 Framing and overflowing

Callon (2007) has introduced a compelling concept of the market, a concept that goes beyond the binaries of human and non-human, of discourse and practice, or micro- and macro-level. Borrowing the term from Deleuze, he conceptualizes markets as “socio-technical agencements”. Agencement has two meanings: First, it consists of an *arrangement* of material, technical, logistical, legal, procedural etc. elements and human beings and, second, this arrangement, this hybrid collective, shapes *agency*, a capacity to act which may be individualized, but is more often distributed amongst various associated agents.

The key mechanism that brings concrete markets about is the multifaceted process of framing. In a very simplified way, framing occurs in three steps: First, goods have to be objectified in order to allow their unequivocal removal from one specific context (e.g. the context of the seller) and the attachment via the exchange of property rights for money to another (e.g. the context of the buyer). Second, calculating agents have to be produced, or to be more precise “qualculating agents” (Callon and Law, 2005) who contribute to the qualification of goods with their preference of certain features and traits over others. And, third, a calculative space has to be created, which enables the encounter of diverse agents and materials as well as a differential evaluation of products, setting the stage for transactions through pricing processes. In a nutshell, framing implies the severing of all sorts of connections. In order to acquire its force therefore, economic knowledge such as the one giving rise to the free trade argument has to do away with context. Various actors – human and non-human – are enlisted and constellations are defined that enable and constrain, forcing actors to act in a certain direction.

It is not very difficult to detect the problems related to these framing processes: It is the complexities of reality, the contradictory outcomes of other associational practices, politics, identities, desires and so on that are constant sources of irritation and resistance. Callon (e.g. 2007, page 143) is adamant that framing is a delicate and contested process, a process that can only be stabilized performatively, easily gets out of control and is never completed. He uses the term overflowing to express this dimension of framing and argues that under certain conditions economic markets spur the proliferation of new social identities and trigger the creation of unexpected social communities with positive and negative consequences. The reason for this is that economic entities are continuously prone to overflow. There may be connections which transgress and

cannot be contained within the frames, for instance, environmental damage or illegal working conditions (Callon, 2007, page 145). Another source of uncertainty is linked to the actors themselves who practically reiterate the norms and rules of a model. Like any other ordering system, economic orders only exist when actors enact them. And as there cannot be identical repetition, there is always a degree of instability, fuzziness and irritation.

Markets are therefore approached as economic quasi-entities ever only stabilized temporarily by a double process of framing and overflowing. Because of this it is crucial for the smooth functioning of economic orders to veil these contradictions and to render these overflows as invisible as possible. Markets, their rules and boundaries, have to appear as pre-given in the eyes of those actors subject to them. The crucial link is this: As long as overflows can be contained and controlled in this way, as long as the free market appearance can be kept, it is possible to realize asymmetrical economic orders which do not appear to have much in common with the pure world of the model. This is another way in which economic knowledge realizes itself performatively.

1.2 B/ ordering

In order to answer these questions we propose a particular geographical translation of the framing/overflowing argument, connecting it with a reconfigured notion of spatial borders. It has been world system theorists who – dissatisfied with the ritualized confrontation between advocates of borderless free trade and proponents of a protectionist system organized around the bounded nation-state – advanced an alternative approach towards uneven global capitalism: the (global) commodity chain perspective (Hopkins and Wallerstein, 2000 [1986]). Criticizing the ideologies of free trade and protectionism for their overtly simplistic geography (i.e. positing an inevitable choice of either borderless mobility or bounded national economies), Wallerstein (2009, page 86) recently raised the specter of the ambiguous and indeterminate border, arguing that for every barrier to cross-border movement there are ways to get round them and that there are ways to play geographical games with commodity chains, for instance, in situations when one set of producers in a country of final sale demands laws that are directly contrary to those preferred by another set of producers.

Being convinced that the commodity chain is a the “appropriate organizational field to use in studying economic globalization” (Gereffi, 1999, page 436) we take Wallerstein by his word, and approach the difficult question of transnational economic integration and the role of borders from a “chain-like” perspective. However, we join those who think that current writing in this literature does not go far enough (see Bair, 2009 for a detailed critique of the global value chain

literature). Arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, the protagonists of the commodity chain approach or other concepts focusing on economic networks, such as the global production network approach (e.g. Henderson et al, 2002) or the global value chain approach (e.g. Gereffi et al, 2005), often find it difficult to escape the methodological territorialism besetting much social sciences (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). Take, for instance, the discussion of the “upgrading” of locations (cities, regions, nations) in the development policy context. Here, the academic commodity chain literature normally falls into either one of two camps as regards the relationship of regions/territories/places and commodity chains: The first position asks how these places shape and influence global commodity production. This is usually informed theoretically by the idea of territorial embeddedness (e.g. Gereffi et al, 2002; Humphrey and Schmitz, 2002). Another type of work follows the connections that go into the production of a commodity or the connections a commodity produces on its way from one place to another (e.g. Barndt, 2002; Cook, 2004; Freidberg, 2001).

In these literatures, places at different scales and the borders defining these places are pre-given. Goods, people, ideas and capital move between these places and cross borders. We turn the territorial logic upside down and argue that it is these mobilities that produce places and borders. Once liberated from the “territorial trap” (Agnew, 1994) space transforms into a bundle of relations, constituted in interaction, mediated medially, communicatively, biographically, economically, politically, and remaining distantly unlimited: “Space, then, is the product of the intricacies and complexities, the intertwinings and the non-interlockings, of relations, from the unimaginably cosmic to the intimately tiny” (Massey, 1999, page 8).

There is a vast body of geographical literature that illustrates that an acknowledgement of the deterritorialized character of our global age does not imply that we are living in the borderless world envisaged by the free trade enthusiasts. This raises the question of how exactly global production is governed transnationally: Before the globalization discourse produced a hegemonic image of a world in motion, of dominant fluidity and ubiquitous connectivity, and before the poststructuralist critique of modern thinking revealed the precarious relationality of the order of things, borders, regional boundaries and other sharp demarcations were no problem at all, they just existed. Today, however, practices of differentiation (i.e. the production and destruction of differences) and with it the question of boundary variations have taken center stage. All of a sudden, notwithstanding their assumed dissolution, myriads of borders mount the scene, there are far too many, they become porous and sealed off at the same time, they interfere with one another and produce various complexities. According to the German sociologist Ulrich Beck the con-

temporary version of modernity is therefore all about “*Grenzarbeit*”, that is “border-work” (Beck et al, 2004, page 14).

The idea of framing can be usefully connected to this, because spatial borders may be regarded as special cases of the framings mentioned earlier. Our argument is that the global movements of capital, goods, people and ideas always involve an ambivalent double play of de-bordering (overflowing) *and* bordering (framing) processes. These ambivalent border regimes are a necessary condition for the construction of global markets and trade systems. Yet, in order for these markets to work, these ambivalences have to be hidden and veiled. One might speculate that in today’s global age these processes play a particular prominent role, borders being made contingent to an extent probably not known before (Beck, 2002, page 143). What is more, the more objects and subjects travel and cross borders, the more borders are themselves moving around, are getting blurred and are sometimes acting as semi-permeable membranes (Mol and Law, 2005, page 637). This all the more so in cases when borders display their selective force through their potential to produce a complex amalgam of multiple, often deeply unequal differentiations: *USA/Mexico*, *Protestants/Catholics*, *Anglo-/Spanish-America*, or *Spain/Morocco*, *Christians/Muslims*, *Europe/Africa*, or *North/South*, *Rich/Poor*, *Modern/Traditional*, *Colonizer/Colonized* etc. (see Ferrer-Gallardo, 2008; Monsiváis, 1998; Vila, 2000).

2. Dis/entangling the tomato: The free trade lab and paradoxical integration realities

The ambivalent double play of bordering and debordering processes comes to the fore most clearly in contexts where global south and global north come into direct contact with each other and where at the same time – one could argue – global north and global south are brought into being by the very processes of bordering and debordering. For illustrative reasons we now turn to two paradigmatic border regions: The integration project NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), with special focus on the relations between the US and Mexico, on the one hand, and Europe’s southern border, the region where the EU uses its so-called EuroMediterranean Partnerships (formerly Barcelona Process and recently renamed “Union for the Mediterranean”) to integrate the countries bordering the southern and eastern Mediterranean into its economic and political orbit. Here, our focus is on the relations with Morocco. In both cases the institutional foundation is laid by bilateral agreements which are conceptualized economically as free-trade zones. To reduce the complexities involved, we focus our paper on the sensitive horticulture sector, choosing an exemplary product as case-study: a mobile fresh tomato that is produced in the global south and moves north, crossing borders but also carrying borders with it.

There are at least three reasons why the tomato is a perfect case for our purposes: *First*, in both regional contexts the production of high quality fresh tomatoes is one of the few areas where the “southern” partner has markedly improved its position following economic integration. US imports of Mexican fresh tomatoes have more than doubled in quantity since 1993, amounting to almost 1.9 bn US pounds in 2006 according to USDA data. This means that Mexico currently accounts for about 85 per cent of US tomato imports. In the case of Morocco tomatoes regularly make up a considerable share of agricultural exports (e.g. 11 per cent in 2002) which are almost exclusively destined for EU-countries. In 2007 Morocco accounted for 65 per cent of all EU tomato imports from non-EU countries. The lion’s share of these imports is taken up by France, French consumers buying 85 per cent of Moroccan export tomatoes in 2007 (Chemnitz and Grethe, 2006, page 207; de Pablo Valenciano and Pérez Mesa, 2004, 173; EUROSTAT 2009). As a result of these trade relations both Mexico and Morocco are amongst the main tomato exporting countries worldwide, Mexico ranking number 1 and Morocco number 10 in 2004 according to the latest FAO data (FAO 2009).

Second, the tomato is amongst the small number of horticulture products of economic importance which are grown on both sides of the political border in both case-study regions. The key tomato production regions – California and Florida in the US, Sinaloa and Baja California in Mexico, Murcia and Almería in Spain, Souss Massa in Morocco – are all located in proximity to the political borders, resulting trade dynamics seeing to it that borders are ambivalently mobilized.

Third, tomatoes are also contributing to the mobilization of places and people. The production of fresh tomatoes is a highly cyclical and also a relatively labor-intensive affair. It is no surprise therefore that growers on both sides of the border rely heavily on migratory labor. This concerns not only production in the north but also in Mexico and Morocco.

In tracing the “network tomato” we posed one central question: How is the tomato held stable as a tomato while it is not only displaced through space but also subject to multiple ways of b/ordering that try to control the double play of framing and overflowing? Our investigation produced three crucial b/ordering processes each linked to specific questions:

- What connects the mobile tomato with market models (i.e. the free trade argument)? (b/ordering the market)
- What decides upon the particular path of a mobile tomato? How precisely are borders mobilized and made contingent in the “tomato production-distribution-consumption network”? (b/ordering the chain)

- What keeps a tomato stable while crossing multiple borders? What decides upon the tomato identity? How are southern tomatoes distinguished from northern ones? (b/ordering the commodity)

2.1 B/ordering the market: Designing an asymmetrical tomato market order

Agriculture is one of the most controversial areas of “north-south” regional integration projects, economic liberalization measures often informed by a logic according to which the southern partner imports bulk crops (e.g. corn and wheat in the case of Mexico), while exporting fruits, vegetables and flowers. This division of labor meets resistance from those who lose out. In the case of NAFTA, this resulted in a phased-out, only very hesitant liberalization over a period of 15 years. Tariffs for the most sensitive goods were only abolished in 2008 and each member country continuous to insist on protective clauses in the treaty, the so-called Special Safeguard Provisions. According to these stipulations governments are entitled to temporarily suspend NAFTA regulations for specific products and their commodity chains as soon as import quantities exceed certain thresholds. On the US side these protective clauses continue to protect onions, eggplants, red pepper, squash, water melons and tomatoes, Mexico’s list only includes potatoes amongst agricultural products (Annex 704.4. of the NAFTA treaty), protective measures being limited to basic foodstuff made from corn (e.g. tortillas).

In the 1996 EU-Morocco association agreement agricultural products are similarly treated separately, the supplementary protocols leaving aside sensitive goods from Morocco. Here, the tomato plays a crucial role. A plethora of instruments, ranging from seasonally variable tariff quotas, flexible import prices, specific and ad valorem tariffs, is put to work to guarantee that EU-producers (mainly from Spain) are protected against Moroccan competition during the main harvest season on the one hand and that European consumers are provided with a seamless supply of fresh tomatoes all year round on the other. Independent of these regulations temporary import restrictions are allowed on sanitary and phytosanitary grounds in both border contexts (Brunke and Sumner, 2002; Chemnitz and Grethe, 2006).

At least at first sight, the realities of north-south tomato trade are a far cry from the model world portrayed by free traders, despite being conjured up repeatedly by the architects of “de-bordered” market orders in the respective documents. It would be shortsighted, however, to simply take this as yet another proof for the unrealistic and erroneous nature of neoliberal representations. Rather, the discrepancy between reality and model notwithstanding, the discipline of economics successfully manages to rearrange the world outside the model: “To understand the performativity of economics, it is not enough to look for economics at work in the economy; one must also

stop understanding it simply as (mis)representation. 'The effectiveness of economics rests on what it does, not on what it says' (T. Mitchell, 2007, page 245). Accordingly, the neoliberal discourse veils a more complex integration logic which obtains its very force from the contradictions and ambivalences which surface whenever an economic model leaves the hermetically sealed world of the laboratory.

NAFTA and EU association agreements are perfect examples for the recent trend towards the formation of regional integration agreements (RIA). These are preferential contracts, removing barriers to trade between partner countries and creating competitive advantages vis-à-vis third countries. Both Mexico and Morocco enjoy special conditions compared to other competitors from the global south. This strategy of a selective deepening of cross-border cooperation sits uneasily with noble free trade principles such as reciprocity and most-favored-nation (MFN) treatment, and is therefore treated with great suspicion by advocates of free trade (e.g. Bhagwati et al, 1998). While the latter prefer a multilateral liberalization of global trade, focusing on the harmonization and removal of barriers to trade in the narrow sense (i.e. tariffs), RIA architects additionally include areas in their drive towards economic integration which are far beyond the remit of classical trade policy. This concerns above all cross-border standardization and harmonization measures originating from private and public actors as well as NGOs. These take on heterogeneous form, for instance materializing in pre-clearance and behind-the-border customs procedures, product and process standards, certification schemes, labor market regulations, or infrastructure improvements. Realizing their differentiating effects not solely at the political border itself, these "obstacles" to trade may be referred to as "behind-the-border" barriers. Economists created the term "deep integration" for this process, in contrast to the "shallow integration" logic of free trade advocates ("shallow" because it is only the dismantling of classical barriers to trade which is of interest, persisting institutional differences are dealt with by the global market) (Evans et al, 2006; Shadlen, 2005).

Deep integration is precisely the logic of RIAs such as NAFTA or the EU-Morocco partnership: To the extent to which classical trade barriers lose in importance, new differences are taking center stage. With a view to agricultural trade, the EU association agreement with Morocco, for instance, speaks a clear language. The aims of cooperation are laid out in Article 54:

- (a) modernise and restructure agriculture and fisheries through methods including the modernisation of infrastructure and equipment, the development of packaging and storage techniques and the improvement of private distribution and marketing chains;
- (b) diversify output and external markets;
- (c) achieve cooperation in health, plant health and growing techniques.

Accordingly, the partners are committed to provide “suitable and effective protection of intellectual, industrial and commercial property rights, in line with the highest international standards” (Article 39, 1), a goal which should be realized in the deep integration logic through “cooperation in standardisation and conformity assessment” (Article 51). It is striking that “behind-the-border” barriers are solely identified in Morocco, the association agreement explicitly recommending the “use of Community rules in standardization, metrology, quality control and conformity assessment”. This one-sided interpretation is echoed regularly in statements about agricultural practices in Mexico by US experts, representatives from the USDA Economic Research Service for instance commenting in 2002:

“[The] adoption of modern handling and transportation practices for perishable fruits and vegetables in Mexico continues to be inhibited by the absence of well-defined quality standards, poor supply chain management, and inadequate physical infrastructure” (Tropp et al 2002, page ii).

There is a peculiar geography to deep integration in both contexts. As the RIAs have contributed to greater transnational integration in the fresh tomato industries, production systems have increasingly become sensitive towards subnational regional differences. This is above all because of the emergence of large transnational players (growers, shippers, retailers) that are able to pursue finely tuned arbitrage strategies in their supply chains. Seasonality is a crucial regulatory issue. In the case of NAFTA, in the winter and spring the competition is mainly between Florida and Sinaloa, while growers in “Alta” and Baja California predominantly struggle over parts of the US market in the summer and fall (Cook and Calvin, 2005; Macias, 2003, page 106). Tomatoes from Morocco, on the other hand, compete mainly with produce from Spain, or to be more precise it is producers in the respective main growing regions, Souss Massa and Almería/Murcia or the Canary Islands respectively, which struggle for the demand from EU consumers.

Over time, the industries have developed relationships that cross national borders and provide a relatively seamless supply of field tomatoes from the different regions across the seasons. These emerging cross-border networks have created transnational facts for authorities in the north, the complex market order in the EU-Morocco context constituting a particularly illustrative example for the tight-rope walk authorities have to perform. In order to protect European producers the EU established a complicated border regime, applying two different import policies for tomatoes regardless of their origin: ad valorem tariffs and the entry price system. In winter and spring (October to May) Morocco is the only non-EU trading partner that enjoys preferential treatment. This is the time of the year when EU production is insufficient due mainly to climatological cir-

cumstances. Preferential treatment is restricted to an annually adjusted quota (e.g. 190,000 t in 2003/2004), the preferential price being lower than the MFN entry price and no ad valorem tariffs being levied. Additional mechanisms (the levying of a relatively high specific tariff as soon as the entry price is undercut by more than 8 per cent) effectively see to it that the entry price has the effect of a minimum import price, protecting those European producers that grow tomatoes during these months. As soon as imports exceed the quota, phased ad valorem tariffs are levied, significantly increasing the price (e.g. between 8.8 and 14.4 per cent in 2003/2004). During the main growing season in the EU (June to September) Moroccan tomatoes are treated in the same way as third-country exporters (Chemnitz and Grethe, 2006; see Fig. 1).

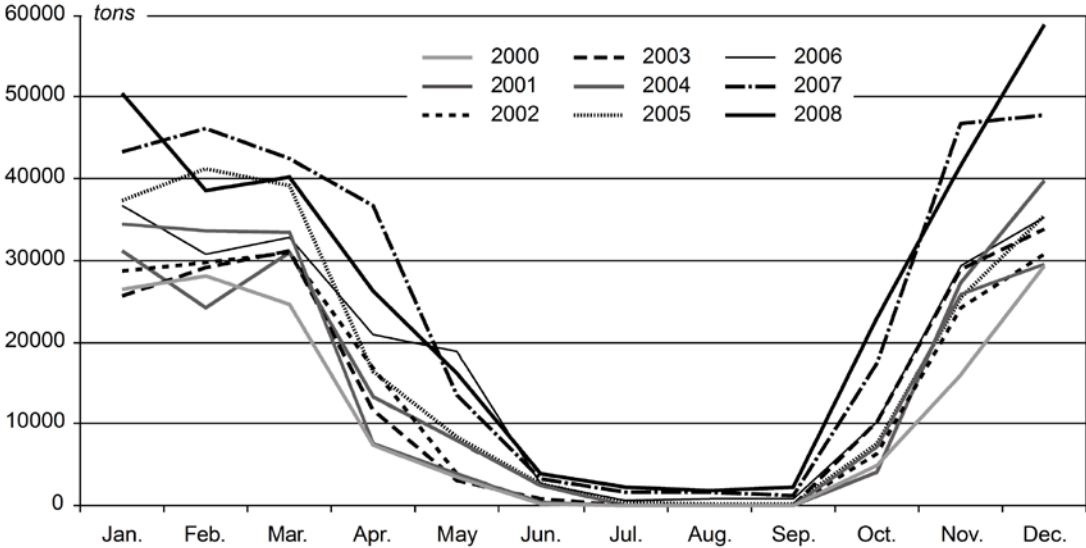


Fig. 1: Seasonal pattern of EU tomato imports from Morocco (data source: Eurostat 2009)

A similarly opaque and complex border regime has been established in the Mexico-US case. The current market order emerged in the wake of an ongoing antidumping investigation under NAFTA stipulations which has been frequently reopened and suspended since it was first put to rest by negotiated agreement in 1996. The agreement set a minimum price (reference price) that covers the majority of fresh tomato imports from Mexico. The aim is to protect the interests of the US tomato industry with markedly more restrictive policies in the spring and summer when US production is strong. The specific geography of tomato production resulted in the splitting of the tomato season into two periods with separate reference prices each: California and Baja Califor-

nia are covered from July 1 to October 22, while Florida and Sinaloa are covered from October 23 to June 30 with a higher floor price put into effect after the renewal of the suspension agreement in 2008 (USDA 2008, page 2; Macias, 2003, page 111).

Examples like these illustrate the extent to which the bordering regimes formatting transnational markets against the backdrop of closely interwoven interests of both consumers and producers are the result of socio-technologically distributed attempts to calculate and monitor the north-south movements of tomatoes.

However, “geographies of marketization” materialize not solely at the political border itself, but extend deep into rural areas in Mexico and Morocco. Here, special attention is given to the vexed issue of private property rights in relation to natural resources and land, deep integration forcing both Mexico and Morocco to get rid of “traditional” forms of land use. In Mexico this is in conflict with the country’s historical agrarian reform which was implemented when the revolution became institutionalized in the 1930s. Enshrined in article 27, the Mexican Constitution forbid foreign ownership of land and redistributed land seized from large landowners as so-called *ejidos*, that is small plots of lands communally-owned by peasants and indigenous communities that could not be sold. The NAFTA process forced the Mexican Government to reform Article 27 and to adjust Mexican agricultural law (*Ley agraria*), according to observers virtually destroying the Mexican *ejido* system and allowing domestic and foreign investors to lease out or buy private and communal land holdings under certain conditions. As a consequence, both Mexican and US agribusinesses invested in the horticulture sector in the north of the country, the fresh tomato boom in Baja California, for instance, being driven by US involvement and direct investment (Echanove, 2005; Tornell and Esquivel, 1998).

The Moroccan state similarly pushes for deep integration because traditional institutions are regarded as backward and as obstacles for the ambitious project to create an export-oriented and competitive economy (Bartels, 2004; Thiel, 2007, page 5). Readily opening up the state-controlled agricultural sector for private investors, Morocco paved the way for foreign direct investment and allowed foreign companies to extend control to crucial nodes in export-oriented horticulture commodity chains. These were reforms long overdue from the point of view of institutions such as the World Bank: “In each country [Greece, Morocco, Turkey, Cyprus] it is now recognized that fruit and vegetables are better marketed by the private sector with minimal government intervention” (World Bank, 2001).

A direct result of this has been a deep polarization of both rural Mexico and Morocco, modern and highly productive agroindustry enclaves confronted by more traditional agriculture in margi-

nalized areas. In Mexico, state-of-the-art horticulture production sites (*“enclaves agrícolas modernos”*; Macias, 2003) operate according to technological standards set in the north and are dependent on US capital both with regard to inputs and marketing. The emerging cross-border agroindustrial production system bears close resemblance to the offshoring networks which gave rise to the Maquiladora industry and have transformed wide parts of the country since the mid 1960s, in particular the northern border region (see Berndt, 2004). This similarity prompted observers to speak of *“agromaquiladoras”* (Macias, 2003, page 108; see Pacheco Castro, 2004, pages 86).

It would be wrong therefore to interpret the persistence of “traditional” agricultural practices as proof for incomplete liberalization and market integration, as if there was a natural outside of the market independent of the discursive representations of neoclassical economists (T. Mitchell, 2005, 2007). Rather, the complicated public discourse of modernization and progress needs those “backward” regions as a mirror against which a modern productive agriculture is being constructed. By contributing to the ongoing fragmentation of both countries into modern and backward regions, the extension of the concept of private property rights and the resulting fragmentation of the south may also be interpreted as the mobilization of north-south borders. As “inner borders” of global capitalism, both the US and EU southern borders move southwards, meandering across rural regions, including some fields and installations, and excluding others as market integration’s Other.

2.2 B/ ordering the chain: Managing the tomato production-distribution-consumption network

The preceding discussion has illustrated the extent to which the social reality outside resists market-radical models, the techno-social (net)working of economics bringing about a flexible and ambivalent regional integration project rather than an ideal perfect market. It has been yet another species of “economists in the wild” who has taken these efforts as a starting point to organize chain-like production – whether referred to as value, commodity or supply chains – transnationally and efficiently: the practitioners of Supply Chain Management (Busch, 2007; Gibbon and Ponte, 2008).

Cross border production of mobile Moroccan and Mexican export tomatoes differs slightly regarding the question of who are the key actors driving the chain. Moroccan production is dominated more directly by large transnational retailers (e.g. Carrefour, Royal Ahold, Tesco, Metro) than appears to be the case in Mexico (Aloui and Kenny, 2005, page 10; Calvin and Barrios, 1998, pages 36 – 37). In both cases, however, it is intermediary players such as shippers, distributors, repackers and brokers who play a key role. In Morocco, French or Moroccan-French investors are particularly active, supplying French consumers with their own brands (e.g. Azura, Idyl; Aznar

Sánchez, 2004, page 97). There are a variety of ways to source vegetables such as tomatoes at a transnational scale. The rule in both border contexts appears to be contract farming in order to maintain organizational flexibility. US and Mexican distributors normally set up one year marketing contracts for an entire crop with farmers before crops are planted, selling on commission and delegating the risk for any losses to the grower (Calvin and Barrios, 1998, page 36). In Morocco, observers depict a similar system, about 10,000 small Moroccan vegetable growers being integrated in a contract farming system (Hoering, 2005). Other sourcing options are implemented less frequently, spot market transactions, for instance, are relatively rare in both contexts. And while joint venturing is more frequent with regard to marketing activities, joint ventures in growing only appear to play a significant role in Mexico for tomatoes grown in areas along the border. Here, geographical proximity allows US firms to exert a more direct influence on production operations.

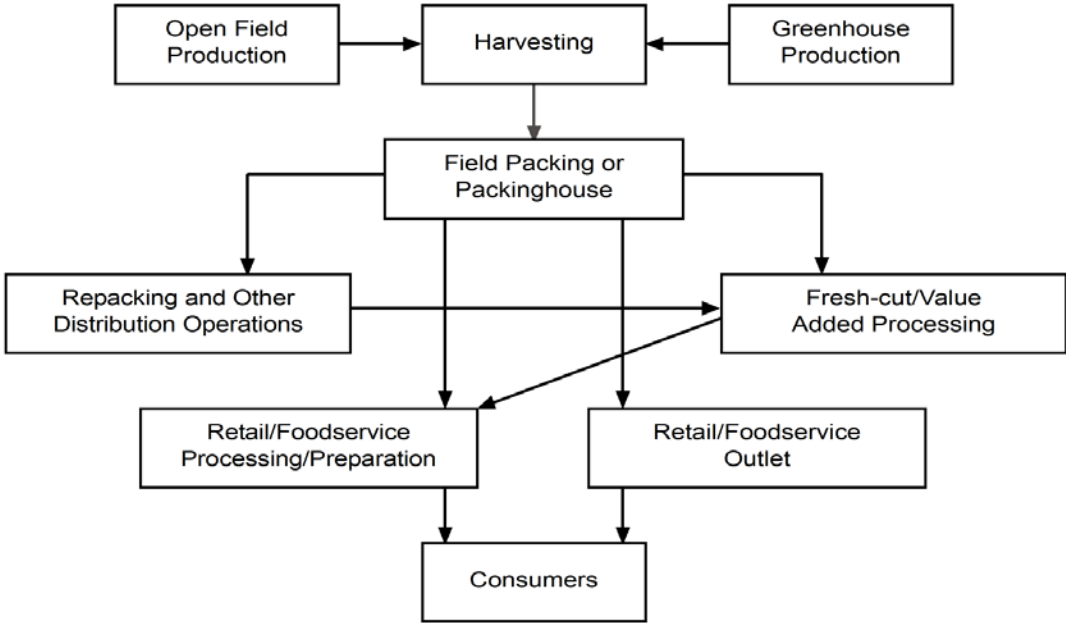


Fig. 2: The fresh tomato supply chain (source: Gombas et al, 2008, page 2)

In order for a tomato to be on display on a supermarket shelf, an extended and complex network of socio-technical arrangements is necessary. These include cooling facilities as much as standards, consultancy firms, surveillance technologies, marketing experts, packing stations etc. Of crucial importance in this context are the normative prescriptions and the practical knowledge of what has come to be known “Supply Chain Management” (SCM). From a logic of framing and

overflowing, it is this “praxis discipline” which acts as a mediator between the laboratory world of free trade and the asymmetric deep integration logic characterizing regional integration. What SCM practitioners are confronted with in their daily activities are potentially infinite connections. In order for production, distribution and consumption to work, these infinite circular networks have to acquire unilinear form. A large number of connections of the tomato network therefore have to be cut in a way that allows the tomato to emerge as an exchangeable commodity. This is what supply chain management is all about: individual production steps are isolated, put into a hierarchy and ascribed pecuniary value, the linear tomato supply chain being the always precarious result of this exercise (see Fig. 2).

If we assume that the two primary factors in the restructuring of the global economy are the search for low-wage labor and organizational flexibility, than it gets obvious that the construction of borders between south and north plays a crucial role in this difficult exercise. In a context such as NAFTA or the EU Association Agreements, SCM practitioners are actively managing flexible border regimes, or to be more precise, they are actively engaging in the mobilization and dissolution of borders themselves:

1. When producing in the north, processes of framing are relatively easy to control. Yet production costs – in particular labor costs – are relatively high. Northern retailers may therefore be more inclined to prefer relatively loose border controls in order to facilitate controlled overflow. Above all, if this assumes the form of so-called “illegal”, undocumented immigrants. In this case southern borders move into US fields or Spanish greenhouses. This illustrates the extent to which “illegal” migration does not occur in spite of border security measures, but rather has to be understood as an integral part of the very political border regime itself, which provides the conditions of existence for transnational economic spaces (see Fernández-Rufete Gómez and Rico Becerra, 2005; D. Mitchell, 2001). There is no question that border security policies are implemented to deter unwelcome elements and to prevent unauthorized border crossings. In addition to this, however, these measures contribute to the production of “illegalized migrants”, transforming Moroccan or Mexican citizens into a labor market segment that is easily put to use by employers and does not have the formal means to demand inclusion into northern societies (Euskirchen et al, 2007; Kearney, 1998).
2. When producing in Mexico or Morocco, the supply chain managers of large agrifood companies favor a tightly controlled border in order to prevent potential overflow, for instance caused by sub-standard produce. This is above all because large supermarket chains with their own brands, integrated producers, key shippers and distributors have a lot to lose in cases

when things fall out of the frame in their supply chains. This is why these companies are actively engaged in pushing the border southwards, for instance by sending own inspection teams into Mexican and Moroccan tomato fields or by hiring the help of private certification agencies. In cases like these the southern border moves southwards, leaving its mark in Souss Massa tomato fields, *sinaloense* warehouses, or packing stations in Baja California.

3. Borders may also be dissolved. Here, specialist private supply chain service firms play an increasingly prominent role. Companies such as the US firm Primus Labs or the German TÜV-Holding have expanded their international activities considerably, amongst other things offering certifications and quality management to clients in Mexico or Morocco. A particular important role in these audits, above all in Europe, is being played by GLOBALGAP, a private standard which has acquired international hegemony in the realm of horticulture production in recent years. Supposedly guaranteeing “good agricultural practice”, GLOBALGAP was brought to life as EurepGAP by large European retailers (e.g. Tesco, Ahold, Metro, Edeka) and was subsequently expanded globally. Stipulating minimum criteria with a view to food safety, the environment and labor conditions (i.e. safety at work), the standard harmonized various existing quality norms. In order to be effective, product and process standards constantly have to be synchronized with production realities. Given that these “reality checks” often bring about unforeseen complications, to which solutions have to be found, decision-makers need an environment of “controlled flexibility” (Croxton et al, 2001; Handfield and Nichols, 1999). This is achieved with the help of the latest track’n’trace technologies which allow the reconstruction of the route of every single crate of tomatoes from the grocery store to the field or greenhouse. Here, smaller irritations play an ambivalent role. They are concealed and contained as far as possible, but serve also as a welcome legitimization for costly surveillance measures. The detailed and meticulous food alerts published online by the EU commission and the USDA, for instance, serve as assurance for consumers that the situation is under control. As long as these overflows keep within reasonable bounds, they can be represented as lamentable exceptions from the rule. Or in the words of Michel Callon (1998, pages 250-251): These are situations where framing is the norm and overflow the exception. In so doing, standardization and track’n’trace technologies bring order into the production and value chain, dissolving the border between north and south with a view to product quality and product process, a border however, which can easily be redrawn with the help of socio-technical surveillance applications at different places along the chain (field, border, cooling truck, wholesale market, grocery shelf etc.).

The result of all this is a constellation which is designed to carefully differentiate between desired cross-border connections and those movements that should be prevented. It is only specific goods, specific forms of capital and specific embodiments of labor that are granted controlled freedom of movement. This appears to work because enlisted market actors do not doubt the ongoing commitment to free trade, believing in “a faithful translation and not a betrayal, a deformation [of the original ideas]” (Latour, 1982, pages 154 – 155). This allows the reproduction of the underlying deep integration regime which proves so remarkably resilient.

2.3 B/ordering the commodity: The production of a northern tomato

Michel Callon reminds us that objectivation and qualification of commodities is at the heart of economic competition and the organization of markets, conceptualizing the construction and mobilization of commodities as a double process of similitude and differentiation (e.g. Callon et al, 2002). A commodity has to be singularized in order to allow it to be distinguished from other commodities, but at the same time perception of its singularity is possible only against a background of comparability vis-à-vis similar commodities. It is very obvious therefore how singularization processes reach their limits in the context of transnational tomato markets.

If one imagines a vine ripe tomato grown in Culiacán, Sinaloa, and a vine ripe tomato harvested in Oceanside, Southern California, or their counterparts produced in Souss Massa and Almeria, Analucía, in the Morocco-EU border context for that matter, differences can very likely only be made visible with the help of complex and sophisticated measuring devices. Wherever they are grown, identical tomato varieties are produced with almost the same inputs, the same seeds, the same machinery, the same fertilizers and – crucially – also with the “same” labor. Both in Mexico and Morocco it is often female migrants from poorer regions who toil in the tomato fields (see International Women’s Rights Watch, 1997, page 7; Lara Flores, 2008), and in Spain and the US “southern” labor is predominantly embodied by migrants from Mexico and Morocco. One could argue therefore that the competition between northern and southern products and growers is suspended as borders are dissolved or shifted southwards.

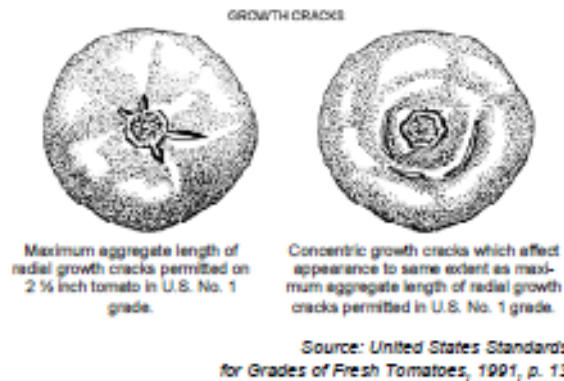
To a large extent standardized similarity is the work of the various kinds of norms which are prescribed by the architects of deep integration. These take on manifold forms, for instance as product, process, social or environmental standards (Jaffee and Henson, 2004; Nadvi, 2008). State agencies have always played an important role here. However, in the recent past it has been private actors, for instance, certification agencies which turned out to be the most important generators of standards. Figure 3 summarizes key stipulations from the EU tomato market order, shows an extract from the USDA “Standards for Grades” regulations for the Vine Ripe Tomato and the

fresh tomato more generally and gives an impression of the private audit system of PrimusLabs, listing a range of questions from the company's so-called food safety audit templates for harvest crews.

USDA standards for grades

Grades - §61.2188 U.S. No. 1. "U.S. No. 1" consists of tomatoes on the vine of similar varietal characteristics (except when marked as mixed type or mixed variety), which are mature but not overripe or soft, clean, fairly well formed; which are free from decay, sunscald, and freezing injury, and free from damage caused by bruises, cuts, shriveling, puffiness, catfaces, growth cracks, scars, disease, insects, or other means (See §61.2167.). The tomatoes shall be attached to stems/vines. The vines shall not be brittle and shall be free from decay; and free from damage by mold or other means.

Source: United States Standards for Grades of Tomatoes on the Vine, 2005, p. 1



EU marketing standards for tomatoes

II. PROVISIONS CONCERNING QUALITY

The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements of tomatoes after preparation and packaging.

A. Minimum requirements

In all classes, subject to the special provisions for each class and the tolerances allowed, tomatoes must be:

- Intact,
- sound; produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for consumption is excluded,
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter,
- fresh in appearance,
- practically free from pests,
- practically free from damage caused by pests,
- free of abnormal external moisture,
- free of any foreign smell and/or taste.

In the case of trusses of tomatoes, the stalks must be fresh, healthy, clean, and free from all leaves and any visible foreign matter.

The development and condition of the tomatoes must be such as to enable them:

- to withstand transport and handling, and
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

B. Classification

Tomatoes are classified in three classes as defined below:

(I) 'Extra' Class

Tomatoes in this class must be of superior quality. They must have firm flesh and must be characteristic of the variety as regards shape, appearance and development. Their colouring, according to their state of ripeness, must be such as to satisfy the requirements set out in the last subparagraph of paragraph A above. They must be free from greenbacks and other defects, with the exception of very slight superficial defects, provided these do not affect the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package.

(II) Class I

Tomatoes in this class must be of good quality. (...)

Source: Commission of the European Communities, 2000, pp. 26-27

Private standards for tomato production

Employee Activities & Sanitary Facilities

02.02 Are any employees eating and drinking (other than water) in active harvest areas, areas yet to be harvested, near harvested product or storage areas?

02.10e Is non-perfumed soap available?

02.10k Is it evident that corrective action is taken when employees fail to comply with hand washing guidelines?

02.13 If observed, are all commodities that come in contact with blood destroyed? If this question is answered No, an automatic failure of the audit will occur.

Harvest Practices

03.03d Is product and packing material free from exposure to the ground and or any handling contamination?

03.04b Are grading and packing tables subject to a documented cleaning program including stating the frequency of cleaning and cleaning procedures? If No go to 3.5.

03.05a Are harvest tools (e.g. knives, coring rings, holsters) being used, made of non corrosive and easy to clean materials (e.g. no wood or fabric parts)?

03.05e Are harvest tools subject to a documented cleaning program including stating the frequency of cleaning and cleaning procedures? If No go to 3.6h.

03.07i Are all platforms above product, packaging, or food contact surfaces (e.g. belts) on the harvest machinery, in-field trucks fitted with protection to prevent product contamination?

03.08a Are microbial tests conducted including Generic E.coli on water used for washing, hydrating, etc. harvested crops (e.g. re-hydration, core in field)? If No go to 3.8c.

Source: PrimusLabs.com, Food Safety Audit, Harvest Crew v07.04

Fig. 3: Tomato marketing and production standards (extracts)

A further impulse is given by retailers, growers associations or individual producers that set up codes-of-conduct and create labels to market tomatoes of superior quality. The following quote is taken from a statement issued by the California Tomato Farmers co-operative which has created the “Fresh Standard for Food Safety”:

“When consumers reach for a tomato grown by a California Tomato Farmers member they are selecting a tomato of the highest quality, grown under the strictest food safety standards and harvested by workers who enjoy a safe and positive work environment” (Statement on the California Tomato Farmers Homepage; <http://www.californiatomatofarmers.com/about.asp>; 7.2.09).

At the same time, however, standards are illustrative of the extent to which qualification processes are distributed between heterogeneous agents – producers, consumers and socio-technical devices. It would be more than shortsighted to believe that it is suppliers alone who decide about the characteristics of their products. Far from being exclusively represented by price signals, consumers play their part, too, their preferences being mediated by the standards mentioned above.

In order to stabilize the southwards extension of the border and the homogenization of the commodities, undesired relations to southern agents have to be cut. Irrigation water has to be clean, farm workers have to adhere to strict labor regimes, and advanced technology is needed. Only then is it possible to produce standardized tomatoes for US or European markets.

Once the ambivalent framing is completed, the tomato turns into a “northern” product being disentangled from its local (southern) context and sent on its way north. As long as it is moved on the southern side of the political border, everything is done to prevent unwanted transgressions by southern agents, be it unfavorable climate, dangerous bacteria, harmful animals or unwelcome humans. Once the political border is reached and crossed, identities change. New differences are being cast and new borders are being drawn. For the tomatoes all of a sudden are southern guests in the north and constantly have to prove their status as northern market-conform products until they reach their final destination on the supermarket shelves.

Except for inconspicuous country-of-origin labels all hints at border mobilization are eliminated. It is only in incidents when product qualities break out of the standardization frame that the border is redrawn in northern places of consumption and differences are named: supermarket displays tell the shopper about special Moroccan or Mexican heirloom varieties. In addition to this, discriminatory practices at the end of the commodity chain redraw the southern border into northern supermarkets on normative or life-style grounds: Some consumers prefer Mexican or Morocco tomatoes for their exoticism or authenticity (e.g. the trend towards heirloom varieties),

others refuse to buy them on ecological, social or patriotic grounds, inscribing specific regional identities with this refusal. The erasure of differences is obviously only one side of the coin, standardization being always about the multiplication of differences at the same time, differences that materialize in the form of multiple diversities at the various places of transnational value and commodity chains.

However, these are delicate processes that easily get out of control. In these cases unwanted connections are suddenly made visible, entanglements that cannot be easily put back into the frame. The crucial point is that such overflows are never external to the processes at work but necessary conditions for commodification. Take the issue of the sanitary risks of industrial agriculture. A recent example in the US is the outbreak of Salmonella Saint Paul in May 2008. From very early on, authorities and public media suspected Mexican tomatoes to be the source of this sanitary problem, warning consumers not to eat certain type of fresh tomatoes on 3 and 7 June. Using trace-back and other distribution pattern information, FDA circulated a list of states and regions which it deemed to be safe. Amongst US main tomato growing regions only Florida was not on this list. This contrasted markedly with the treatment of Mexico, given that not a single Mexican tomato production region was declared safe. As a consequence, US consumers soon lost their faith in Mexican fruits and vegetables:

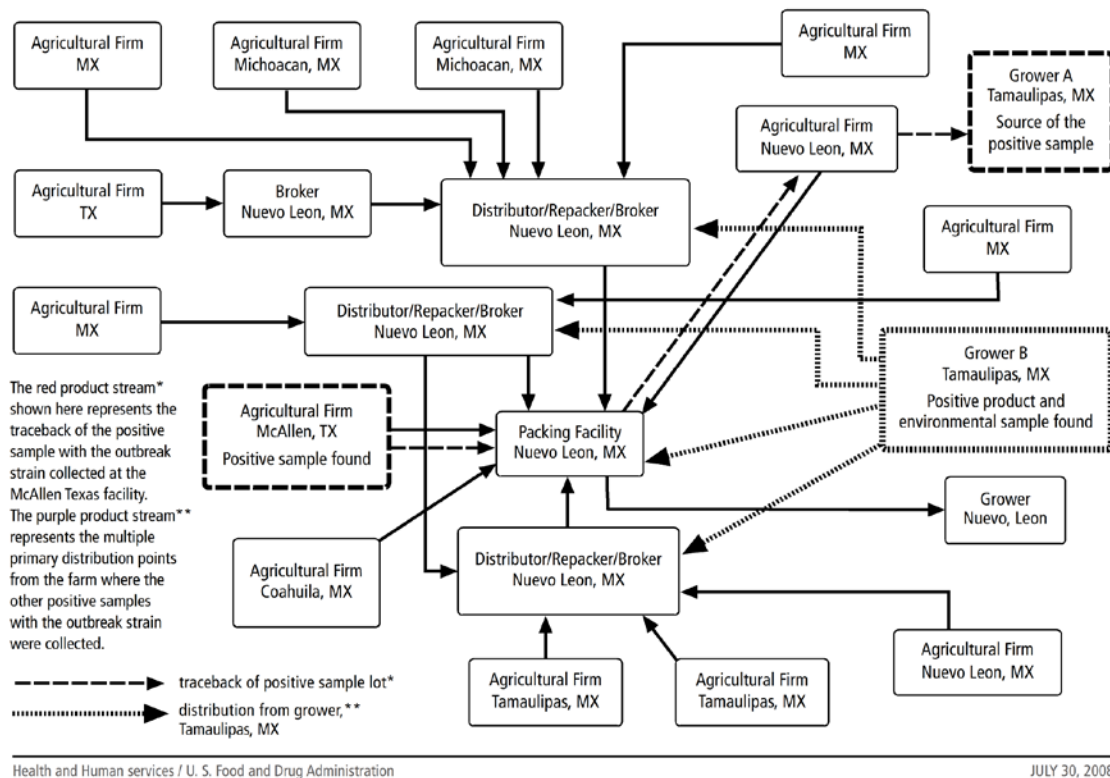
“And so the follow-up question is when people go out to eat and have been later contracted Salmonella is it always Mexican food or are there other type of foods that people have eaten before contracting Salmonella?” (A worried consumer, phoning a FDA media briefing on 9 July 2008; <http://www.fda.gov/oc/opacom/hottopics/tomatoes.html>).

By end-July the tomato was finally cleared after the salmonella outbreak had been traced back to Jalapeño and Serrano chilies originating from two farms in the northeastern Mexican state of Tamaulipas (see Fig. 4). What is interesting is that while all US producers of *chiles jalapeños* and *serranos* were instantly declared safe by the FDA, on the Mexican side the warning did not isolate Tamaulipas but again extended to any Mexican Jalapeño or Serrano pepper. On 28 August the consumer warning was lifted. This is an example of an almost ritualized practice, political and economic decision-makers, and media in the US regularly immunizing themselves from those incidents by displacing them “south of the border”. This notwithstanding the fact that sanitary and phytosanitary problems are no less frequently traced to US producers and that the cross-border movement of unwelcome bacteria or insects such as the Mexican Fruit Fly may be a price to be paid for the seamless year-round supply of horticulture produce. This is an example of the extent to which overflows can get out of control and how, multiplied by the media, they can no

longer be contained and veiled. It is in these cases when overflow appears to be the norm and framing the exception that the fragility of b/ordering processes is exposed and scope for change exists.

Salmonella Saintpaul Outbreak Traceback & Distribution

Partial view of the traceback & distribution of peppers from Mexico: July 16 - July 30, 2008



Health and Human services / U. S. Food and Drug Administration

JULY 30, 2008

Fig. 4: Salmonella Saintpaul traceback information (source: FDA 2008; <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/NewsEvents/PublicHealthFocus/UCM179981.pdf> ; 20 December 2009)

Conclusions

Globalization is perhaps best understood as the liquid manifestation of a world in which borders are increasingly made contingent (Bauman, 2000; Urry, 2000). This perspective on our global world, however, sits uneasily with the still wide-spread devaluation of the unsettled, the nomadic, the vagrant and unstable. From a position which equates social order with sedentary and stable life-styles, spatial movements are a constant source of irritation and conflict. As we have illustrated in this paper, this holds also for the global movements of agricultural commodities. Whenever internationally traded fruits and vegetables are rejected entry at the borders demarcating the territories of the US or the EU, these decisions are framed in a telling language. Official

documents refer to “detention”, “deportation”, “foreign bodies” or “filth” (Jaffee and Henson, 2004, pages 100 – 101). Just as other mobiles, for instance capital or humans, commodities constitute a constant threat to the territorialized order of national societies, not only because of the existence of commodities and movements per se, but above all because it is the very moment of border crossing which makes visible both the border itself and its porosity at the same time. And it is because of this threat that the crossing of borders has to be veiled. Or to put it with Ulrich Beck: It is not the dissolution of borders, but rather border negotiation and border work which is at the heart of current globalization processes (Beck, 2002, page 143; our translation). We used our example of Mexican and Moroccan export tomatoes to show how the irritations and challenges arising with the border crossing of transnationally mobile goods are framed by a flexible border regime which selectively and contextually moves borders between Europe and North Africa, and the US and Mexico southwards and northwards, under certain conditions sealing them hermetically, at times opening them widely. What the implementation of market orders, standardization processes and surveillance practices does is simply to suspend the act of border-crossing. It is only at times when control is lost over the suspension and shifting of the borders, when mobility gets visible and the danger is consciously perceived that old borders are being re-drawn in new places.

To use Callon’s terminology: Framing is only possible as long as there are connections and entanglements between elements inside and outside the frame. It is crucial however that these constituent connections between inside and outside have to be held invisible by unambiguously defined and safely guarded borders. In this sense it is warranted to refer to these practices as hidden conditions for the production of deeply uneven transnational market orders. Being indispensable for the production of market-conform commodities in today’s “supply chain capitalism” (Tsing, 2009), these are visible for the northern consumer only in cases when control over hidden entanglements is lost and irritations reach a wider public.

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