Globalization and localization: new challenges for rural research.

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GLOBALIZATION AND LOCALIZATION: NEW CHALLENGES FOR RURAL RESEARCH

by

NORMAN LONG

(Universities of Bath, UK, and Wageningen, The Netherlands)

Introduction: a turning point in history?

Many contemporary commentators and researchers have stressed that we are now living in an era of significant change: a moment in history, a turning point, a time of transition and radical social change; an end of industrial society and the end of the promise of the Enlightenment (Touraine 1984, 1989), the ‘end of history’ as ‘the West’ has conceived it (Fukuyama 1989). Important dimensions of change involve the rapid dissemination of scientific knowledge and technology, culture and communications, the restructuring of work, industry and economic life, and the fragmentation and reorganization of power domains leading to the emergence of new social and political identities.

Such change-processes - whether seen as the latest manifestation of some ‘modernist’ conception of history and ‘progress’ or as the beginnings of a ‘postmodernist’ era - not only affect the so-called ‘advanced’ or ‘developed’ societies but also the poorer nations of the world. Indeed much of what we now witness is essentially ‘global’ in scope, entailing the accelerated flows of various commodities, people, capital, technologies, communications, images and knowledge across national frontiers.

On the other hand, we should not be seduced into believing that globalization has a uniform impact everywhere. To do so would be to fall into the same trap as previous attempts at theorization, namely that of formulating a general (or universal) theory that seeks to identify certain ‘driving forces’ (e.g. the ‘laws’ of capitalist development or the imperatives of modern bureaucratic organization), ‘prime movers’ (e.g. technological or economic factors), or ‘cultural facilitators’ (e.g. religious asceticism or entrepreneurial rationalities) of change.

Discerning and interpreting these complex and interrelated processes is, of course, an enormous task (in fact this constitutes a major part of the research agenda for sociology) that goes well beyond what is possible in this paper. My task here is much more modest: I aim to outline certain critical dimensions of social change in the late twentieth century and to identify key theoretical issues central to developing a new agenda for rural research on ‘globalization’ and ‘localization’.

Three interwoven fields of change

As I briefly indicated above, we can distinguish three fields wherein significant restructuring is taking place. The first concerns changes in production, work and economic life more generally. Here we encounter the following critical dimensions: changes in the patterns of commoditization consequent upon the rise of new, and the ‘reinvention’ of old, modes of value, as consumer markets and interests become more diversified in the types and qualities of goods required; an
uneven transition from 'Fordism' and the vertical integration of firms towards a more flexible and global pattern of production and accumulation marked by the growing importance of more loosely structured horizontal linkages covering sub-contracting, industrial or artisan homework, and a multiplicity of linked service and consumption-based activities; changing notions of 'work' and 'occupational status' resulting principally from increased unemployment and part-time work and a reorganized gender division of labour; a move towards greater 'informalization' and fragmentation of economic life within the family/household, small-scale enterprise and local community, in some cases leading to the demise of local systems of care and social support.

The second field of change concerns the changing nature of the state, changing power domains, and the appearance of new social movements and socio-political identities. Central dimensions here include: the decline of corporatist modes of regulation and organization, and the 'hollowing out' of the state as it relinquishes more of its functions to non-state bodies; the emergence of new forms of coalition at local and regional levels as the politics, policies and organization of nation-states are transformed under the impact of more global interests, and as centralised political authority and control become increasingly delegitimized; shifts in the relations and meanings of the 'public' versus the 'private' domain, bolstered by neo-liberal 'free enterprise' and 'back-to-the-market' discourse; and the development of new social and political identities and movements based on diverse social commitments, class being only one among many other forms of association and social difference (such as gender, ethnicity, locality, religion, membership of environmentalist or human rights groups, or a commitment to 'transnational' or 'cosmopolitan' notions of 'citizenship').

The third field relates to issues of knowledge, science and technology. It focuses upon debates about the nature and impact of the rapidly growing 'information society', wherein sophisticated information, communication and media systems, production technologies and computerized modes of reasoning shape the social relations and the value orientations of contemporary societies. This field also encompasses issues concerning knowledge generation, dissemination, utilization and transformation; the encounter between so-called 'expert' and 'local' modes of knowledge; the clashes and accommodations that take place between contrasting cultural and epistemological frameworks; the affirmation of the 'power of science' to transform social life and steer change; and the transformation of knowledge and technology at the interface between intervening 'development' institutions and their so-called 'recipient' groups. In addition, it raises questions about the time-space compression of contemporary social life hastened by information technologies, as well as the central role that information-processing plays in the development of 'institutional reflexivity' (Giddens 1991) which, it is alleged, facilitates the quick response of modern organizations to changed circumstances.

Globalization: diversity not uniformity

So far we have dwelt primarily on delineating broad trends and identifying what seem to be critical dimensions. At this juncture, however, it becomes important to give more attention to certain contradictions and struggles that are generated within and between these different fields of change. This is imperative if we are to stand back from essentialist and reified interpretations of globalization that assume rather than demonstrate the force and uniformity of such change. It is also necessary to make a case against centrist and hegemonic modes of analysis.

As a first step let us reassert the significance of social heterogeneity. We are in fact living in an increasingly diversified world which only has the trappings of homogeneity. The revolution in information and communication technologies has made the world look more uniform and interconnected. Yet even the most sophisticated modern communication and media systems and the development of integrated international commodity markets have not destroyed cultural,
ethnic, economic and political diversity. Indeed globalization has generated a whole new diversified pattern of responses at national, regional and local levels.

Awareness of such heterogeneity is reflected in the questioning, in certain policy circles, of standardized solutions to problems of economic development, employment and welfare, in favour of what are described as more flexible, localized and 'sustainable' strategies. This shift implies, at least in public rhetoric, a greater recognition of the strategic contribution that local knowledge, organization and participation can make to development. Concomitant with this is an apparent decline of hierarchical and corporativist forms of organization and the emergence of new groupings and coalitions that delegitimize centralized political control and authority, thus reshaping power relations; although, at the same time, we must remember that so-called 'decentralized' patterns of government may often mask 'top-down' measures aimed at reducing the administrative and financial burdens of central government.

Alongside these trends is the swing back to 'market-led' development where the language of 'free enterprise', 'competition' and 'deregulation' prevails, with the consequent 'pulling back' or 'withdrawal' of state institutions. Once again, though, we should not assume that liberalizing and privatizing strategies, spearheaded by international bodies such as the World Bank and IMF, imply the end of interventionist measures undertaken by the state. Indeed, the very implementation of liberalization policies requires a framework of state regulation, resources and legitimacy, and the use of a persuasive political rhetoric aimed at mobilizing people and enrolling them in this new type of strategic thinking. Moreover, policy measures that address themselves to the 'solution' of pressing economic problems, often fall short precisely because they fail to come to grips with the everyday practicalities and diverse modes of making and defending a living. Thus strategic planning by government is always difficult to realize successfully when faced by a myriad of local and regional adaptations, but especially so when the political conditions militate against the state being able to govern effectively and steer change. Many domains of state activity in fact increasingly require international backing to function at all.

Global domains and 'new' social movements

This problem of state 'governability' arises in part from the increased global character of the relationships affecting various domains of human practice. Recent geo-political transformations (such as the break up of the Eastern Bloc countries and the establishment of new regions of cooperation like the European Union and NAFTA, as well as the new agreements or 'conditionalities' concerning Third World development aid and trade) question the sovereignty of nation-states, since their rights and obligations, their powers and autonomy, are clearly challenged and redefined. Yet, the immense flows of capital, goods, services, people, information, technologies, policies, ideas, images and regulations that these changes imply are not organized from a few centres or blocs of power, as World Systems theory might suggest (see Sklair 1991: 33-4). Transnational enterprises may have localized sites of operation (e.g. London, New York, Tokyo, and Hollywood) but they do not dominate their spheres of influence and investment. Rather they must contest them with their competitors.

It is equally difficult then to think of the nation-state or the transnational corporation as the appropriate power-container of important economic and social relationships in the global political economy. Instead we must replace such a model with that of global orders whose building blocks are groups and associations set within multiple and overlapping networks of power. These various networks are constantly reordering themselves in the face of changing
global conditions. In doing so they draw upon diverse local and extra-local resources and values, frequently appealing to images of some new kind of 'global' scenario and 'cosmopolitan' civil society.

Such groups and associations include, not only international trade organizations, financial corporations and newly-emerging inter-state political alliances, but also social movements where people group around pressing problems of a global nature. The latter manifest themselves in the growing commitment to new 'causes' which bring people together across the world - people of different nation-states and cultures. For example, there are 'green' movements that address themselves to the issues of world-wide pollution, degradation of the environment, depletion of natural resources and the loss of genetic diversity among animal and plant populations; movements that have sprung up around issues of health threats affecting the world population at large (and especially vulnerable groups), such as the HIV/AIDS associations and pressure groups; and 'alternative development' associations and groups that have launched campaigns against transnational companies that have introduced to the poorer nations what are considered to be nutritionally 'inappropriate' products such as baby bottle-feed formulas and Coca Cola, as well as 'inappropriate' technologies promoting non-sustainable production methods and systems of labour control that are oppressive.

Other examples include consumers' associations (mostly based in the richer countries) that try to protect consumer interests by pressing for better quality or more organically grown produce and more favourable prices; and farmers' organizations that seek to advance their own particular interests - sometimes at loggerheads with each other (such as the French and British producers who have for a number of years been locked into a pitched battle over European Union agricultural export quotas which led in one instance to the slaughtering of imported British sheep in France), and occasionally mobilizing across national boundaries in order to pursue more global issues. Here the problem of the modern food chain is a critical factor, with transnationals and increasingly supermarkets making direct deals with producer groups in Third World production zones in order to avoid state control and standards (see Marsden and Arce 1993).

Other cases highlight certain shifts in the character of peasant movements. Latin America in particular has a long history of struggles by small producers and agricultural labourers against landlords and local political bosses who monopolize access to the most productive land and to crucial marketing and servicing channels. But now we witness massive mobilizations of indigenous peoples. For example, around the Amazonian rim we find several different groups fighting aggressively not just for rights to land (ie. plots for cultivation or livestock rearing) but for habitat rights (ie. the right not to be disturbed by transnationals or ravaged by land speculators, and the right to determine how natural resources should be utilized and by whom). This struggle, of course, has a strong ethnic and human rights dimension to it which prompted the International Labour Organization to become involved in providing logistical support for the coordination of these Amazonian groups. It also sparked off protest marches directed towards the national governments of Bolivia and Ecuador by indigenous peoples who walked from the eastern tropical lowlands to La Paz and Quito to present their cases. The recent outburst in Chiapas, which focused upon resistance to the Mexican state and its free trade policies, that took place on the day NAFTA was inaugurated presents a similar mix of issues embracing land, ethnicity, political repression and human rights. This case is also notable for the rapidity with which the leaders of the uprising were able to disseminate their manifesto detailing their complaints and demands: almost as soon as they had taken their first offensive a statement from them appeared in e-mail inboxes throughout the global electronic network!
Another interesting global initiative concerns the expansion of women's and feminist associations to include women of diverse cultural and socio-political backgrounds, leading in recent years to the holding of World Summits to share experiences and to identity problems and areas for future strategic debate and action. Finally, of course, we should not forget the example of the long-standing Esperanto Association which has been promoting Esperanto as a world language, though somewhat unsuccessfully in the face of the accelerating spread of English.

As we stressed above, at the same time as these movements have been evolving and flexing their muscles, so we have witnessed a re-ordering of power relations due to a decline of hierarchical and corporativist modes of control. The interplay of these two processes has generated a variety of dynamic and contingent situations which contain both the organizational potentials for the creation of new globally-oriented coalitions of interest, as well as the possibilities of a fragmentation of existing power domains. While the latter may lead to the opening up of new political spaces, at least for some social groups, it may also heighten cultural and political confrontation, resulting (in the worst of scenarios such as the Balkans) in ethnic strife and civil war.

Clearly, then, globalization processes generate a whole new range of conditions and socio-political responses at national, regional and local levels. These changes, however, are not dictated by some supranational hegemonic power or simply driven by international capitalist interests. Changing global conditions - whether economic, political, cultural or environmental - are, as it were, 'relocalized' within national, regional or local frameworks of knowledge and organization which, in turn, are constantly being reworked in interaction with the wider context. It is for this reason that we need to study in detail the processes of 'internalization' and 'relocalization' of global conditions and trends (van der Ploeg 1992). These processes entail the emergence of new identities, alliances and struggles for space and power within specific populations.

People develop their own strategies to solve the problems they face through the use of interpersonal networks, community or neighbourhood ties, church or similar institutions, and through an appeal to certain widely-accepted value positions, and they may do this either individually or in groups. They do not merely respond to programmes or services provided by 'outside' public or private interests; nor do they simply react to distant market conditions. On the basis of 'local' knowledge, organization and values, they actively attempt to come to grips cognitively and organizationally with 'external' circumstances, and in so doing the latter are mediated or transformed in some way (Long 1984, 1989 and 1992). And in this manner, 'states', 'transnationals', 'markets', 'technologies' and 'global images' themselves become endowed with highly diverse and 'localized' sets of meanings and practices.

**Globalscapes: cultural flows, 'imagined worlds' and changing socio-political identities**

Global relations and cultures, as Appadurai (1990) and Featherstone (1990) convincingly argue, are sustained and transformed by global networks of communication and information. This has a number of implications.

The symbolic forms transmitted by communication media become central to contemporary cultural repertoires. The technology involved enables messages, images and symbols to be transmitted rapidly to audiences widely dispersed in time and space, thus creating and reinforcing new types of technically 'mediated' social relations which link individuals to various 'imagined communities' throughout the world (Anderson 1989; Thompson 1990). These 'imagined worlds' (as Appadurai renames them) are made up of 'historically situated
imaginations of persons and groups spread across the globe. [and] are fluid and irregularly shaped'(Lash and Urry 1994: 307).

To be a member of an imagined world is not of course to be spatially contiguous or involved in direct interaction. In fact imagined worlds are always inhabited by non-existent persons, in the sense that there are no persons that exactly match the qualities or profiles of those who are conceived of as being members. Yet individual and group identities (eg. ethnic or gender belongingness or stereotypes, or simply the idea of what it means to be a 'train spotter' or a member of 'Manchester Football Supporters Club') get constructed around these imagined peoples and places precisely when individuals compare and contrast themselves and their situations with those 'others'. This points to the potential ideological impact of media-transmitted images and symbols, although at the same time one must recognize that widespread and rapid communication entails the continuous transformation of meanings and 'reinvention' of old images and traditions.

But, perhaps most important of all, is the fact that these media networks project many diverse and often conflicting images which are then reworked by specific audiences in very different ways. For example, in rural Zambia, peasant Jehovah's Witnesses watching an American-made video about the coming of the 'New World' assumed that the paradise would offer them modern bungalows set within a beautiful country estate where they would dress European-style, all have handsome wrist-watches, splendid limousines, and enjoy endless family picnics on the well-kept lawns. In short, they expected to receive all the material benefits now mostly monopolized by the whites. Their reading of the video then seized upon the materialist setting chosen to represent the paradise rather than upon what the makers would deem to be the 'spiritual' message. And no doubt numerous other interpretations of the same video film would arise among other audiences.

Thus, rather than generating an increasingly uniform cultural pattern, modern media technology helps to expand the cultural universe in many varied and unexpected ways. Some images, for example, are appropriated by oppositional movements to champion their own campaigns, as frequently happens with environmentalists or 'Friends of the Earth' lobbyists. In this way images become highly localized and may be deployed to challenge established views; or, on the other hand, they may communicate certain supposedly negative attitudes and 'falsehoods' concerning particular cultures. The latter is powerfully demonstrated by Said (1978) in his exposure and critique of 'orientalist' views of Islamic society, which gained added saliency and legitimacy for the West through the media reporting of the Gulf War.

It is essential therefore to acknowledge, what Appadurai calls, the 'non-isomorphic' nature of global cultural flows: that is to say, the many movements of people, things and ideas do not neatly coincide or accumulate to produce a single overall pattern. Nor does culture merely flow from 'global centres' to subordinate 'peripheries'. Indeed in many cases it is the so-called 'periphery' that brings cultural innovation to the 'centre': see, for example, the constant reverberations of Caribbean, African and Latin American musical and artistic styles that shape the pop scenes of London and Paris.

A further tantalizing but complex aspect of global culture and identity concerns how the notion of citizenship, normally linked to the idea that a person's political identity and rights are defined and guaranteed by the nation-state, has become more elastic and unsure. Nowadays, many groups feel themselves less part of a nation-state, especially when the state is divided along sharp class, ethnic, or language lines, and more in tune with the idea of belonging to a nation, such as 'the Scottish nation' to which many Scots claim allegiance, even if this is 'an aspiration rather than an historical fact' (see McCrone 1992 where it is argued that Scottish
nationhood is actually built upon the invention of ancient Scottish kings and queens whose portraits now hang in Holyrod House in Edinburgh). Others claim to be part of an ethnic grouping with its own distinctive culture and language or dialect that cross-cuts nation-state boundaries. This often involves the creation of 'new' ethnicities as networks of people from specific 'homelands', seeking work, education or political asylum, build ties that span rural and urban locations and national frontiers. These networks constitute specific responses to changes in economic circumstances such as shifts in the international demand for labour (eg, Mexican labour migration to the US) or to the convulsions associated with the restructuring or break up of nation-states (eg the Sudanese and Ethiopian refugees in Kenya escaping from war and famine).

As cross-border ties stabilize around regular flows back and forth, so migrants gradually develop a sense of self that is genuinely transnational. They also tend to form associations to further their own specific cross-border interests. This encourages the crystallization of a new kind of socio-political identity built upon ethnic bonds but cutting across national frontiers. Hence, for example, we find a growing propensity among migrant groups from Oaxaca, Mexico, in the US to articulate and defend their social rights as tomato workers vis-a-vis their Californian employers and the US government. Yet they do this not only as agricultural workers but also on the basis of a rejuvenated Mixtec identity, linking them to their villages of origin in Mexico, which they skilfully deploy in arguing their case against unfair treatment and inadequate housing. According to Kearney (1988), this militancy has spread to incorporate Mixtecs in the border cities of Tijuana, Mexicali, etc in northwestern Mexico, where Mixtec residents' associations have successfully fought cases involving, for instance, police harassment of Mixtec women street traders. Over time, these experiences have contributed to the emergence of a new conception of self which is essentially pan-Mixteca and which therefore goes beyond the normal criteria of citizenship.

This is a common characteristic among international migrant communities; as Hannerz (1990) suggests, even among those who make up the brigades of international migrant professionals who travel around the world working for the UN, development aid agencies and transnationals. These professionals quickly develop a cosmopolitanness that in many ways transcends national styles and identities, although at the same time their global networks remain relatively closed to outsiders. They are more interested in pursuing lifestyles that are largely unencumbered by the civic rights and duties of national citizenship, and of course they often receive tax-free salaries.

This, in turn, raises the thorny political and moral issue of redefining citizenship in terms of consumption so that we may argue that 'people in different societies should have similar rights of access to a wide diversity of consumer goods, services and cultural products', as well as the right to international tourism, that is to 'consume other cultures and places throughout the world'(Held 1991; Lash and Urry 1994: 309-10).

Analysing the inter-dynamics of 'globalizing' and 'localizing' processes in agricultural and rural development

The foregoing condensed account of key aspects of social change in the late twentieth century provides a baseline for a discussion of rural transformations. In it, I tried to highlight the complex inter-dynamics of globalizing and localizing processes that generate new modes of economic organization and livelihood, new identities, alliances and struggles for space and power, and new cultural and knowledge repertoires.
In the rural context we witness the increasing globalization of agriculture and the food chain, leading to changes in farm technology and the division of labour, with women assuming an increasing role in part-time agricultural work and in the food processing industries. Also, in some areas, we see the growth of new consumption and service activities linked to the tourist industry and recreational pursuits, or the consolidation of small-scale workshops that produce or assemble manufactured goods for transnational enterprises. Once again, these changes have tended disproportionately to recruit women into new and often poorly paid jobs.

Many such changes have exacerbated existing conflicts over land and natural resources, as well as over access to crucial socio-political or economic support. Also, depending on the situation, they have implied changes in legal frameworks, land use, environmental management, technology utilization, the network of technical and administrative institutions serving the farm, status and gender relations, and the internal organization of the household and farm enterprise. None of these transformations has been simply imposed from outside, since the different actors involved (e.g. peasant smallholders, commercial farmers, transnational companies, agricultural bureaucrats, credit banks and various agrarian organizations) have struggled to advance their own particular interests and outcomes have, as far as possible, been negotiated.

As I have argued in previous publications (see for example Long 1984, 1988 and 1992), farming populations are essentially heterogenous in terms of the strategies that farmers adopt for solving the production and other problems they face. Although ecological, demographic, market, politico-economic, and socio-cultural conditions differ and may shape the opportunities open to the farmer, it is the farmer (or more precisely the decision makers of the farm enterprise) who must actively problematize situations, process information and bring together the elements necessary for the operation of the farming enterprise. Hence it is the enterprise managers who take a major role in constructing their own farming world, even to the extent of internalising external rationalities (including the use of new technologies and computer software programmes) and thus, as it were, appearing to carry out the commands of outside agents, whether they be government officers, representatives of transnational companies, or research scientists.

Adopting such an actor-oriented perspective alerts us to the dangers of assuming the potency and driving force of external institutions and interests, when the latter represent only one set among a large array of actors who shape the outcomes. The organizational forms that result are complex and varied, since each 'solution' represents a specific configuration of interlocking actors' 'projects' which is generated by the encounters, negotiations and accommodations that take place between the actors, though not all of them meet face-to-face (Long and van der Ploeg 1994). The influence of actors who are remote from the action-situation is, of course, especially pertinent in an age where information technology penetrates more and more into people's daily lives. Many commercial farmers in the Third World, for example, now communicate through walky-talkies with their farm overseers or foremen in the fields, and some possess computers that can directly access New York or other commodity markets for up-to-date information on prices and product turnover.

Patterns of agricultural development are therefore subject to the combined effects of globalization and localization: that is, 'local' situations are transformed by becoming part of wider 'global' arenas and processes, whilst 'global' dimensions are made meaningful in relation to specific 'local' conditions and through the understandings and strategies of 'local' actors. This produces a variegated pattern of responses, with some farms or production sectors orienting themselves towards producing for international markets, whilst others increase their commitment to locally-specific production, consumption and distribution markets. Likewise,
some farmers specialize their production, whilst others hedge their bets through crop diversification or by combining agricultural and non-agricultural activities. Nowadays, of course, such choices are complicated by the fact that technological developments are racing ahead of mechanization and chemical inputs to embrace biotechnological research and automation. This throws up new choices and dilemmas as to the use of modern science and technology vis-a-vis local farmer knowledge and practice. Though, even in this case, this does not entail a complete surrender to the 'imperatives' of advanced technology because, as Hawkins (1991) shows for British dairy farmers using embryo transplant methods of reproduction supplied by agribusiness, farmers still retain control of how they integrate this technology and its organizational implications into their farming activities and commercialization strategies.

The relationship between global and local dynamics is especially important for understanding the management of agroecological resources. Problems may be identified as global in nature when they have widespread consequences (e.g. destruction of the tropical rain forests) or ramifications that interlock a series of actors ranging from the local to the international arenas (e.g. intervention by transnational companies in particular production zones). But their solution requires 'localization', that is, the localized management of available resources in accordance with existing local and regional knowledge, skills, potentialities and restrictions, although politically it may also be essential to lobby internationally. Frequently too, there are several possible socio-technical solutions to the same basic problems, with consequent differences in farm management styles, cropping patterns, levels of production and the differential use and transformation of knowledge.

Farm knowledge varies and is accorded different social meanings depending on how it is applied in the running of farms. This can readily be seen in the use of different technologies (e.g. tractor, plough, hoe or axe) but is also revealed in the meanings a particular instrument or factor of production acquires as it is coordinated with other production and reproduction factors (van der Ploeg 1986). Adopted technology is forever being reworked to fit the production strategies, resource availabilities and social desires of the farm household. Included in this process is not only the process by which 'new' technologies or packages are adopted, appropriated or transformed, but also the ongoing processes by which particular farmers combine different social domains based, for example, on family, community, market, or state institutions, as well as the struggles they pursue in order to retain or create space for manoeuvre.

Over recent decades non-agricultural dimensions have increasingly emerged as critical to the future of rural areas. One such factor is the massive increase in international migration flows from poorer to richer countries. The motivations for these movements have varied, many individuals and families leaving home in search of work and a better standard of living, and others joining the ranks of the already swollen number of persons displaced by natural disasters or civil war. A large proportion of these migrants originate from rural areas and, as we described for the Mixteca labour migrants, some are destined to return one day to their homelands, although a growing number remain in their host country working in poorly-paid jobs in agriculture, the services and small manufacturing workshops.

Nevertheless, a majority retain important ties with their places of origin - even those who are refugees with no immediate prospect of returning. Over time these homeland ties consolidate into wide-ranging, cross-border networks that play a crucial role in the livelihood strategies of households at both ends of the migration flow, with the homeland households looking to their migrant kin and friends for help in finding jobs and raising cash, especially during periods when rural household incomes fall short of requirements, and the migrants expecting their compatriots to look after their homeland assets (e.g. land, housing and livestock) and to defend their interests.
whenever necessary. These migration networks also function as important conduits of information and opinions about the 'world outside' and disseminate the latest fashions in dress, music and films. In addition, they operate to promote and sustain attachment to homeland ways of life vis-a-vis the multiplicity of cultures that migrants encounter. This process facilitates the retention of migrant social identities.

Clearly the existence of such networks shapes the nature of rural social life and may be decisive in determining how rural producers respond to changing agricultural and economic circumstances. In this way, migrant networks, and especially those involving international migration, become central to understanding the restructuring of the countryside consequent upon the introduction of neo-liberal policies which have withdrawn or reduced subsidies and privatized many of the service-providing agencies previously responsible for credit, technical assistance and commercialization. Hence the ability of many farm households to adapt to these measures in order to survive or reap some benefit rests upon the effectiveness of their migrant networks.

'Globalization', 'localization' and 're-localization'

In developing further these observations on rural change, we must clarify a bit more what is implied in the notions of 'globalization' and 'localization', and why it is sometimes useful to speak of 're-localization'.

In the first place we use 'globalization' instead of 'internationalization' since the latter conjures up the idea of 'inter nation-state' relations, thereby suggesting that the constituent parts are composed of nation-states. Such a view is clearly too restrictive, especially given the present world situation where we are confronted with a complex and changing multiplicity of interconnections based on financial commitments, commodity flows, producer and consumer associations, technology and knowledge disseminations, and political negotiations and struggles that are transnational in character in that they depend upon types of authority and regulatory practices other than those promoted by the state.

Secondly, as I indicated earlier, we wish to stand back from the 1960's idea of globalization which pictures an emerging world order in terms of 'centre-periphery', or 'metropolis-satellite' relations, thus implying simple asymmetries in economic, political and cultural terms. Instead we should view global ordering in terms of a complex changing pattern of homogenization and diversity. Moreover, the autonomy and boundedness of social and cultural units is better conceptualized as a matter of degree rather than as a set of sharply delineated forms. What we need then, as I suggested earlier, is a model that concentrates upon global flows involving movements of people (e.g. migrant workers, refugees, investors, traders and transnational employees), technology and information, money through financial operations, products through commodity markets, images and symbolic representations through various media (e.g. addressing notions of 'modernization', 'entrepreneurship', 'citizenship'), and institutional designs (e.g. the role 'modern' business organizations, cooperatives and 'partnership' arrangements) as promoted by the international development agencies. We should then attempt to identify the interest groups, organizations and stakeholders involved in stimulating, manipulating, steering or blocking these flows, and analyse the types and sources of power relations generated.

On the other hand, we use the concept of 'localization' to emphasize the local embeddedness of agrarian development. That is, we aim to examine the complex ways in which local forms of knowledge and organization are constantly being reworked in interaction with
changing external conditions. We also find it useful to reflect upon issues of 're-localization' rather than simply 'localization', since this addresses questions concerning the resurgence of local commitments and the 'reinvention' or creation of new local social forms that emerge as part of the process of globalization. In fact globalization itself can only be meaningful to actors if simultaneously the new experiences it engenders are made meaningful by reference to existing experiences and cultural understandings, but in the process new social meanings and organizing practices are generated. To argue for the reassertion of local organizational and cultural patterns, the reinvention of tradition, and the creation of new types of local attachment is therefore not the same as arguing for a persisting set of local traditions. Rather, these 'reinvented' patterns are generated through the ongoing encounter between different frames of meaning and action. In this way, 're-localization' opens up new theoretical insights into processes of social transformation.

Towards a new agenda for rural research

The foregoing theoretical reflections on change in the late twentieth century underline the need for a new agenda for rural research. The present situation throws up a number of important theoretical and methodological challenges, some new and others a continuation of previous lines of enquiry. A central concern running throughout such a new agenda is, of course, how to analyse the complex sets of relationships that develop between policy discourse and intervention and the ideas and strategic actions of various social actors. It is of course the latter who, in the end, have to grapple with all the exigencies, dilemmas, vulnerabilities and contradictions of the new emphasis placed upon 'market-led' development, ecological modernization and 'sustainability', and the accelerating impact of agricultural science and technology.

Yet, while stressing the significance of an actor perspective, we must also acknowledge that attempting to comprehend these processes requires a major rethinking of certain critical concepts and processes such as agrarian development, state intervention, commoditization, and agricultural knowledge. This, of course, would necessitate a much fuller discussion than can be achieved in a paper of this length. My aim then in this last section is to offer a sketch of some of the more interesting analytical problems we encounter.

An actor-oriented approach to issues of intervention

In previous research at Wageningen we have examined critically several of these key notions, stressing for instance the importance of treating state intervention and agrarian development as socially-constructed and continuously-renegotiated processes (see Long 1988; Long 1989; Long and van der Ploeg 1989; de Vries 1992; Arce 1993). We have also used this constructivist approach for studying the differentiated nature of styles of farming, agrarian enterprise and agricultural work (van der Ploeg 1990; Gonzalez 1994; Torres 1994), as well as for an analysis of the role of knowledge and power in the transformation of small-scale development projects (Villarreal 1994).

The time is now ripe, we believe, to build upon these insights to explore further the interrelations between market processes, government and other forms of planned intervention, and the organization of civil society. As one proceeds, it is important to counterpose theoretical forms of discourse with the actual ways in which different social actors - including here not only male and female producers, agricultural labourers and small-scale entrepreneurs, but also bureaucrats, politicians and planners - conceptualize, deal with, and become agents in the
creation and reproduction of these dynamic and often volatile market, state and community relations.

Crucial to understanding the processes of intervention is the need to identify and come to grips with the strategies that local actors devise for dealing with intervenors so that they might appropriate, manipulate or subvert particular interventions. Similarly, the question of how far people make use of formal state or market frameworks and resources necessarily entails the consideration of how local knowledge, organization and values reshape these 'external' structures. In other words, to what extent do the 'state' and the 'market' become endowed with diverse and localized sets of meanings and practices? The latter include not only the well-trod routines of 'local' culture, but also apparently trivial, contingent and experimental actions that can in no way be seen as simply determined either by planned intervention or by the exigencies of culture. Such a viewpoint we think can offer new insights into the interpretation and analysis of neo-liberal policies, theories, and practices that go beyond the common tendency to explore them solely from a macro-economic or macro-political angle.

Differentiated nature of agrarian structures and interface networks

In order to accomplish this, we need to reconsider the concept of 'agrarian structure'. This has most frequently been used heuristically to identify the set of technical, natural resource and production factors involved in a particular farming system and to depict how wider legal, political, economic and spatial relationships fashion its reproduction. Rather less attention has been placed upon explaining the diversity of farming styles and enterprise types that are contained within such a system. Nor is there much detailed research on precisely how local producers and other actors are tied into more global actor-networks.

These networks form part of complex food chains that link producers to traders, state agencies, transnationals, supermarket businesses, agricultural input suppliers, research enterprises, and eventually the consumers of the products. Each producer or group of producers is in effect part of an interface network which integrates the producer to his/her immediate farming environment composed of a series of actors involved in input and output service activities. Such interface networks take many different forms: some are built upon personal networks and commitments, whilst others entail membership of officially recognized organizations such as cooperatives, farmers' associations or water-users' organizations (see Long 1989; Hawkins 1991). Hence the ways in which the producer and his/her counterpart actors construct these social arrangements will vary significantly, thus shaping the organizing practices of the farmer and his/her farm enterprise. Systematic study of interface networks within particular farming populations affords a better understanding of the differentiated nature of particular agrarian structures. This will provide additional insights into the heterogeneity of farming styles and economic practice.

Food chains contain within them many other arenas within which commodity and non-commodity values are contested, negotiated and realised. Although often remote from the site of production, these arenas are also important for understanding farming styles, interface networks and agrarian structure. Shifts in consumer tastes, technology development, and transnational or supermarket strategies set off a whole series of repercussions that can significantly affect farm decision-making. They may also have a disequilibrating effect on existing agrarian social relations, even to the extent of contributing to the downfall of key political groups and alliances within a region.
It is crucial, therefore, that the analysis of agrarian structures includes not only those forms of organization that emerge from the struggles that take place between different interest groups within the regional setting, but also those ordering and organizing processes that arise from the ways in which farmers and other actors are bound into more global actor-networks. The concept of agrarian structure is essentially a simplifying device for coming to grips with these multiple practices of agrarian life. Agrarian change evolves in the context of particular types of regional settings and identities and it is important to develop an analytical framework for understanding the patterns that emerge. But in so doing, one must avoid accepting uncritically the regional definitions and assumptions of administrators, planners and politicians. The lifeworlds of farmers and other actors are not confined to the spatial and strategic options promoted by policy makers even when these conceptions acquire a 'reality' as powerful instruments for allocating resources and for defining the discourse of policy and analysis.

Technologies and organizing practices of government

We also need some concept of 'government' which concentrates upon the multifarious ways in which the state, through its various development programmes and organizational structures, attempts to control territory and people, and how this relates to non-state modes of control and regulation at both local and supranational levels. Although there is a burgeoning theoretical literature on social regulation in market, quasi-market, state and other institutional domains, there remains a dearth of detailed empirical studies exploring issues of 'governability'. One recent contribution draws upon Foucault's notion of 'technologies of government' to emphasize that we need to give more attention to the indirect mechanisms that link the conduct of individuals and organizations to political projects of others through 'action at a distance' (Miller and Rose 1990). The authors illustrate this by reference to the kinds of control exercised by so-called 'experts' concerned with economic planning or accounting practices that render certain things and people amenable to inscription and calculation. These new technologies (along with various other management, marketing, advertising and communicational methods) make up a concerted programme for promoting state policies geared to 'educating citizens in techniques for governing themselves'. Hence political authorities no longer seek to govern directly by putting as many of their own people on the ground as possible - everywhere state bureaucracies are being cut back - but rather to reinforce self-regulating processes among their subjects. Self-regulation, of course, constitutes a key objective of neo-liberal policies, not so much 'deregulation' as is often argued.

The role played by these 'technologies of government' could be fruitfully extended to cover non-state bodies such as the World Bank which draws upon a large pool of experts to assist in the promotion of programmes of structural adjustment and 'good governance', as well as to various private enterprise initiatives aimed at encouraging competitiveness and entrepreneurship. We might also apply these insights in the field of rural development to the study of agricultural extension, and research and technology development programmes.

One shortcoming of this approach, however, is its emphasis on the part played by language and the discourse of experts. This view needs complementing by examining how discourses are deployed in particular social arenas, and by giving more attention to issues of strategy and social practice. Clearly the meaning and impact of particular arguments or images depend heavily on who is communicating to whom and on how the message is conveyed and received or transformed.
These dimensions can only be adequately explored by developing appropriate ethnographic methods for doing so. We need, that is, to document carefully how particular government officials, experts and professionals draw upon different conceptions of the functions of the state to legitimize their activities and task definitions, creating, for instance, images of the state as ‘protector’, ‘arbitrator’, ‘facilitator’, ‘investor’, ‘judge’ or ‘cajoler’. Attention must also be directed towards understanding how government policy concretely affects the lives and life-chances of agrarian populations and how, in turn, the character of the government and its policies are affected, and sometimes transformed, by the actions of rural peoples. We must at all costs avoid a reification of state institutions and actions, in the sense of attributing to them an ‘internal logic’ or a fixed rationality. Though, having said this, we must also recognise that images and ideologies of the state clearly shape the attitudes and guide the actions of all those individuals involved in or affected by the activities of state organizations.

Understanding issues of intervention and regulatory practice entails developing a methodology for studying administrative processes and the work and strategies of bureaucrats, especially in respect to the bottom-end of the agricultural bureaucracy. Such an analysis should look at problems of access to and rationing of services, as well as at the types of labelling (e.g. of target groups, or of state ‘functions’ etc.) practised by administrative, planning and technical personnel. We also need to refine our understanding of organizational styles and the transformation of policy that occurs during implementation.

These dimensions can be integrated into a framework of studies dealing with rural development ‘interface’ (Long 1989). Interface studies are essentially concerned with the analysis of discontinuities in social life. Such discontinuities imply discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power, and typically occur at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds or social domains intersect. More concretely, they depict social contexts wherein social relations become orientated towards the problem of devising ways of ‘bridging’, accommodating to, or struggling against other persons’ social and cognitive worlds. One such critical point of intersection is, of course, where government officers or representatives of transnationals encounter various local actors and institutions (for further discussion of the concept of interface and how to place it theoretically, see de Vries 1992, Chapter 5, ‘A Theoretical Interlude’).

Social differentiation, social identities and commoditization processes

A new agenda for rural research would also necessitate developing new insights into social differentiation among rural populations, but, unlike much previous work on this topic which concentrates largely on class dimensions, greater attention (as already evident from the literature) should be accorded to issues of age, gender, and ethnicity. Research should focus particularly on questions concerning the formation and transformation of social identities that arise in part from the above social differences. This implies addressing issues concerning the negotiation and struggle over self images, and analysing the interplay of discursive practices whereby the behaviour and perceptions of particular actors are shaped by how others ascribe social meanings to them, and by whether or not they themselves embrace or disown these. These processes generate certain types of power relations and establish the relevance or otherwise of specific normative frameworks. They are likely also to reveal the frailty of authority and the ambiguity of status ascriptions.

Far from being remote from issues of agrarian development, these dimensions become central to the changes taking place. For example, it has become commonplace to assume that
with increased commoditization the social identities of people and groups are fundamentally transformed, although in fact relatively little detailed ethnographic research has been conducted on this topic (Taussig 1980 is somewhat of an exception but adopts a political economy position). Given the kinds of globalizing processes that we now face, which draw people into different social worlds - many of which are 'imagined' rather than directly experienced - it seems highly relevant once again to tackle such dimensions.

Types and levels of commoditization and 'externalization' (i.e. the delegation of production and reproduction functions to external bodies) affect the scale and specialization of production, the degrees of capitalization and styles of enterprise management. In the contemporary scene, as agribusiness and food industries compete for increased shares of the market, so they become more sensitive to the differential and localized organization of agricultural production, whilst at the same time often attempting to commoditize peasant labour through new forms of temporary labour and contract farming. These changes generate the opening up of different 'action spaces' for farmers and peasants and can lead to the growing 'opting out' of some farmers from certain styles of farming.

Linked to this issue is the interrelation of 'commoditized' and 'non-commoditized' relationships in agriculture. Many theories of agrarian development simply assume that the autonomy and functioning of the peasant farm is undermined by the extension of commodity relations, but the empirical evidence shows the matter to be much more complex. This issue merits special attention since commoditization and externalization only become real in their consequences when introduced and translated by specific actors (including here not only farmers but also others such as traders, bureaucrats and politicians). It is necessary therefore to analyse closely how farmers and householders deal with these problematic situations and develop their own 'livelihood projects'. Moreover, since farmer- or householder-initiated strategies draw upon and may reshape socio-cultural resources and identities, it becomes important to introduce into this type of research an appreciation of how particular cultural repertoires and social organizational resources can create or constrain choice.

The social construction of local and scientific knowledge

One way in which the new agenda should take up these cultural dimensions is through the study of agricultural knowledge. This type of work can draw upon the sociology of knowledge and on cognitive anthropology to analyse how farmers or other relevant actors generate, reproduce, transmit and transform knowledge relating to agricultural practice. Such studies focus, in part, on the schemes of classification used by farmers for coordinating production and reproduction tasks and for guiding their farm decisions on technology, investment, on labour mobilization. They also bring out differences based on the type and scale of enterprise, as well as differences by age and gender. In the same way, we should be interested in identifying the conceptual schemata of agricultural scientists or extensionists when dealing with farming matters. Exposing the underlying assumptions and rationales of these various bodies of knowledge and their bases for reproduction (e.g. the institutions and interactional networks that function to maintain them) reveals the points at which the conceptual models and expectations of the different actors coincide or collide. Through this one can learn a lot about the ideational impact of new technologies or the incorporative power of existing local cultural models.

More recently, the sociology of knowledge has embraced a more robust social constructivist perspective which provides fresh insights into how 'expert' and everyday forms of knowledge relate to development processes. Such a perspective takes full cognisance of social actors, their
values and understandings in the construction of knowledge, and in the scientific design for alternative or competing 'projects of society'. It also takes a stand against treating science and everyday knowledge as being ontologically different.

Hence the demystification of science through the ethnographic study of scientific practice and everyday knowledge (in this case, we are interested in agricultural types) brings into focus a whole new set of images and representations of how the social/scientific world is constructed and organized. The creation and transformation of knowledge, we argue, can only effectively be studied and analysed through an appreciation of how knowledgeable and capable actors - whether peasants, bureaucrats or scientists - build bridges and manage critical knowledge interfaces between their diverse life-worlds (Arce and Long 1987, and Long and Villarreal 1993). This requires giving close attention to the practices of everyday social life, involving actor strategies, manoeuvres, discourses, speech games, and struggles over social identity, since only in this way can one tease out the intricacies of how knowledge is internalized, used and reconstructed. Such an actor-oriented perspective helps us to go beyond earlier dichotomised representations that overstate the differences between the nature and application of modern science and forms of local knowledge.

Understanding the encounters between various types of knowledge and ideology is central to the analysis of rural development. The interactions between government or outside agencies involved in implementing particular development programmes and the so-called recipients or farming population cannot be adequately understood through the use of generalised conceptions such as 'state-peasant relations' or by resorting to normative concepts such as 'local participation'. These interactions must be analyzed as part of the ongoing processes of negotiation, adaptation and transfer of meaning that take place between the specific actors concerned. Interface analysis provides a methodology for doing this. This is a difficult research topic but one which is central to understanding the intended and unintended results of planned intervention carried out 'from above' by public authorities or development agencies or initiated 'from below' by local interests.

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Norman Long 10th May 1994