

Chapter One

Introduction: Struggling with “World Market Integration”

It has become a familiar scene in Densu Valley, Aborobe district, southern Ghana: Trucks piled with fresh pineapples struggle through the rough rural terrain, making their way to the nearby processing facility of a multinational agribusiness company. Upon arrival, the fruits are sliced and packed, and flown “fresh from farm” and “just-in-time” to retailers in Europe, where an affluent and quality-conscious urban clientele would buy the little 200 g packages of pineapple chunks, making the farmers distant participants in the convenience food revolution.

For some time now, Densu Valley has been one of the new sites of the global agrifood economy. In the past, many farmers in the valley – until the 1950s a major cocoa-growing area, when all the plants were destroyed by disease – had mainly been involved in food crop production or had left to seek their fortunes in Ghana’s sprawling cities, but it was in the late 1980s that a much more lucrative window of business opportunity opened. With European consumers hungry for fresh pineapples, some farmers and pioneer exporters ventured into pineapple production, which subsequently took off on a broad scale from the early 1990s onwards. However, “the market” was frequently deceitful, shaped by mistrust and uncertainty, with both exporters and farmers often being cheated by one another or by buyers in distant Europe, in a trade that was mainly organized around volatile spot-market relations. With the arrival of the exporter–processor Ton:go Fruits¹ (TF) in the late 1990s, times seemed to change for a few chosen ones. Through its operations, some farmers were integrated into more tightly regulated, dynamic, and demanding supply chains via more solid contractual arrangements. Under close supervision of the company’s

agronomists and through its financial support, the farmers were introduced to the world of European retailers, with its demands for food safety, quality, freshness, supply chain management. Many farmers fared well with the just-in-time model. Their new riches materialized through the opening of shops and the construction of houses in the area, symbolizing the relative fortunes that a new class of “big-time farmers” (as they are known locally) had acquired through the blessings of international trade.

Depending on one’s theoretical inclination, the integration of Densu Valley farmers into agrobusiness supply chains may be seen through very different prisms. In their seminal work *Living under Contract*, Little and Watts (1994) conceived of the “world market integration” of farmers in the Global South through specific contractual relations with (often large) agribusiness companies as an industrial appropriation of selected rural activities, expressive of a new global regime of capital accumulation based on “global fresh” and the penetration of new agrarian frontiers (see also Friedmann 1993). In the same book, Watts (1994) reflected extensively and with impressive historical detail upon the social implications of contract farming in the rural South,² arguing that through such a mode of market integration “[n]ominally independent growers retain the illusion of autonomy but have become in practice what Lenin called propertied proletarians, workers cultivating company crops on private allotments” (ibid.: 64). Watts’ argument can be placed in a lineage with other political economy texts that have critically discussed how agribusiness operates and takes control over production in the Global South, and what role smallholder farmers (or “peasants”) play in a globalized agrifood economy (Feder 1976; Bernstein 2010).

Agrarian political economy’s critical stance towards “world market integration” and global capitalism more generally can be contrasted to the position of neoclassical economics and the policy descriptions derived from it. From the viewpoint of the World Bank economists who in the 1980s and 1990s urged the Ghanaian government to liberalize markets, attract foreign direct investments (FDI), and embrace export promotion strategies, the case of TF and its farmers might have been considered as nothing less than a success story. From the 1980s onward, the World Bank singled out the promotion of non-traditional exports (NTEs) as a new panacea for development, as prices for traditional commodities such as cocoa, coffee, and sugar were declining. As part of a new paradigm advocating “private-sector development with an emphasis on export-led growth, monetary and fiscal reform, and government deregulation in agricultural production and marketing” (Little & Dolan 2000: 63), countries like Ghana were promised a rosy future, given their comparative advantage with regard to land, labor, climate and proximity to European markets. As the World Bank (1993: 40) noted back then, “[a]ccelerated growth is predicated on a rapid integration of the Ghanaian economy into world markets, and Ghana has a comparative advantage in horticulture and (potentially) fruit and vegetable processing industries.”

Indeed, TF invested in Ghana owing to the country’s comparative advantages and a range of tax incentives the structurally adjusted Ghanaian state provided to foreign investors under a free zone model promoted by the World Bank – which some may consider ostensible proof that export promotion policies can attract precious FDI. The case also seems to provide striking evidence that the diversification of Ghana’s

economy, which since colonial times had relied upon the export of cocoa, minerals, and timber, is feasible. TF moved beyond the mere export of crude fruits by adding local value through processing, generating employment and transferring skills and knowledge to workers and suppliers alike. In this regard, the company also seems to have helped evade the trap of crude (low-value) exports, the yoke under which most export-oriented economies across sub-Saharan Africa had found themselves since colonial times.

Despite their different theoretical inclination and treatment of the consequences of "world market integration", the agrarian political economy and neoclassical take on markets do share a striking commonality. Implicitly, they both render the global market an "organismic totality" (Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996]: 98). Through scholarly abstraction, an essential, absolute economic entity with a self-evident quality is created.³ In these narratives, "the market" to varying degrees either features as a grand destructive or grand empowering force (and thus either as an object of critique or glorification), but it is rarely made an object of discussion in itself. While many critical political economy approaches often treat markets, and capitalism more generally, as abstract machines whose "dominance is guaranteed by a logic of profitability, a telos of expansion, an imperative of accumulation, a structure of ownership and control, or some other quality of feature [...]" (Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996]: 15), neoclassical economics in its various disguises does so by naturalizing and dehistoricizing them (see also Barnes 2005). By abstracting markets, these readings often unintentionally join tracks by black-boxing how markets (and "capital" more generally) come into being *practically*. Far from natural, smooth, or straightforward, this is often a contested, interrupted, and precarious process.

Many hundred miles north of Densu Valley, we encounter another frontier of the global agrifood economy. Since the late 1990s, a company, hereafter referred to as Organic Fruits Ltd. (OFL), has tried to create a market for organic mangoes in northern Ghana, a region where farmers had neither grown trees for export, nor trees under contract before. Where subsistence farming based on a slash and burn system is still the dominant mode of production, where rural land is largely held as a communal property, and daily life is deeply entangled with customary and religious values and forms of authority, market-making becomes a complex project. Ghana's north has always been marked by high incidences of poverty and food insecurity, having fared less well during Ghana's economic recovery that took shape in the 1980s. Having been structurally "underdeveloped" since colonial times, it has largely served as a labor reservoir for the cocoa, mining and urban economies in the country's south. A Ghanaian geographer attuned to critical political economy once described it as "a marginal, peripheral and 'distant' rural space in the context of capital accumulation" (Songsore 1989; cited in Kasanga 1995: 221). Choosing a different wording, even more liberal economists subscribe to such a diagnosis, arguing that the "high incidence of poverty in northern Ghana is [...] attributed to exclusion from trade" (Al-Hassan & Diao 2007: 5).

In both discourses on the developmental condition of northern Ghana, categories such as "marginal," "peripheral," "distant," and "excluded" are usually based on the idea that the market has a boundary, which, according to Mitchell (2007: 246–247),

“is thought to separate the market from the large areas of material activity and resources that seem to exist beyond its limit. For countries outside the West, the idea of a boundary provides a common way not just to think about these places but to diagnose their problems and design appropriate remedies.” Such remedies have become increasingly popular and manifest themselves in ambitious programs for “market integration” and “value chain development.” For some time now, international development players and many African governments’ ministries for agriculture, industry, and trade have embraced a market-oriented development agenda that no longer ties smoothly into the free-markets approach of the Washington Consensus era, as it wants to actively design and shape markets through reengineering economic relations and practices.

Global value chains and “inclusive markets” are now heralded as harbingers of growth if well designed, having the power to bring “development” to places “disconnected” from the global space of flows (McMichael 2013; Neilson 2014). Ghana has become a prominent laboratory for these new tools of economic engineering, which often aim at modernizing and professionalizing farming practices as a by-product. Although many of these efforts have targeted regions in Ghana’s south in the past, more recently “excluded” populations in Ghana’s north have been chosen for “market integration.” But these populations are not naturally “outside” the market. Market integration programs need this “outside” as a “supplementary constitutive other” (Boeckler 2005: 53) to “help to extend the rules of the market into these other spaces” (Mitchell 2007: 247). These “other spaces,” perceived to lie “outside” an already-existing market, enter orthodox economic knowledge and imaginations as “absent objects” (Mbembe 2001: 241) always set in relation to the full presence of “the market” or associated categories such as “capitalism,” “modernity,” and “development.” Such differences not only inscribe qualitative, spatial, and temporal differences between places and people, and thereby justify interventions, but they also convey the idea that “the market” exists independently as a kind of transcendental being to which one could become closely connected. Indeed, extending the blessings of the market has been the goal of OFL’s investment. The company undertook the ambitious effort of contracting almost 1,300 farmers in what so far has been one of the largest private investments in the agricultural sector in northern Ghana. The farmers are pre-financed through a contract arrangement, under which OFL provides inputs and services to farmers on a credit basis, while farmers provide the land and labor for the production of mangoes, which are finally marketed both locally and overseas by the company.

This book is about the two frontier regions introduced earlier. Taking the evolution of the aforesaid two agrobusiness–outgrower complexes as vantage points, its objective is to advance broader arguments about market-oriented transformations in Ghana’s agricultural sector and the rural South more generally. It is a story about firm managers and farmers who struggle to become part of, position themselves in, and make a living from global agrifood markets, which have been undergoing profound changes since the 1990s: a surging demand for fresh fruits and vegetables in the Global North; the rise of retailers, standards, and certification schemes; the time–space compression of supply chains through the power of logistics; and the

consolidation of a neoliberal trade and development architecture have all altered the geography of the global agrifood economy (McMichael & Friedmann 2007). One of the most striking markers of market restructuring in North–South trade has been the rising importance of high-value horticultural exports, such as the pineapples and mangoes. But the issue goes far beyond fruits; products and assortments such as baby vegetable mixes or flower bouquets, barely known to consumers in the North just a decade ago, have become “destination goods” (Dolan & Humphrey 2004) and a core of large retailers’ strategies to effectively enroll consumers by ensuring “permanent global summer time” (Blythman; cited in Dicken 2011: 271). Their demand has led to an expansion of global supply chains into new frontiers such as Densu Valley and northern Ghana, where labor and nature can be turned into resources. In addition, large agribusiness enterprises, often of foreign origin and in alliance with other market-makers such as governments or international development organizations, have been cooperating with local farmers through diverse institutional arrangements, integrating different people, modes of production, and nature(s) in distinctively new ways into global market architectures.

This book will show that there is neither something natural, nor something evolutionary or inevitable, about global market connections. Markets do not simply fall out of thin air if the environment is “enabled,” as development organizations frequently claim, nor do they befall and subjugate local actors as inexorable global forces that are driven by some transhistorical law of capital accumulation, as more structuralist critiques of economic globalization or agrarian political economy usually imagine (Busch & Juska 1997). Today’s global fresh produce markets, like all markets, do not reside outside the ongoing practices of market subjects, which are themselves effects of *particular* conditions that need to be *worked* upon. Humans not only have to become particular types of subjects in the very first place, but they also have to solve a range of sociotechnical puzzles in order to access, maintain, and/or expand markets. With regard to contemporary global agrifood chains, this comprises the transformation of nature into market goods, the setting of quality standards, the implementation of different production technologies, the calculation of prices, the organization of logistics, and the coordination of transactions in often uncertain environments, to name just a few. TF had to overcome such very *concrete* (but by no means “natural”) “problems” of market-making, but how did all this work out? How did the company create and extend the connections sustaining its markets? What organizational forms, resources, technologies, strategies, and practices were central to this? How were these connections maintained across space and time amid competitive and regulatory dynamics, and what impact did this have on local farmers and the wider regional economy?

Such sociotechnical puzzles of market-making seem to be even more complex in the case of the organic mango outgrower scheme in northern Ghana. Although OFL had to solve similar market-making problems as TF, the complexity of constructing markets for organic mangoes revolves around one peculiar “problem”: how to integrate farmers into the organic agrifood market who had never been exposed to its workings before? In each case, it will become clear that the global agrifood markets scrutinized did not simply extend into new territory, but came into being as effects of

a process during which labor, nature, and the worth of goods were as much worked upon as they were contested. We often forget the contested nature of the commodity form and the manifold associations that may enable and disable it, for markets are not only mechanisms of connection and disconnection, but also of “forgetting” (Tsing 2008: 27). Global agrifood markets are no exception. When consumers finally buy the neatly packaged fruits from Ghana, vegetables from Kenya or cut flowers from Ethiopia, the reconfigurations, struggles and controversies that shaped their production are no longer visible.

It is against this backdrop that this book seeks to unmake how agri-export markets are assembled as sociotechnical arrangements, but it also seeks to unmake how these are unmade through moments of crisis, disruption and resistance. It thereby critically challenges the fetishization and (ahistorical) normalization of markets in their various disguises in the realm of agrarian development. This is an important political exercise as the contemporary governmental desire to link farmers to global agrifood markets often falls short of acknowledging the risks, disappointments, exclusions, and displacements that come with the integration into global agrifood chains, whose rules of the game are made in particular places. In order to do so, we have to unpack the ontologies and epistemologies that underlie the dominant concepts being used to render intelligible the workings of the global economy.

Rethinking Global Connections

To be fair, the study of the dynamic reconfiguration of the global agrifood economy has advanced since Watts’ political economy account of the new spatial fixes reshaping global agrarian capitalism. He later clearly distanced himself from more structuralist approaches to the global agrifood economy (Goodman & Watts 1997). More fine-grained approaches such as global commodity or global value chain analysis have emerged over the last two decades with the aim of unpacking the complexities of global trade relations. Rooted in world-systems analysis and the dependency tradition, global commodity chain (GCC) analyses have contributed to our understanding of how households, capital, commodities, firms, institutions, and places are functionally integrated in spatially dispersed production and distribution networks within an increasingly complex global division of labor (Gereffi 1994). The GCC approach has helped us in theorizing and researching the global network economy in different ways, before later morphing into the global value chain (GVC) framework (see Gereffi et al. 2001), which departed in both conceptual and empirical terms from the meso-level foci of the GCC approach (Bair 2005). Both frameworks have been widely applied to North–South agrifood relations, often with a focus on African farms and firms (see, e.g., Dolan & Humphrey 2004; Gibbon & Ponte 2005; Ouma 2010). Despite the crucial insights that the “chain literature” has provided into the inner workings of the global agrifood economy, it has often focused on a rather narrow set of theoretical and empirical issues: the organization and governance of agrifood chains, questions of economic upgrading, and the re-regulation of chains by private standards (which are increasingly being proliferated in the global economy). Although

these, alongside labor struggles (Selywn 2011), dynamics of "social upgrading" (Barrientos et al. 2011), and the environmental and livelihood impacts of global agrifood chains (Neilson & Pritchard 2009) remain important issues to be critically interrogated, the existing chain literature often tells us little about how global economic connections come into being, how they are assembled practically by different actors, and what such chains look like "from below" or even "from within." And while we should ask ourselves why and how managers, farmers or workers become part of global markets, there is an urgent need to overcome the "inclusionary bias" (Bair & Werner 2011a: 989) of the chain literature and likewise ask why markets break down, people lose faith in them or are actively being expelled from them.

The underlying problem here, however, is not only one of empirical focus. Although chain approaches differ in important ways from neoclassical or structuralist views on trade, they partly display a similar kind of ostensive sociology (Latour 1986), privileging entities such as "global markets," "GCCs," or "GVCs" over the multiple relations, materially entangled practices, and diverse bodies of knowledge that make them up. This point has been repeatedly made by the global production networks (GPN) school, which extensively draws on relational and poststructuralist takes on economic processes in economic sociology and geography (Dicken et al. 2001; Henderson et al. 2002; Hess 2004). Indeed, many scholars working in the chain tradition predominantly advance an absolute, essentialized and overcoordinated understanding of global supply chains without considering the often precarious and contested nature of these connections across geographical, material, social, and institutional differences, and the practical work that sustains them. In particular, the now dominant variant of the approach that borrows from *New Institutional Economics* (NIE) (Williamson 1979) frequently treats markets as preconfigured and essential coordination mechanisms among other "non-market" governance forms such as hierarchies or networks (Gereffi et al. 2005) rather than as something that is socially constructed in the first place. A primordial notion of markets indeed has deeper ontological and epistemological roots in the social sciences more generally. In their quest for conceptual order and purity, economists, sociologists and geographers have often mobilized a final vocabulary such as "the market," "the firm," "the commodity," "value," "capital," or "price," which serve as stable and unquestioned artifacts of explanation that exist *a priori*. Providing the researcher with a sense of security that she can mirror her object of analysis (Rorty 1979; Barnes 2001), these orders and the final vocabulary that sustains them are often blind to the messy actualities of economic practice, the myriad of connections that finally make up seemingly stable "economic" entities, and the very (im)possibilities that shape this process.

But there is another reason why this literature has largely left untouched certain processes that are nevertheless central to the making of global agrifood economy: much of the GCC and GVC literature has embraced a rather top-down notion of order, which is considered to be produced by particular forms of governance, executed by powerful actors such as "lead firms" (e.g., large retailers, branded marketers and agribusiness companies) (Coe et al. 2008). Although we should not downplay the "rule-governed structure" (Friedmann 1993: 30–31) of the global agrifood economy, including its underlying dynamics of supranational and state regulation, corporate

power, and human and environmental exploitation, the popular top-down notion of order employed in GCC/GVC studies (and, indeed, much of agrarian political economy literature more generally) often produces too crude an account to capture the more fine-grained “microphysical” processes through which particular market orders are established on the ground (for exceptions, see Loconto 2010; Raj-Reichert 2013). Besides asking what GCCs and GVCs are, how they are governed, and how they impact local firms, farms, and workers, it is likewise fruitful to explore how they become *effective* in particular places within particular historical conjunctures. Such a perspective raises a range of questions usually not addressed (or at least under-researched) by scholars working in the GCC, GVC, and GPN traditions: What about the inner life of organizations and commodities? How are prices constructed in GCCs? How are ordinary fruits turned into goods of the retail market? How does the “outgrower” or “supplier,” a new kind of subjectivity in itself, come into being, and how is he or she being worked upon? How is the complexity of economic life coordinated across spatial, material, and social differences – differences that often do not exist *a priori*? How do economic models of global connection structure the very organization and practical realization of markets?

Finally, we should ask ourselves whether it is appropriate to fully substitute “chains” and “networks” for “markets” at a time when economy, society, and even nature are all about *markets*, and when market-led development has become a new panacea? This is a deeply political question, resting on a particular notion of critique. While ideas about the societal impact and reach of markets have remained contested throughout history (see, e.g., Polanyi 2001 [1944]; Swedberg 2005), the rise of neo-liberalism from the late 1970s onwards, and the demise of politico-economic alternatives after the fall of state socialism in various countries, have led to a new absolutization and ontologization of markets. These processes have not only deeper roots in the history of modern economic thought, but have also been reified in the language and practice of market-fetishizing politics. Such market fetishism manifests itself in the typical tropes often mobilized in a variety of different settings. In an attempt to justify political decisions and projects of economy-making, economists, planners, business people, and politicians alike often uphold notions that “the market” demands, empowers, determines, is nervous, promises, connects, clears, allocates, or even loses trust in a certain country, as we could witness for the ongoing Euro crisis. “The market” frequently acts as an unquestioned referential meta-category, as a final vocabulary in a Rortyan sense, according to which decisions are justified.

The realm of development provides one of the most striking examples. For instance, two major international development organizations note in their manual on “making markets work for the poor” (M4P) – a new paradigm of development that is currently being globalized alongside similar ones such as the value chain approach – that “there’s little point being against markets *per se*. Like breathing air, they’re there” ([italics in original] Sen; cited in DFID & SDC 2008: 9). More generally, in its most abstract form, as an efficient mechanism for allocating scarce resources based on the principle of supply and demand, “the market” seems to have become a concept so familiar that its mere existence and nature are taken for granted often in such powerful ways that it is not only difficult to imagine alternatives, but also to demonstrate

what ongoing constructive work actually goes into this seemingly natural and absolute economic formation. As one could witness with the global financial crisis that ensued from 2007/2008 onward, even in times of systemic market failure, the fetishization of "the market" persists.

Against this backdrop, it should become clear that despite the fact that this book is about the construction of agro-exports markets in Ghana, a broader scope of analysis and reflection is necessary. I can do nothing but agree with Çalışkan and Callon (2010: 22) when they assert that "[i]f the dynamics of economic markets are to be understood, then they must be placed within the context of broader movements that bring the economic into being." This is an important point, as it is associated with a particular understanding of critique embraced in this book. While the GCC, GVC and GPN literature, as well as economic sociology and geography accounts of markets, more generally often advance an *ipso facto* critique (Castree 2003: 291), arguing that one approach/discipline or another (especially economics) does not represent "the economic" correctly, my project is more closely aligned with Foucault's take on critique, who understands it as a "historical interrogation of the conditions of possibility of things being as they are" (Elden 2010: 800).

Grounding Commodity Chains: Geographies of Marketization

To come to terms with the expansion of global market relations through the work of a variety of market-makers (ranging from businesses and traditional authorities to NGOs and governments), I shall draw on what has been called the "social studies of economization and marketization" (SSEM)⁴ (Callon 1998a; Çalışkan & Callon 2009, 2010). Taking inspiration from the social studies of science and technology and their constructionist take on "scientific facts," as well as its intellectual offspring, actor-network-theory (ANT), scholars in this field argue that economic facts like "the economy" or markets can be considered outcomes of historically variegated processes of economization. In this book, the latter refers to all the processes that constitute the "behaviors, organizations, institutions, and objects which are tentatively and often controversially qualified as "economic" by experts and lay persons" (Çalışkan & Callon 2009: 370).

Thus, I understand marketization as a particular but now dominant form of economization, denoting either the creation of new market relations around new goods, or the reconfiguration of existing markets and goods according to new modalities of valuation and accumulation. The power of this approach is that it helps unsettle both (global) commodity chains and markets as unquestioned entities, providing not only a sympathetic critique of the GCC/GVC/GPN literature, but also challenging the ontologies and epistemologies of modern economics, this "sole science of the market in practice" (Fine & Milonakis 2009: 12). Although markets are at the heart of modern economics and take "center stage in capitalist processes of circulation and exchange, they have rarely been made an object of study" (Berndt & Boeckler 2009: 535; see also Frances et al. 1991; Coase 1988). What instead prevails in the "age of the market" (Lie 1997: 341) is a neoclassical trope, whose bits and

pieces have become part of how many professional and lay economists make sense of economic realities:

The theoretical picture of the market is one of impersonal exchange. [...]. At a given price (or, more precisely, given all prices), individual agents choose how much to supply and how much to demand. These supplies and demands are simply added up; when the prices are such that total supply equals total demand in each market, equilibrium prevails. There is no particular relation between a supplier and a demander; that is, a supplier is indifferent about supplying one demander or another, or vice versa. (Arrow 1998: 94)

This “theoretical picture” is based on the (often implicit) premise of secure property rights over goods, the full availability of information, the homogeneity of goods, full competition, and stable, pre-given preferences of rational individuals in the marketplace. A utilitarian rationality as the exclusive mode of economic action lies at the core of such a research program, which advances an ahistorical picture of particular economic subjectivities.⁵

In contrast, the marketization perspective attunes us to the fact that particular market configurations, economic subjectivities, and goods are outcomes of specific historical struggles. It acknowledges that there are not only many ways to organize and perform “the economy” (Polanyi 2001[1944]; Gibson-Graham 2006 ([1996])), but also many ways to organize and perform markets.⁶ For instance, local markets for fish, and maize markets in Ghana, work according to quite different principles than export-oriented (or extravert?) markets for crops such as pineapples. At the same time, this perspective is sensitive to the power-laden reconfiguration of particular markets in space and time. Many global agricultural markets, for instance, have been reshaped according to a capital-friendly program of marketization, where even the knowledge relevant to production and exchange has been commoditized (Guthman 2007). Such processes are embedded into a range of wider techno-economic struggles, regulatory shifts and the ongoing practices of actors such as retailers, agrobusiness firms and (new) market intermediaries such as certification bodies, who all try to extract profit from agriculture (Amanor 2009; Ouma 2010; McMichael 2013).⁷

The social studies of markets/marketization program has sparked a considerable interest among economic geographers (see, e.g., Berndt & Boeckler 2009, Boeckler & Berndt 2012; Peck 2012), but its full thrust is yet to be explored in both theoretical and empirical terms. Unfortunately, many studies committed to the social studies of markets/marketization program have so far focused on so-called advanced capitalist economies (but see Çalıřkan 2010). However, by confronting this program with the concrete historical and material realities of southern and northern Ghana, I show that marketization is never a straightforward process but one marked by improvisations, controversies, recalcitrances, and crises. In order to imagine marketization as much more frictional than conventional readings, I shall draw on additional insights from earlier ANT work, the *économie des conventions* (EC) (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006 [1991]), and what I call the “anthropology of universals” (Mitchell 2002; Tsing 2005, 2008).⁸ In their own ways, each of the latter approaches sensitizes us to the historical and geographical situatedness of particular practices framed as “economic,” and the

often-skewed ways in which marketization wrestles with or is entangled with other forms of economization. I provide a detailed discussion of the synergies, unacknowledged links, and frictions between these largely more-than-human and anti-essentialist strands of thinking about economies.

In order to underscore the analytical power of the approach developed in this book, it is briefly necessary to situate it in the non-economics social science disciplines, particularly the *New Economic Sociology* (NES), from which the sociology of markets emerged as a more recent intellectual field. Taking inspiration from the work of Polanyi (2001 [1944]), White (1981), and Granovetter (1985), among others (e.g., Weber, Marx, or Simmel), the sociology of markets has become one of the most vibrant frontiers of sociology. Even though there exist some notable internal differences, for instance, with regard to whether one conceives of markets as networks, institutions, or fields (Fligstein 2001; Fourcade 2007; Aspers & Beckett 2008), market sociologists inspired by the NES are unified by a distaste for the neoclassical conceptualization of markets as socially thin, decentralized mechanisms for the efficient allocation of goods and services, with exchange solely being structured by the laws of supply and demand. Starting from the basic premise that there is nothing law-like, natural, self-organized, or spontaneous about markets, they argue that this type of exchange already contains a great deal of social structure:

Market actors have to find one another. Money has to exist to allow market actors to get beyond bartering non-equivalent goods. Actors have to know what the price is. Underlying all exchange is that both buyers and sellers have faith that they will not be cheated. Such faith often implies informal (i.e., personal knowledge of the buyer or seller) and formal mechanisms (i.e., law) that govern exchange. Furthermore, market actors are often organizations, implying that organizational dynamics influence market structures. For sociologists, market exchange implies a whole backdrop of social arrangements that economics does not even begin to hint at. But the sociology of markets goes further than just questioning the institutional embeddedness of an anonymous market. It is prepared to unpack the black boxes of exchange, competition, and production. Sociologists begin by realizing that market actors are involved in day-to-day social relationships with one another, relationships based on trust, friendship, power, and dependence. (Fligstein & Dauter 2007: 113)

The program of the NES-inspired sociology of markets has been highly influential. Except for mainstream economics, there is now a growing consensus in the social sciences that markets are “constructed socially with the help of actors who are inter-linked in dense and extensive webs of social relations” (Berndt & Boeckler 2009: 536). On this basis, social “scientists” have delved into a wide array of phenomena that economists usually undersocialize. Economic geographers, in particular, have taken up many key insights of the NES to study the social embeddedness of economic activities from a territorial and topological perspective (Henderson et al. 2002; Hess 2004; Peck 2005; Grabher 2006), even though they have been somewhat hesitant to engage more comprehensively with its market-oriented offspring (Peck 2012). Taken as a whole, the NES-influenced research program in and beyond sociology offers a more socially grounded take on economic phenomena (firms, markets, inter-firm

linkages, economic agency, etc.) than mainstream economics does. However, it also suffers from a range of shortcomings⁹ that need to be addressed if the question of how marketization takes effect in the new frontier regions of global agrarian capitalism is to be answered:

1. While at least a few market sociologists have addressed the making of new markets (Fligstein 2001; Aspers 2009), they – like many economic geographers – usually disregard the specificities of market constructions and market behavior; they instead dissolve markets by embedding them into networks, institutions, and fields, which then become privileged as analytical categories. But what if “[m]arkets exist and so does rational behavior [...]” (Barber 1995: 389)? Indeed, even the most abstract markets should be understood as truly social (and thus not “disembedded”) entities (Knorr-Cetina & Bruegger 2002). This calls for an approach that takes seriously the spatially variegated social construction of market arrangements and interrogates the specific conditions under which they emerge (Peck 2005). Thereby, the terms *social construction*, *arrangement*, and indeed *the social* itself, have to be put under critical scrutiny (Latour 2005). We have to move beyond the ontological divide that separates the “economic” from the “social” in much of the NES-inspired literature, with the former said to be embedded into the latter (Krippner 2001).
2. NES-inspired works in economic sociology and geography often neglect the powerful and effective role of different bodies of knowledge, including more or less formal economic models (or templates), when they interrogate the architecture of markets. Yet, for many agricultural markets in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa, for instance, economic models have played a crucial part in transforming social, economic, and society–nature relations, be it through the implementation of the macro-economic models which underpinned structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s (McMichael 1998) and the privatization of collective farms in post-socialist Russia in the 1990s (Lindner 2008), or, as we have witnessed more recently, through the global proliferation of micro-economic models such as food safety and quality standards, or supply chain management (SCM) tools. Reconstructing how certain bodies of economic knowledge are not only constitutive of the construction of markets but also become more effective than others becomes an analytical-cum-political project that requires more attention.¹⁰
3. Although some economic sociologists have addressed the question of how markets are made and how they work *in situ* (e.g., Abolafia 1998 on financial markets), they have usually done so from a distance. Yet, as Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger (2002) demonstrate so strikingly in their ethnographic study of trading rooms, or as Elyachar (2005) shows for the making of micro-enterprises in Cairo as part of neoliberal entrepreneurship promotion programs, specific practices are constitutive of markets and have a productive–inventive, reproductive, and reinventive–destructive function, and they must be put under ethnographic scrutiny.

4. While scholars embracing an NES-inspired research program have frequently noted that economic relationships are imbued with politics and power, both are often "rendered contingent and contextual, and, as a result, they are only haphazardly theorized" (Peck 2005: 147). If these are recognized, it is usually in a top-down fashion. The sociology of markets (and, also to a lesser extent much of economic geography) has largely not addressed the more fine-grained, "micro-physical" processes and arrangements that produce market orders and subjectivities *in situ*. This represents a missed opportunity to link up questions of social theory and society-/economy-making more generally (Fourcade 2007). Some economic geographers and sociologists working on global connections provide valuable entry points in this regard (see, e.g., Hughes 2001; Loconto 2010; Ramamurthy 2011; Raj-Reichert 2013), but these are yet to be more explored in relation to a theory of market-making.
5. Different strands of the NES-inspired sociology of markets operate with an over-coordinated notion of order that is grounded in formal and informal institutions and/or shared understandings, which coordinate human actions. However, the notion of an institution as defined by network scholars and neoinstitutionalists seems to be too restricted to describe the spatially variegated arrangements of power, knowledge, rules, material devices, and technologies that make up markets (Callon 2005: 8). From this, it follows that we need to take seriously the socially transformative, redistributive, and stabilizing role material devices play in markets (Pinch & Swedberg 2008). They are central in facilitating the coordination of market activities across space and time, as Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger (2002) demonstrate for the working of financial markets. At the same time, materials not only have an exchange-facilitating role, but they themselves lie at the very heart of exchange as "transformed nature" (Hudson 2008). The "double-materiality" of markets must therefore have a firm place in any study of marketization.
6. Even though economic sociologists and geographers have reworked many of economics' assumptions and categories, they have often shown limited interest in reflecting on how these categories come into being and become effective in both shaping our worldview as researchers as well as the very practical processes of market-making.

Although this book in fact acknowledges many overlapping concerns with both the GCC/GVC/GPN and the sociology of markets literature, the program developed here aims to portray "world market integration" processes as discursive, material, and social all at once. In short, they are about (re)assembling the market social, as an extended reading of Latour (2005) would suggest. By grounding such processes in regions widely underrepresented in economic geography, economic sociology and global political economy (Murphy 2008; Carmody 2011), this book deliberately straddles the divide between economic sociology, anthropology, geography, and "development studies" at large.

Matters of Concern

Given my own ambition to rethink “world market integration”, I first and foremost critically engage with the problems raised earlier by de-centering absolutist and preconfigured readings of global market connections. Instead of either embracing or assuming away “the market” as a final object, the overall goal of this book is to reconstruct how global market connections are being *constructed, ordered, and performed* in concrete places for concrete agro-commodities.

This “how” question will be addressed for the two market-making projects introduced earlier, which in their own right mark two typical frontiers of the global agrifood economy. In addition, they also epitomize the resurgence/refashioning of contract-farming arrangements across Africa, and the Global South more generally (Oya 2012). While in many African countries contract farming was practiced for traditional commodities such as cotton, oil palm, tobacco, tea, or sugar in the early post-colonial period (1960s–1970s), and was promoted by development organizations such as the World Bank or the United Agency for International Development (USAID) as a “dynamic partnership” between small farmers and private capital across the Global South since the late 1970s (Glover & Kusterer 1990; Watts 1994),¹¹ it has recently been refashioned in development discourse as a “win-win tool” to facilitate the market integration of smallholder farmers into highly demanding retail markets. This discourse maintains that by linking farmers to agribusiness companies through contractual arrangements, they would benefit from market access, technical expertise, and financial support provided by contracting companies, which would enjoy a stable supply of products at the right time and quality.

The rise of new commodity spaces in Ghana fits well into this discourse. Thus, my case studies by no means stand alone but must be situated into the wider experimental space of Ghana’s agricultural sector, which over the past decade has experienced a series of new market-making projects for fresh fruits such as pineapples, bananas, mangoes, and citrus, and also for staples such as maize. Agribusiness companies of different sizes and origin, large Northern retailers, development organizations, certification bodies, governments, consultants, industry associations, farmers, and traditional authorities to varying degrees have been central actors in these market-making projects. At the same time, at least the fresh fruits subsector has also experienced significant restructuring due to regulatory and structural changes in global agrifood markets. While export-oriented horticulture contributes little to Ghana’s overall agricultural GDP in comparison to staple crops such as maize or traditional export crops such as cocoa, my case studies do offer something to rethink the remaking of agriculture and the (Ghanaian) economy more generally.

As introduced earlier, my first case study focuses on the operations of OFL. It is a telling case because it is representative of a nucleus–outgrower model, where a large company organizes farmers as “outgrowers” under a long-term contractual arrangement, seasonally serving the organic mango market. At the same time, farmers are supported through a long-term-credit scheme and technical services that should allow for the optimal production of mangoes.

The second case study revolves around the operations of TF and was selected because it is representative of a centralized "hub-and-spoke model" of agribusiness organization, whereby a processor–exporter links up with a pool of small-, medium-, and large-scale suppliers, serving highly demanding retail markets on a just-in-time basis throughout the year with a variety of tropical fruits products. The focus here is on the market segment for fresh pineapples and the farmers supplying them. Located in Ghana's coastal savannah zone, the case study area has experienced rapid institutional, economic, environmental, and cultural transformations over the past decades.

These contextual factors differentiate this case study from the mango project, which is embedded into the distinct institutional, social, ecological, and infrastructural setting of northern Ghana. Historically, southern Ghana has been shaped by processes of commodification since the early 19th century (first through the extension of export-oriented palm oil production and later through cocoa production). Ghana's north, on the contrary, has a different history of land administration and economy-making. Consequently, the commodification of land and labor in the north has progressed far less than in Ghana's south. Indeed, many farmers in northern Ghana have never been exposed to the workings of the "world market" as tree farmers. Despite these differences, both case studies do not, however, simply stand for themselves, but in fact will serve as entry points for critically reflecting upon more general issues pertinent to the workings of the global economy. To me, they are catalysts, not cameras.

The Practical Means of Marketization

In regard to both case studies, I am specifically interested in the "practical means" (Latour 2005: 66) that co-produce markets: How is nature being turned into goods for the "world market"? What organizational forms, subjectivities, tactics/strategies, material devices, practices, and ways of knowing are being mobilized to construct and maintain such market connections? How are specific market encounters being organized, and how are these being stabilized/destabilized in the course of everyday market practice? An overall interest lies in the question of which new forms of South–North connection and disconnection are being established through assembling and performing export markets. Because I am interested in the new forms of (dis-) connection that emerge from the latter, I shall put under ethnographic scrutiny the new alignments of power, knowledge, and materially entangled practices that lie at the heart of new export market orders. In this regard, it should be noted that while the traditional themes of agrarian political economy – economic impact, social differentiation (including the dimensions of "citizenship," "ethnicity," "age," and "gender") and agrarian change are still important points of reference when dealing with processes of "world market integration" (see, e.g., Amanor 2010a; Oya 2012; Ramamurthy 2011; Selwyn 2012), I am more specifically interested in *how* markets, and for that matter "the social" itself, are being assembled through the ongoing practices of market agents and *how* they become effective (or not), rather than only focusing on what (re)distributive

or stratifying effects they bring with them. Thus, this book aims to reconstruct the quotidian and interdependent making of organizations (the agribusiness–outgrower complex), markets, and the “economy” at large.

Marketization as Proliferation

Studying how the intricate geographies of global capitalism come into being, however, is not devoid of theoretical, ontological, epistemological, and methodological challenges for which we have to be sensitized. This is probably best done in Anna Tsing’s *Friction*, a remarkable ethnographic study of the penetration of the Indonesian rainforest by Japanese–Korean “capital” (Tsing 2005). She reminds us that conceiving of markets or capitalism in dynamic unfolding relations rather than mere substances must defy any essentialism, and that processes of “world market integration” are usually much messier *in practice* than one might think. Speaking with Tsing, universals such as markets or commodity chains need to be engaged locally for them to become “global” in the very first place. It is through friction “that universals become practically effective,” but “they can never fulfill their promises of universality. Even in transcending localities, they don’t take over the world” (ibid. 8).

In order to unveil what it takes to accomplish global market connections in a heterogeneous world, I explore the very practical *problems* that lie at the heart of agrarian marketization processes. These “problems” need to be solved practically before something ostensibly abstract like a market can take its form and function. Marketization is, hereafter, conceptualized as a “proliferation” (Tsing 2005: 26) of engaged arrangements that respond to a number of problematizations that are pertinent to contemporary market-making projects in the global agrifood economy. As Foucault (1997 [1984]) reminds us, problematizations are by no means innocent, and they are often highly productive undertakings. Certain domains, objects, relations, rationalities, or practices only become problems at particular historical conjunctures, and these are usually followed by (not necessarily successful) interventions that aim at solving them in particular ways. Export-oriented marketization is no different.

Of Frontier Regions and Borderlands

Tsing’s notion of engaged universals also has profound implications for my conceptualization of the term *frontier*, which hereafter does not simply denote a terrain of expansion of market modernity (Turner 1921), where unvalorized nature is appropriated by resourceful men (sic!). The term I propose here is neither synonymous with the notion of “frontier” often advanced in critical agrarian political economy (Amanor 1994: 24–26; Watts 1994: 71; Agergard et al. 2010), as it does not assume the expansion of a universal and essential form of “capitalism” into spaces which had previously been dominated by other modes of production, for instance, subsistence agriculture. Instead, I am here more inclined towards Mitchell’s concept of the “frontier region” (Mitchell 2007: 247). Defying any methodological territorialism,

frontier regions are discursive-cum-material "borderlands of global capitalism" (Boeckler & Berndt 2012) where struggles over new agencies, commodities, encounters, entitlements, rights, obligations, and material devices, as well as with the "inside" and the "outside" of the market are fought out.

Similarly to Tsing's notion of "engaged universals," the notion of "frontier region" allows us to capture the heterogeneous, at times messy, arrangements of global markets, and the extensive work that is needed to sustain them across geographical, material, social, and institutional difference. By being interested in the relational production of markets in two specific frontier regions, I also refute what Hart (2004: 97) calls the "impact model" of globalization – the popular perspective that renders the "local" as a mere passive object of inexorable "global" forces, thus privileging the universal (the abstract) over the particular (the concrete) in an often deterministic mode of thinking. This relationship, as will be shown, is less one of determinations, or one of "dialectics" – a notion which despite its emphasis on the mutually constitutive quality of the abstract and the concrete has too often fallen short of explaining how the abstract is assembled, stabilized, destabilized, and reassembled in practice – but one of translations, hybridizations and, to use Tsing's term (2005), "friction." Thus, I will show that global market connections require "particular conditions of existence to appear at all" (Hall 1985: 113). But they are not simply multiply articulated, as Hall and others would put it (see, e.g., Bair & Werner 2011a).¹² Instead, they emerge within the "sticky materiality of practical encounters" (Tsing 2005: 1). As such, they need "to be positively sustained by specific processes" (Hall 1985: 113), yet they can break down at any time.¹³

All in all, the two frontier regions presented here have to be conceived as heuristic sites in a larger global setting of agrarian marketization. The case studies are experimental sites that could undoubtedly have been located elsewhere – global capitalism has many frontier regions where it is being *worked* upon. Although this work is about the construction of agro-export markets in Ghana, it thus relates to wider debates on the expansion of markets and new processes of commodification in various social domains and places.

How This Book Unfolds

In order to set the scene, in the next chapter I sketch some key prisms through which we can imagine market-making processes. Drawing on a bricolage of ANT, the social studies of economization and marketization, the EC, as well as the anthropology of universals, I develop a vocabulary that helps grasp the very practical problems that lie at the heart of making global market connections. In general, cross-fertilization between these different intellectual strands represents a frictional project, but one that produces productive friction.

Chapter 3 first outlines the structural and policy context of my case studies, which are then introduced in detail. Even though both serve different markets in different structural settings, similar dynamics of market-making can be observed. While I attend to commonalities and differences between the case studies in the empirical

part of the book, this prelude to the empirical sections underscores that these projects of global connection only became possible at particular historical conjunctures and in turn have influenced other projects of economy building in Ghana more generally. My rather detailed discussion of the structural and policy context also points to something larger: that we cannot think of marketization without considering the multiple technologies, forms of regulation, material devices, discourses, and calculative practices that constitute “the economy” at large.

Chapter 4 maps out the methodological approach of the book, which is inextricably linked to the theoretical conceptualization of markets embraced here. I spell out the basic traits of what I call a “critical ethnography of marketization,” which allows for capturing how markets are arranged and performed as heterogeneous actor-networks. My key methodological concern is to outline an approach that is not only sensitive to *what* things are done and *why* they are done but also to *how* they are done – how the messy work of making markets plays out *in practice*. I show, however, that “following the actors” and the multiple linkages which made up markets in my case studies was inevitably bound up with various methodological challenges as it called for in-depth ethnographic research in agronomy departments, in busy packhouses, and on remote farms over an extended period of time. It also required maneuvering at the frictional interstices between agribusiness companies and their farmers. Consequently, I will discuss these challenges in detail.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed genealogy of the two case studies and how global market connections have been forged in each one. I put the investments of OFL and TF “in place” and discuss the underlying economic models. Taking into account the very different nature of frontier regions and global connections (seasonal mango production in Ghana’s north versus just-in-time production in the south) in each case, I also demonstrate how micro constructions became macro, how more complexly coordinated global connections evolved, and what factors supported or hampered such processes of enlargement.

In Chapter 6, I reconstruct how global market connections were enacted *in situ* by unpacking the more microphysical, disciplinary processes that lie at the heart of “world market integration”. The global connections I described in the previous two chapters could not become effective without the making of particular agencies (among farmers) that value simple crops as goods that have (a legitimate) exchange value, take ownership over them, perform the roles assigned to them in the market-making program, and become responsible, autonomous, and accountable “market agents.”

Chapter 7 delves more deeply into issues of power and asymmetries in markets, highlighting the ambiguous character of markets as (anti-)political encounters. I explore the question of how encounters between ostensibly “powerful” companies and ostensibly “powerless” farmers were organized, without resorting to a top-down and preconfigured notion of power. Instead, I address *how* hierarchies came into being, were performed, and resisted, highlighting the mundane and technical manifestations of power in agrifood chains. First and foremost, I demonstrate that power relations are not only articulated in specific relations of definition, as the previous chapter shows, but also in specific relations of calculation and accounting.

Chapter 8 deals with the issues of crisis and change in markets. A performative and processual take on marketization needs to address both order and disorder in markets. I thus show how market arrangements in the two case studies were destabilized into different directions over the course of time. In the pineapple case, the just-in-time model slid into crisis owing to the cumulative effects of changing preferences in the world pineapple market, the global economic crisis, price pressures and increasingly fierce competition in buyer markets, and the destabilization of supply chain relations amid new dynamics of competition in the raw material market in Ghana. In the mango case, the entry point is a different one altogether. I here highlight how "nature" itself was the source of crisis as it could not simply be turned into a resource, a fact that had a significant impact on the organization and trajectory of the market-making project. In each case study, I am interested in how company managers and agronomists reengineered market arrangements in the wake of crisis.

The book's conclusion tackles the question of how we can grasp and qualify the ambivalent dynamics of connection and disconnection that come along with marketization projects in the Ghanaian policy context as well as in the age of "global capitalism" more generally – projects which strive to instantiate particular forms of market modernity.

Endnotes

- 1 In this book, all names of individuals, of the case study companies and related organizations, and their geographical associations have been anonymized, are withheld, or have been altered to protect sources. Development organizations and programs associated with the Ghanaian agricultural sector more generally are referred to by their original names.
- 2 Contract farming can be defined as "forms of vertical coordination between growers and buyers-processors that directly shape production decisions through contractually specifying market obligations (by volume, value, quality, and, at times, advanced price determination); provide specific inputs; and exercise some control at the point of production (i.e., a division of management functions between contractor and contractee)" (Little & Watts 1994: 9).
- 3 The absolutization of markets has been a long-standing problem in economic and social theory. For an early take on this, see Barber (1977).
- 4 This program also goes by the name "social studies of markets" (Çalışkan 2010) and is sometimes narrowly referred to as the "performativity program" (MacKenzie et al. 2007).
- 5 I am aware that "economics" is a diverse field, including strands of feminist, evolutionary, institutional, Marxist, and ecological economics that break with these assumptions in many respects. Yet these are not part of the discursive core of a highly centralized discipline (see also Peck 2012).
- 6 Indeed, markets, including capitalist markets, have historically taken a variety of forms (see, e.g., Polanyi 1992 [1957]; Swedberg 2005; Peck 2012), which one should not subsume under one grand market narrative.
- 7 I am not suggesting here that the peculiarities of global horticultural markets and other types of markets with bilateral oligopolies are features of all markets. I am grateful to Kojo Amanor for pushing me to be clearer on this.
- 8 Note here that economic anthropology more generally provides some crucial (and welcome) insights to help make sense of markets as material, institutional, semiotic, and discursive formations, including their very making (see, e.g., Polanyi 1992 [1957]; Geertz 1978; Carrier 1997; Graeber 2001; Rankin 2004; Escobar 2005; Hann & Hart 2011).

- 9 In what follows, I concur with optimistic reviewers such as Fligstein & Dauter (2007) and Aspers & Beckert (2008) that different theory camps in the sociology of markets share common interests, yet often obscure these owing to the use of jargon or ignorance. Therefore, we can only but benefit from an “engaged pluralism” of approaches that allows us to conceive of markets as “boundary objects” (Barnes & Sheppard 2010). However, I will also demonstrate that there are notable ontological, epistemological, and methodological differences between the SSEM program and network, neoinstitutionalist and field approaches to markets.
- 10 Note that the need to study how firms, inter-firm relations and markets come into being in practice has also been repeatedly emphasized by economic geographers (Yeung 2003; Hess 2004; Jones & Murphy 2011), but there seems to be a considerable gap between theoretical and methodological ambition and actual research practices, as such calls have rarely been followed up by a more ethnographic research program (for exceptions, see Rankin 2004; Dunn 2005).
- 11 The earliest experiments with contract farming in Africa indeed have colonial roots. The first contract farming scheme goes back to sugar cultivation schemes in Kenya in the 1920s, back then a white-settler colony. Amanor (1999: 35) reports that in Ghana smallholder-focused contract farming was introduced for cocoa, oil palm, cotton, and tobacco sectors as well as for the production of rice and vegetables under irrigation from the 1970s onward.
- 12 Hall utilizes the concept of articulation in order to distance himself from deterministic and essentialist readings of Marx. “Essentialist” here denotes the “specific presumption [...] that any apparent complexity – a person, a relationship, a historical occurrence, and so forth – can be analyzed to reveal a simplicity at its core” (Resnick & Wolff 1987: 2–3; cited in Gibson-Graham 2006 [1996]: 24).
- 13 What is commonly referred to as the “local” then is hereafter not understood as something that is given or subordinated to the “global.” It is an epistemological category, not an ontological one. It indicates the effective “sites” (Marston et al. 2005; Schatzki 2005) of market practices that are associatively enacted by multiple connections and have to be positively sustained.