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*Journal of Consumer Culture* 2009; 9; 187

DOI: 10.1177/1469540509104374

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## ARTICLE

# Crossing Divides

Consumption and globalization in history

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### *Abstract*

This article has two aims. First, it seeks to raise awareness about three competing frameworks that are currently dominating the debate about consumption and globalization: 18th-century global exchanges; Americanization; and consumerism. These have tended to operate in virtual isolation and ignorance from each other. Second, through a critical discussion of recent research, the article sets out to complicate conventional chronologies of tradition/modernity/late modernity that continue to underpin much research on consumer cultures. Instead of a linear progression from diversity to standardization, from gift-exchange to commodity-exchange, and from public engagement to privatized materialism, the article points to the dynamic interaction between these forms across time. An appreciation of these longer, deeper, and more variegated histories means that it is problematic to equate consumer culture with the 'age of affluence' after the Second World War. In turn, it calls on critics of consumerism to adopt a more realistic and historically sensitive approach that engages with the longer evolution of consumer culture and avoids idealized images of a recent pre-consumerist past.

### *Key words*

Americanization • consumer culture • consumerism • diversity • empire • practices

**THE WORLD IS** a big place. Our knowledge of the material lives of its inhabitants is patchy and fragmented. This is, perhaps, no more apparent than in our highly uneven understanding of consumption in different cultures in the new era of globalization that followed on the age of

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(London, Los Angeles, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC)  
Vol 9(2): 187–220 1469-5405 [DOI: 10.1177/1469540509104374]  
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exploration five centuries ago. While we know in fine detail the precise number of porcelain cups, knives and forks, books, furniture and gowns owned by merchants, lawyers, and even some artisans in 17th- and 18th-centuries Holland, England and Spain (Brewer and Porter, 1993; Schama, 1988; Torras and Yun, 1999; Weatherill, 1996), we know virtually nothing about the possession let alone use of things by hundreds of millions of Chinese people in the same period, other than estimates of their overall standard of living (Pomeranz 2005). Yet, our historical understanding has suffered as much from an excess of knowledge as from its deficit. As scholarship on particular areas and problems has deepened, new divides have opened up, between periods, disciplines, and indeed about the very stuff of consumption.

This article offers a critical discussion of the quite different stories about consumption and globalization that currently coexist for the period from the 16th to the 20th century. The aim is not to offer a review of the vast historical literature on consumption, but rather to focus on three different spatial and temporal pairings of consumption and globalization that have come to dominate research. Recent scholarship on (1) 18th century global exchanges, (2) 20th century consumerism, and (3) Americanization, have proceeded in virtual isolation from each other, often pointing in polar opposite directions. Greater awareness of the first raise questions about the historical worldview that continues to inform much social theory and social science research, with its idealized progression from industrial to consumer society and from modern to late modern society in the middle of the 20th century. Conversely, a closer re-examination of the latter two complicates the implied long-term trend from diversity to uniform standardized consumerism that informs models of proto-globalization. In short, greater engagement with the histories of global consumption opens up a space to think about consumer culture as a phenomenon evolving across time rather than as a distinct stage of late modernity.

Three projects currently coexist that are characterized by different vantage points, global goods and moralities. First, for the 17th and 18th century, a fresh interest in the global history of consumption has re-integrated the Indian Ocean and China into a history of material culture previously monopolized by Britain and Holland. The career of Indian cottons epitomizes this more interactive understanding of the entanglement between East and West.

If we fast-forward to the 20th century, it is as if the world has shrunk. Historical accounts are overwhelmingly of individual nations, cities, even districts and particular shops; comparative studies are few and far between

(Capuzzo, 2006; Haupt, 2002). With some notable exceptions (Burke, 1996), the central axis for transnational flows in this second group is that between the USA and Europe, the story of an 'Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through 20th-century Europe' (de Grazia, 2005), symbolized by Hollywood and the supermarket. Whereas recent accounts of the 18th century emphasize mutual entanglements – with Britain as much in the role of follower as leader – the multi-directional flow of consumer cultures, and dispersed centres of technologies and creativity, the Americanization story remains overwhelmingly a one way street.

A third narrative is that of consumerism as a new lifestyle, the defining mode of contemporary society where consumption is crucial for self-fashioning and lifestyle, the actualization of the self and the rise of a consumer-citizen. While it has been connected to competing social theories (late modernity, postmodernity, liquid society, governmentality), this story remains the shared orthodoxy for most in the social science community today (Baudrillard, 1998[1970]; Bauman, 2007; Featherstone, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Miller and Rose, 1997). This literature presumes a sharp break between contemporary consumer society and earlier histories. With a few notable exceptions (Fine, 2002; Sassatelli, 2004), the past is primarily held up as a stylized model of standardized mass production and class cultures in contrast to more fluid, reflexive contemporary consumer culture.

Americanization and global consumerism are not necessarily the same; anthropologists and geographers in particular have emphasized how local cultures play an active role in shaping the global (Massey, 1994; Miller, 1995b; Watson, 1997; Wilk, 2006). Still, rather than tracing hybridity or glocalization, the few historians who have linked past and present directly have tended to do so via a stage model where Americanization launches an unsustainable global consumerism based on fossil fuel, cars and an addiction to shopping (Mazlish, 2005; Stearns 1997, 2001). Consumerism, in this view, is characterized by 'unlimited material desire', no longer balanced by other values (Mazlish, 2005: 132). Consumerism has tended to be upheld as an ideal type, even historical telos, associated with western excess and selfish materialism, against which all kinds of other commercial cultures are judged.

The problem is that consumerism is a slippery, morally charged category rather than a tight, historically helpful term of analysis. It rose to prominence during the Cold War and expressed the anxieties of observers about the pathologies of consumer society rather than the realities of how people lived their lives in affluent societies. Various scholars have cautioned against the arbitrary and moralistic portrayal of consumerism, stressing

instead the ongoing centrality of family, sociality, routines and politics (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996; Gronow and Warde, 2001; Miller, 2001; Soper and Trentmann, 2007). But it is this 'consumerist' approach that is amongst the very few treatments of the subject that has made it into global history readers and surveys and continues to inform public commentary, a fact worth recognizing at the outset of our inquiry. One reason for this mismatch lies in the continuing gulf between different disciplines. Where many social scientists continue to invoke a model of modern mass society that no longer commands consent amongst historians, historians of 20th-century globalization now run the risk of working with a model of 'consumerism' that many anthropologists, sociologists and geographers have similarly discarded. Genuine multidisciplinary work remains the exception (Appadurai, 1986; Brewer and Trentmann, 2006; Miller, 1995a).

These approaches to consumption express more general differences about the genealogy of modernity and about the practice of history itself. The recent turn to a global history of consumption in the 17th and 18th centuries has been part of a more general effort to move beyond Eurocentric narratives of modernity. European modernity was not the *sui generis* result of a unique meeting of scientific mentality and the rule of law (Weber). Nor was it primarily the product of capitalist exploitation of other lands (Marx). Rather it was a transnational achievement that mobilized non-European knowledge, goods, technology, and labour and resources – some of it through trade (such as Indian textiles), some of it through coercion (slave plantations) (Berg, 2004b; Pomeranz, 2000). By contrast, the interest in Americanization and its twin 'global consumerism' continues to treat the USA as origin and centre. It is a self-critical inversion of the 'Rise of the West', which replaces the positive telos of liberty, law and commerce with a negative one of unbounded materialism.

Decentering the Anglo-American story of consumer society has implications well beyond the 18th century. It raises questions about the 'modern' qualities of consumption, its origins, dynamics and consequences, with implications for the geographic distribution of agency, ethics and political responsibility. If many regions and traditions have shaped the world of goods, it may be too simple to view 'consumerism' as an alien import or to focus on the ethical responsibility of affluent consumers in the North.

This article, then, is an invitation to cross several divides at once: between East and West, between the 18th and 20th centuries, and between history and the social sciences. In their seminal essay, Glennie and Thrift already challenged the association between 'modern' consumer society and industrialized mass-production, drawing on research on urbanization and

the slow, piecemeal nature of industrialization in 18th-century Britain. Consumption, they pointed out, expanded in an artisanal setting, driven by people's need to communicate identities in increasingly complex urban environments, rather than by emulation (Glennie and Thrift, 1992). This article adds a global dimension to the critique of the 'modern' model, and its intellectual twin, late modern consumer culture. I want to place the parallel narratives of global consumption alongside each other to show how new research on the 17th and 18th centuries further undermines the conventional link between consumer society, modernity and industrial mass production. Far from being new signs of late modern consumerism, creolization, self-fashioning and diversity were already integral to this earlier global moment. This, in turn, raises questions about the role assigned to markets, commodification and individual choice in the spread of consumption, relative to the role of empire, social networks and politics.

#### **MULTIPLE MODERNITIES: GLOBAL NETWORKS OF CONSUMPTION BEFORE EUROPEAN HEGEMONY**

Ideas of a distinctly western form of modernity have long shaped views of consumer culture. F.W. Hegel imagined fashion to be a monopoly of the West. In the course of the 19th century, the difference in development between Europe and China became so vast that it encouraged a search for unique endowments that favoured modernization in Europe. Marx traced the rise of the West to the accumulation of profit via exploitation of the rest. This idea was given a new lease of life in the late 20th century by the 'world systems' theory with its account of a European core and a dependent non-European periphery (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989).

Recent research has effectively overturned these meta-narratives (Frank, 1998; O'Brien, 2001). Transnational economic systems did not have to wait for European genius or industry. The Indian Ocean was an integrated world system by the 10th century at the latest. Already in the 11th century, dyed and blockprinted cottons went from India via Cairo to East Africa, finding their way into clothes, beddings, and curtains, for poorer as well as richer people (Barnes, 1997). From Bengal and the Coromandel coast, Indian cotton and textiles went to Southeast Asia and China (Crill, 2006). When European explorers and trading companies entered these parts, they found vibrant commercial networks that were not easily taken over. In 1600, over a century after da Gama's voyage, only one quarter of Asian pepper and spices went to Europe (Findlay and O'Rourke, 2007: 157). As late as the 18th century, it is difficult to decide which was core and which periphery. Asian silks were already invading European markets in the

15th century. When Indian cottons began to spread in the late 17th century, English producers felt they were being swamped by superior, colourful goods and agitated (successfully) for a prohibition on the import of calicoes (1701, 1721). For most of the 18th century, British imitators found it impossible to match the dyeing and printing techniques of Indian artisans. Their eventual success was not the result of some national genius for science but of competitive emulation, learning and transnational technological rivalry (Mukerji, 1983; Parthasarathi and Riello, 2009). Nor did the eventual triumph of cotton factories in Britain lead to wholesale de-industrialization in India; while spinning was crushed, handloom cloth production survived.

The model of 'modern mass consumption' has encouraged the idea that the mass market and shopping were spawned by industrial mass production, and that prior to the late 19th century, most people lived in a world without things or shops; at best, they had a few kitchen utensils, a shirt or a dress, obtained through barter or self-production (Richards, 1990; Williams, 1982: 2–3). This is fiction, not history. Shops, shop windows and shopping as a pastime were well established by the 18th century (Walsh, 2006; Welch, 2005). The poor, even slaves, frequented shops. The pauper did not live like a king, but the poor, too, had more and more access to the conveniences and goods associated with a polite, consuming society, including teakettles, soft furnishings (curtains, quilts, pillows) and mirrors (Styles, 2007; Vickery and Styles, 2006).

Spices and silk were early examples of global consumer goods. Cotton took such exchanges to a new level. Cotton textiles were as successful, fashionable and desirable in the late 17th and 18th centuries as jeans have been since the 1950s. An average of 682,235 pieces of Indian textiles were imported a year into England in the 1680s. Floral patterned and in bright, fast colours, 'checks' and other cottons found growing use in soft furnishings and curtains. Chintzes (painted or printed cottons) quickly became popular. In 1690, they still made up only 10 percent of total textile imports. By 1700, they had reached 40 percent, before becoming the target of prohibitive legislation the following year (Aiolfi, 1987: 217 and Tables 8–9; Chaudhuri, 1978). In the course of the 18th century, cotton gowns, stockings, handkerchiefs, sheets and towels became part of the wardrobe of most people in England and France, including artisans, servants and the poor. In England in 1777, a servant girl reported the theft of 'one pink and black Manchester gown, lined with green stuff; one garnett stuff gown; one striped and flowered cotton; one flowered cotton go[w]n; one coloured quilted stuff coat' (Lemire, 1991: 97). As far away as backcountry Virginia,

slaves, too, bought textiles, hats and ribbons – sometimes selling cotton seed or the chicken they raised in exchange (Smart Martin, 2008).

On the eve of the French revolution, cotton made up one third of all clothing. People did not overnight adopt underwear and nightclothes, but the advance is impressive nonetheless. In 1700 only 5 percent of artisans and 30 percent of shopkeepers had nightclothes, by 1798, it was 87 percent and 97 percent (Roche, 1994[1989]: 138, 163–7). A new market emerged for ready-made clothing. The number of fashion plates increased five-fold, helped by innovations in printing. The cotton craze was not necessarily driven by price; curtains made of cotton, for example, were not cheaper than worsteds or linen ones (Styles, 2006: 74). Rather the appeal was aesthetic and practical. Cottons were colourful, comfortable and convenient – the fabric kept colour better and could be cleaned more easily than wool or linen. They were also light, thus requiring additional layers of clothing, and more consumption. Contemporaries noted that people were replacing their clothes more often, searching for novelty.

Thanks to European inventories, and the sheer volume and painstaking research that grew out of the ‘birth of consumer society’ project, we now have a more detailed picture of the spread of goods in Europe than ever before. It would be erroneous, however, to presume that the disproportionate mountain of articles and monographs on Europe necessarily reflects the stasis of consumer culture elsewhere. When they turned East, European traders found demanding consumers. In 1617, for example, the director general of the Dutch VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) urged that ‘only the best quality goulongs and tapi-sarassas were procured for Java since these people were very particular about the quality and . . . would pay a very good price for the right kind of textiles’; goulongs had gold thread (Prakash, forthcoming). Here is a good example of how, in the early modern world, trade and the global demand for luxuries boosted the role of extra-European societies as consumers: the high price of pepper had increased people’s purchasing power in Java.

Nor did fashion come only out of Paris or European courts, as commonly assumed in accounts of the rise of capitalism, luxury and modernity in the West since F.W. Hegel and Werner Sombart. Elaborate designs and changing specifications about style, colour and patterns can just as well be found in the order books of European companies trading with the East. Excessive consumption and the velocity with which styles were changing were a frequent target in late Ming China. Rural villages as well as cities were subject to growing commercialization. Young men in their villages, so the scholar Chen Yao complained in the 1570s, were no longer content



with the customary light silk gauze but now lusted for Suzhou embroideries. 'Long skirts and wide collars, broad belts and narrow pleats – they change without warning.' They were all after 'the look of the moment' (*shiyang*) (Brook, 1998: 220; see also Finnane, 2003 for early Qing). The more fashionable, the better. In East Africa, too, European merchants encountered demanding consumers and changing fashions for beads and other goods (Presthold, 2003). Instead of a highly localized western birth of consumer society, such studies suggest a transnational space for diverse yet expanding cultures of consumption that shared an impulse for self-fashioning and had points of contact, exchange, incorporation and emulation.

We know far less about the flow of goods from West to East than vice versa, but it is worth emphasizing that the East were not just producers: they were consumers of things and images as well, including European ones. In early Qing China this included English wool used in fashionable clothes. The import and cultivation of tobacco was followed by a range of fancy tobacco receptacles not perhaps so different from the craze for novelties and gadgets sparked by exotic goods in Europe. Some experts have provocatively invoked an 'early modernity' for late Ming China (Clunas, 1991, 1999). There was certainly a rich visual engagement with material objects. Where later 19th century commentators only saw fundamental differences between Europe and China, 17th- and 18th-century travellers were still able to see many parallels between their material cultures. Late Ming fashion prized imported novelties, from porcelain with Arabic script and European books to the well-rubbed tombstone of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (d. 1610), which carried Latin as well as Chinese inscription (Clunas, 2007: 100–3). Ricci himself noted the large concentration of cotton production in Nankin province ('they say there are two hundred thousand weavers here') and how elsewhere, the Chinese, 'now weave a cloth made entirely of silk', 'in imitation of European products'. Instead of difference, he was struck by 'the similarity of customs . . . Their use of tables, chairs, and beds is wholly unknown to any of the peoples of the states that border on China, . . . there are numerous points of advantageous contact between ourselves and the Chinese people.' (Ricci, 1953[1583–1610]: 13, 25, 550).

The chronology of consumer culture has expanded with its geography. The authenticity of 'consumer society's' 18th-century 'birth' (McKendrick et al., 1982) has been questioned by a number of authors. Luxury trades have been found thriving in 17th-century England, unperturbed by the upheaval of the Civil War (Peck, 2005). Some Italian Renaissance towns already matched the number of shops in Georgian England (Welch, 2005).

Such has been the number of competing claims for the birth of ‘consumer society’, that it may be sensible to suspend the concept altogether, not least in recognition of its own problematic roots in a post-1945 telos of modernization and growth (Brewer, 2004). A simple, linear periodization probably does more harm than good. As cultures of consumption are diverse (within societies as well as across them), the quest for a biological birth moment is flawed. It would be easy, for example, to play the periodization game and emphasize the flow of Indian textiles to the Horn of Africa in the 11th century or the use of cotton cloth in the Niger region in the same period. There was a good deal of shopping and spending in ancient Athens and Rome. Such individual instances, however, must not be confused with an argument about consumer culture as a whole network of values, spaces and practices that assumes critical importance in the life of people and society as a whole.

If the global broadening of consumer culture has challenged the direct trajectory from 18th-century England to 20th-century models of development, it also indicates what sets the 17th and 18th centuries apart from earlier periods. There was a deepening and broadening of consumption. Expanding trading networks between Europe and Asia, on the one hand, and the establishment of slave-based plantations in the New World, on the other, left their mark. Exotic luxuries such as tea, sugar and tobacco became popular necessities. Their prices fell rapidly. Sugar consumption in Britain, for example, increased six-fold in the 18th century to 24 pounds per person (Berg, 2004a). People not only wore more cotton. They wore more diverse clothes, using a greater range of goods and mixes of fabrics, pattern, and colour, ranging from ‘bull’s blood’ to ‘goose shit’ (Roche, 1994[1989]). In the ‘luxury debates’, new consumption habits and desires became tied to questions of national development as well as individual morals. Above all, goods played an ever more important function as social positioning devices in increasingly complex, growing urban environments.<sup>1</sup>

The original error was to tie the story of consumption causally to the story of industrial modernity. Ken Pomeranz’s seminal *The Great Divergence* (2000) made the important argument that people in China were just as well off as people in Britain in the 18th century, certainly in advanced areas such as the Yangzi delta. In other words, it was misguided to trace the contrast in their respective development by the late 19th century to some unique, earlier take-off in Britain as a consumer society. Instead, it was Europe’s ability to break through resource constraints – access to coal underground and, through colonialism and forced slavery, to cheap labour and land in the New World – that made Europe, not China, the first industrial society

(Pomeranz, 2000). Clearly, without the slave trade it would have taken a long time to extract as much cotton, tobacco and sugar from the New World, and European levels of consumption would consequently have been lower. It is debatable, however, how much slavery helps to explain industrialization, which primarily benefited from technological innovation (not profit or exploitation) and resources and demand internal to Europe. Overseas trade did, however, enable Europe to reap the full benefits of technological changes by escaping from resource constraints and offering a cushion of added markets and security (Findlay and O'Rourke, 2007: Ch. 6). Recent estimates have widened the gap in the standard of living once more. Already by the middle of the 18th century, the north-west of Europe was more urbanized and workers had a lead over those in Beijing. In terms of their standard of living, people in the Yangzi delta were closer to the bottom than the top of Europe (Allen et al., 2005; Broadberry and Gupta, 2005). Industrialization sharpened the divergence between East and West: it did not initiate it.

On the eve of industrialization, the world contained several, connected societies with dynamic, mainly urban cores of consumption. What set Britain and Holland apart from China was not some unique presence of these centres as such, but their relative scope and density.

Compared to 20th century consumer societies, 18th-century Britain was distinguished by constant purchasing power (until c. 1820) even as the ownership and consumption of things was rising. The principal attempt to resolve this conundrum has been the thesis of the 'industrious revolution' (de Vries, 1994). Households, in this view, began to work harder to support a more consumption-intensive lifestyle. Instead of making things for themselves, they sold more of their labour in the marketplace so they could buy more goods from the market. They became more commercial and less self-sufficient. The Industrial Revolution, a supply-side phenomenon, was preceded in this view by a paradigmatic shift in demand, the result of 'changes in taste', and a willingness to work harder, 'emanating to a substantial degree from the aspirations of the family' (de Vries, 1994: 256).

It is debatable whether families work and live as in this application of Gary Becker's economic model of household utility maximization. It is also unclear why the arrival of new goods and tastes should have motivated people at one time in history to intensify and commodify – not other societies at other times. Nor do new tastes and preferences spread automatically – or easily. Exotic goods such as tobacco and coffee were initially rejected in Europe as vile, dangerous and barbarian. The career of hot, caffeinated beverages was a global one, never just the success story of a new

modern western habitus.<sup>2</sup> More generally, similarly advanced industrializing regions such as Catalonia show no sign that producers were selling more of their labour to fund more consumption (Marfany, forthcoming). Research on British households certainly cautions against seeing direct consumption and consumption via the market as mutually exclusive. Many families simultaneously produced more for their own use and bought more (Overton et al., 2004). Above all, when and whether Britons started to work more remains a subject of debate (Clark and Werf, 1998; Voth, 2001). Instead of new tastes tempting people into the market, it might have been hard times that pushed them there. A more commodified world of goods may have been effect rather than cause.

There are moral-ideological histories hidden in the Anglo-centric story of the 'industrious revolution'. It has its roots in a material civilizing project dating back to the very period it is seeking to explain. In the late 17th century, writers such as Nicholas Barbon and John Cary presented a new, optimistic view of popular consumption. New goods and desires were a good thing, and ordinary people should be encouraged to pursue them, not condemned.<sup>3</sup> Their desire for more goods would make them work harder. Idleness would give way to enterprise and initiative. Wealth, manners and civilization would all improve. This was always a prescriptive discourse. In the British Empire, too, the 'civilizing' mission of commerce sought to instill in the native the habitus of acquisitiveness. Early 19th-century missionaries and colonizers in Southern Africa believed that the sight of a shop on mission ground would 'rout superstition, slavery, [and] sloth' (Philip, 1828 cited in Comaroff and Comaroff, 2005: 157). For vassals and some subordinate groups, the new markets of goods could be empowering. For others it brought brandy and other unsettling temptations. That the arrival of foreign goods was a mixed blessing was already apparent before the 'new imperialism' led to a more intense phase of capitalist extraction and exploitation.

### CONSUMING EMPIRES: DIVERSITY, HYBRIDITY AND SELF-FASHIONING

The global expansion of consumption took place in the context of empire. The role of imperial power and culture for the flow and appropriation of goods and tastes has received particular attention for the 17th and 18th centuries. An influential model is Chris Bayly's distinction between archaic globalization, proto-globalization, and modern globalization. Instead of seeing present globalization just as a bigger version of the past, these ideal types point to ruptures and highlight the different ways in which cultural and political systems have stimulated global consumption. Instead of a clean

succession of stages, Bayly presents these systems as overlapping. Archaic and proto-global systems were subordinated and redirected in the mid-19th century by an emerging modern system shaped by new ideologies of industrial capitalism, the nation state, and consumerism.

In archaic globalization (13th–18th centuries), the flow of goods between Eurasia and northern Africa was connected to a shared idea of cosmic kingship, which, in turn, created a distinct logic of trade and consumption. The Chinese, the Mughal and the Ottoman empires lived out a sense that they had a historic title to global dominion. The divine message had been dispersed across the globe and could be accessed through its many material forms. Aggregating the world of goods in all its diversity was part of what made a king a universal over-lord. This exotic impulse stimulated long-distance trade and gift-exchange, moulding a highly discriminating elite culture that cherished diversity. It was this cosmic logic, Bayly points out, that explains why otter furs from Bangladesh found their way into northern China in the 17th century, or why precious books and religious objects from the Middle East made it to India and Southeast Asia (Bayly, 2002: 51–2).

With plantations and American slavery, the European empires introduced a new logic. Where previously goods had been agents of globalization because they were prized for their geographic specificity, now they were diffused. The cultivation of coffee and cotton was globalized. At the same time, there was an initial symbiosis between new ‘proto-global’ forces and the ‘archaic’ elite-based ideology of consumption. Drinking coffee or chocolate were aspects of elite sociability, not yet of mass consumption.

The consumption regimes of these systems of globalization were tied to different production regimes. The exotic orientation of ‘archaic globalization’ ‘involved the use of rare embodied labour skills, knowledge and reputation, which could not easily be reproduced’ (Bayly, 2002: 55). Together with the shift from cosmic kingship to territorially bounded nation states, Bayly has argued, the ‘modern’ pattern of globalization shifts production from locally specific artistic production to standardized ‘consumerism’.

If the collection of things was in part inspired by visions of cosmic kingship, it was reinforced by imperial rivalries, especially between Britain and France in India and Egypt. Collecting shares many attributes more conventionally associated with consumerism in late modernity, such as self-fashioning, the hybridity of styles and the creation of new polyglot cultures of consumption. Robert Clive, ‘Clive of India’ and the nabob par excellence, chose goods from the East to refashion himself as an aristocratic

connoisseur. He accumulated Mughal elite objects, from filigree boxes to betel-nutcrackers in an attempt to disguise the commercial origins of his wealth. Lucknow in the late 18th century has been described as a place where 'diversity was a way of life.' (Jasanoff, 2005: 58). Persian, Muslim, Hindu and European styles were fused. Empires collected things and cultures as well as territories. They were fluid, hybrid and unstable, lubricating the global exchange of goods and cultures. Together with evidence we have of the intensely fashion conscious and reflexive outlook in some texts from early Qing China – where English cloth played an important role for selfhood (Finnane, 2003) – these accounts suggest that a reflexive interest in other cultures and in fusing material reference points is much older than tends to be recognized.

The 'archaic' type of globalization derives part of its appeal from its stark and not exactly charitable portrayal of its 'modern' successor associated with standardized uniformity. 'Whereas modern complexity demands the uniformity of Levis and trainers, the archaic simplicity of everyday life demanded that great men prized difference in goods . . . In one sense archaic lords and rural leaders were collectors, rather than consumers' (Bayly, 2002: 52). The realm of the spirit, of elites versed in exotic languages and cultures, and appreciative of the local expertise and materials that went into the making, say, of a particular Kashmir shawl or a handsome book from the Middle East, gives way to standardized, mass produced, soulless goods. Some of this echoes older stories of the disenchantment and loss of authenticity resulting from industrialism, mechanical reproduction and mass consumer culture (for critiques: Miller, 1987; Slater 1997; Zelizer 2005a).

While Bayly is keen to stress the overlap between global eras, and the ways in which they drew on their predecessors, the almost Weberian approach carries the more general problems of stage theories of history. Consumption appears to be changing its essence as the socioeconomic and political configuration of modernity switches to industrial capitalism and nation states in the course of the 19th century. Consumer culture appears as a secondary phenomenon acting out the imperatives of organized capitalism. Of course, it would be foolish to deny that mass manufacture had an influence on what and how people consumed. At the same time, stage theories like this tend to ignore the continuities of desire, distinction and the ordinary routines of consumption across these periods. The ideal-type of archaic globalization, with its focus on elite-based connoisseur collecting, thus deflects from more popular dynamics of consumption at play already in this early phase. Equally significantly, it tends to project a stylized version of modern 'consumerism' onto modern globalization that

obscures how older practices have survived, adapted and evolved to the present. 'Consumerism' appears in such an unflattering, monolithic light because it appears as a terminal point of industrial capitalism with little cultural or political autonomy of its own. Inevitably, this view is at loggerheads with work in the social sciences that has stressed the diversity of the material world and of consumption practices today, and the need to appreciate their own logics instead of seeing them as the products of nation or production and its social formations (Appadurai, 2005; Miller, 1995a).

Collecting, diversity and hybridity have not all suffered a shared fate in 'modern globalization'. They were reshaped by the nation state, industrial capitalism and democracy, not destroyed by them. The spread of more rigid, hierarchical forms of racial knowledge and politics in the 19th century put an end to the mixing of Indian and British consumption styles amongst the colonial elite. But racism and the more territorially bounded project of national identity did not stop the collection of material culture. Rather, diversity was reclassified according to a more linear vision of progress. Royal and elite collections were superseded by private and public museums, international exhibitions and travelling shows of exotic objects and peoples – the Paris exposition of 1878 included native villages. Museums, fairs and department stores were successors to the early modern *Wunderkammern*. Indian styles continued to find their way into shop design, fashion and the interior.

Collecting and consuming are not competing, successive tropes. They feed off each other. Almost a third of all people in the USA today have their own collections. In the 1980s, 230 museums opened each year in the USA, while in Britain a new museum sprang up every fortnight. If consumer society is defined as a way of viewing 'an increasing profusion of both natural and human-produced things as objects to be desired, acquired, savored, and possessed', then, Belk has argued, 'the proliferation of individual and institutional collections' might be recognized as 'the most prominent manifestation of such consumerism' (Belk, 2001: 1). Of course, some people just go to a museum to shop. Yet, many collectors take pride in participating in a global project of preserving knowledge and the richness of the past. It may be rare beer cans or discontinued toys rather than finely hand-made books or exotic furs, but the quest for diversity and local specificity remains alive and well – too much so, in the eyes of some family members who have to live with collectors. Mickey, the 50-year-old wife of an American stockbroker, for instance, carefully notes the origin, from East Africa to Germany, on the bottom of each of her nutcrackers (Belk, 2001: 84). Without the sense of acquiring a slice of authenticity from a distant

culture it would be difficult to explain the range of trinkets that find their way into tourists' luggage and into their vitrines and living rooms. Whereas a production perspective highlights modern capitalism's imperative for uniformity, a consumption perspective reveals how globalization involves, perhaps even requires, local value and distinction. Where commercial consumer culture has made a difference is in terminating the exclusive hold of a small elite. Everyone can be a collector, just as every customer is king. Cosmic kingship has been democratized: anyone can play the role of conservator and guardian of things facing extinction.

Modern ideologies further complicate the thesis that the transition from archaic to modern globalization involved a change from a 'transcendent' ideal to one where goods are simply 'self-referential to themselves and to the markets that create demand for them' (Bayly, 2002: 52). Some scholars have diagnosed a secular individualizing shift from religious salvation to self-realization in the USA in the late 19th century (Lears, 1983), but the trend has not been all in one direction. Collective political projects and social movements have continued to link consumption to transcendent ideals – all the way to ethical consumerism today. British Free Trade played the role of a commercial-imperial successor to cosmic kingship: surely, God had created diverse climates and continents because he wanted people to trade freely and enjoy all the fruits of his creation. Nationalism and imperialism, in East and West, also tried to co-opt consumption for their own ends. These were directed against the global diversity and free flow of goods, but they, too, set goods and tastes within transcendent ideologies. In early 20th-century China, the national products movement organized mass boycotts of foreign goods in the hope that national clothes would make strong citizens (Gerth, 2003; cf. Dikötter, 2006). In India, Gandhi led the campaign for swadeshi and local products. Transcendent ideologies of consumption also continued in the most advanced capitalist societies. In inter-war Britain, hundreds of thousands of Conservative women were involved in Empire shopping weeks where consumers were urged to pay a bit extra to help their white brother-and-sister producers in the colonies – a kind of imperial racist precursor to fair trade (Trentmann, 2008).

Instead of moving from diversity/transcendence to uniformity/self-reference, then, the ideologies of nation state and empire ensured that the global integration of the commodity trade saw a collision between fluid, diversifying ideals of consumption and more rigid, uniform ones. This makes it unhelpful to periodize or measure the degree of globalization in terms of price convergence in wheat or the flow of investments. Globalization is not of one piece – cultural, political and economic processes of



integration and divergence cut across each other. The global integration of commodity trade in the 19th century heightened the concern for the local. Locally specific goods became charged as symbolic carriers of difference, be it Indian and Chinese cloth or an Empire pudding.

Colonies were more than passive by-standers responding to a globalizing dynamic pouring forth from an advanced imperial core. Conceptually, there are parallels here between geographers' emphasis on the relational production of space and place (Massey, 1994) and the new imperial history with its emphasis that ideas and practices flow from colony to metropole as well as the other way around (Burton, 2003; Hall and Rose, 2006). For consumption, the process of 'globalization at the margins' has been especially illuminated by anthropologists and geographers (Wilk, 2006: 63; see also Foster, 2006; Miller 1995b; Miller 1998). In the case of British Honduras (Belize), it was the hunger of pirates, settlers and merchants for British foods that helped create a system where, instead of developing its own agriculture and food industry, the colony exported logs of mahogany and tortoise shell to import pickled Bristol tripe, smoked tongues, brandy and imperial citronade. The story of Belize shows the tremendous importance of where things come from in a global economy. Place of origin did not become irrelevant. People in Belize wanted ham and punch from Britain, not a local variant. It was colonial tastes as much as imperial design that made Belize a dependent consumer economy. Time and again, the metropole tried to make the colony import less food – in vain.

The contradictory workings of imperial globalization considerably complicate analytical categories such as agency, power and resistance. On the one hand, food preferences were not freely chosen. The empire established a hierarchical system of distinction that made those in the colony recycle metropolitan tastes and habits. Emulation and distinction is an imperial as much as a social-class practice. On the other hand, over time these preferences developed a power of their own. This was not just a matter of the colonial elite demonstrating their superiority. It also included the people of Belize more generally, including slaves. By 'mixing up their cuisines and eating European foods,' Wilk argues, 'local people were breaking through these [racial] barriers and boundaries, and achieving a kind of categorical equality with the British' (Wilk, 2006: 70). At the end of the year, slaves indulged in general binges, experiencing a sense of choice and dignity from consuming like their masters. Wilk stresses how preference for European meats and processed foods ultimately reinforced Belize's colonial dependence. But we could also argue that, in the long term, cultural-dietary resilience helped undermine the imperial project; Belize's

heavy food imports were a drain on Westminster. Colonialism, even as it helped to globalize foods such as sugar and coffee through its plantation systems and forced labour, was an inherently unsustainable cultural system, as people in the colonies refused to be just consumers of local goods and producers of global ones.

### AMERICANIZATION REVISITED

Such perspectives from the margins of globalization point to the limitations of a simple binary between the local (authentic; diverse; free) and the global (artificial; standardized; imposed). Their implications are not limited to European empires. Victoria de Grazia has placed consumption at the centre of her account of the USA as a hegemonic 'market empire' after the Second World War (de Grazia, 2005). While the choice of analytical categories has been criticized (Sassatelli, 2007; cf. for different approaches, Domosh, 2006; Kuisel, 1993; Lüdtkke, 1996), de Grazia's story is significant for returning older concerns of political economy to the study of material culture. Commercial culture is shaped by political institutions, norms and values. The US government backed social networks, such as the Rotary Clubs, and a worldview of peace, democracy and best practice that were important in spreading American material civilization. American consumer culture, with its limitless territorial and social ambition, is contrasted with 'old bourgeois' Europe, bounded by class and nation. Inevitably, this approach highlights a clash between material civilizations rather than affinities or continuities. Yet European societies were diverse and had their own dynamics such as music halls, dance clubs, advertising and tourism. Contemporaries were struck by the similarities between Berlin and Chicago. Cultural transfer was never a one-way street (Haupt and Nolte, 2008). Americanization, too, occurred at the margins and took hybrid forms, as Europeans picked certain aspects and fused them with their inherited traditions. Exhibits of the 'American way of life' had different receptions in France, Germany, and Britain (Kroen, 2006).<sup>4</sup>

How the American empire of goods fits into a longer history of empire and consumption deserves further exploration. Was Americanization a break or was it a variation on an older theme? The American idea of creating peace by going out and selling goods went one step further than the British imperial mission of spreading civilization through commerce. Advertisers and businessmen continued where missionaries and Free Traders had been before. Best practice and material comfort replaced the gospel and the promise of atonement, but the global mission of leading people up the ladder of consumption to a higher plane continued. Class cultures were, perhaps, more entrenched in Europe (McKibbin, 1998) but divisions across

race, income and region were not simply erased in the USA, either, by the idealized American way of life (Cohen, 2003). Notwithstanding its more inclusive, democratic ambition, the American vision of a consumer society had precursors. The turn to the consumer as a universal or public interest was well under way in Britain before the First World War (Trentmann, 2006c). Suspicion of unbridled materialism was strong amongst European elites (though not absent in the USA), but Europe, too, included thinkers and middle classes who embraced possessions and material comforts as a legitimate and productive form of creativity, self-fashioning, and even manifestation of God's rich design (Cohen, 2006: 24–9). By the 1930s, dreams of a better material life were circulating throughout society. These would be reaped in the affluent 1950s and 1960s, and reinforced by American consumer culture, but they were not solely a foreign import. Thus, the Nazi regime and business together created anticipatory desires for a world of material comfort that outlived war and destruction and that families took with them into the post-war years (Wiesen, 2008).

Looking back at Europe in the 20th century, what is striking is the ongoing diversity, not some drift towards monoculture. The post-war decades saw the American expansion of the Hollywood star-system, the self-service supermarket, and corporate advertising. Advertising and the rationalization of retail systems, however, also had endogenous roots. How Europeans consume remains distinctive across nations, even regions. As late as the early 1980s, Italians and the French bought only 2 percent and 14 percent of their food in supermarkets; compared to 32 percent in Germany and 70 percent in the USA (Scarpellini, 2001). People from Scandinavia and the Mediterranean tend to holiday in their home country, while the Irish, Germans and Austrians prefer to go abroad (Trentmann, 2006a). Recent sociologists who have compared practices (such as eating and reading) across affluent countries, have found no overall convergence. In the last 30 years, the time spent by Britons and Americans eating out has significantly increased, but not amongst Norwegians. French people continue to eat leisurely at home (96 minutes on average) – Americans don't (42 minutes). The same practices carry different status in these countries, and they are unevenly distributed within them. One suggestion is that the USA (followed by Britain) is becoming more diversified and specialized, whereas countries such as Holland and Norway show greater homogeneity (Gronow and Southerton, forthcoming; Warde et al., 2007). Ironically, it is the society most often seen as promoting a global monoculture (the USA) that appears to have the largest internal degree of diversification.<sup>5</sup>

What is impressive is the quite different outcome of local–global exchanges in different fields of consumer culture. In contrast to movies, music shows the creative encounter of national music styles with American pop music and its diverse and pluralistic consequences. In Italy in the 1950s, for example, singers were turning to American crooners as they tried to move away from the routinized form of Italian song. The emerging ‘urlatori’, or screamers, paved the way for the novel ‘cantautori’, the singer songwriters of the 1960s–1970s. Instead of standardization, the outcome was diversification, with new styles and rhythms, new social themes, and new types of producers, performances and audiences. Popular music challenged the cultural monopoly in radio and early TV. Domenico Modugno – who outside Italy is best remembered for his 1958 international hit ‘Volare (Nel blu dipinto di blu)’ – not only won a Grammy and topped the US charts, but also promoted a regional style from the South (Puglia and Sicily), and gave songs a new psychological depth. The emergence of politically engaged singers out of this new wave shows the fallacy of equating commercialized modes of mechanical reproduction with alienation and a loss of critical reason. American influences were absorbed selectively and creatively; Adriano Celentano, the rock-and-roll teen-idol amongst the ‘urlatori’, blended in jazz but ignored the blues. American music was always only one influence amongst others. Songs, composers, and styles travelled between Italy and Brazil (bossa nova), and between Italy and France (the chanson), as well as between Europe and the USA (Gundle, 2006; Labianca, 2007; Santoro and Solaroli, 2007; Zoppa, 2008).

### COMMODIFICATION REASSESED: GIFTS, POLITICS, AGENCY

The stylistic and social diversity of popular music points to more general questions about the role of commodification. In models of modern mass consumption, consumption has often been collapsed with commodification, which, in turn, was tied to standardized or Fordist mass production. Commodification is seen to unmoor things from time and place, making them exchangeable and universal.

This line of reasoning has flaws on the production side as well as the consumption side. Modern production methods have been and remain diverse. Factory tooling matters for some things (the can opener; the washing machine), much less so for others (furniture, software, clothes), where small producers can more easily attain equipment and skills (Molotch, 2005). Consumption, moreover, is not the same as commodification. It concerns use and practices (Warde, 2005). How jeans are personalized by their wearers is just one example. The diversification of goods is

as much an in-built part of modern capitalism as is the standardized, mass-manufactured product. Once again, revisionist work has turned in different directions in neighbouring disciplines. Historians have mainly challenged the commodification paradigm for the period prior to industrial capitalism. The new anthropology of consumption, by contrast, has stressed how goods have played similar social functions across time (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996) and how, instead of a linear progression, they pass through cycles of commodification and decommodification (Appadurai, 1986). Material culture scholars in particular have shown how, instead of prompting alienation, goods, provisioning and commercial services continue to be part of social relationships, a source of identity, morality and communication (Buchli, 2002; Miller, 1998; see also Zelizer, 2005b). Recognition of people's creative appropriation of goods in the process of consumption has stripped away much of the dehumanizing weight previously placed on commodity fetishism. Conversely, scholars working on the South, have emphasized that commodification is not a preserve of the developed North (van Binsbergen and Geschiere, 2005). Put alongside each other, these perspectives amount to a critique of a meta-narrative of modernization where the spread of commodity culture signalled a shift from a traditional social world of gift exchange and community to a modern system of markets and individualism.

In social theory, it is possible to contrast ideal types of community/gift exchange and market society/commodification, but in history, these mostly overlapped.<sup>6</sup> Households have long relied on a mix of provisioning systems (and continue to do so, in some respects). Earlier eras of expanding global consumption are no exception. Kinship networks and gift exchange played an important part in the 'emotional economy' of Anglo-Indian society in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Finn, 2006), features at odds with the thesis of a new more hedonistic consumer (Campbell, 2005[1987]). To function, empire needed to create and maintain relations between members of its imperial family separated by space. Goods and gifts fulfilled that function, carrying with them feelings, obligations and assertions of power and connections. In turn, these imperial exchanges lubricated the circulation of Indian-inspired fashionable goods and floral patterns within the British market and added to their desirability amongst families without direct imperial connection.

The mixture of market and gift-exchange in this moment shows the danger of tracing expanding cultures of consumption back to a particular type of the 'modern' individual. For some anthropologists, the circulation of things reveals larger conceptions of personhood. Marilyn Strathern thus

aligned exchange with individuality and contrasted it with the 'dividuality' of gift-giving in Melanesia, where persons exist as part of relationships (Strathern, 1988). Such juxtapositions carry echoes of older contrasts between *Gemeinschaft* und *Gesellschaft*. There is no need, however, to turn them into historically sequential types – in fact, F.Tönnies stressed that they were always simultaneous, although with changing form and power (Harris, 2001). People in contemporary societies continue to display individual and 'dividual' characteristics: consumers are also members of a family, a club, or a community. Applied to the history of consumption, the task is not to ignore commercial networks and commodification, but to recognize the contribution of dividual forms and of national, imperial and other forms of power for the circulation and quest for goods. Consumption has fired on more than one piston in the modern world.

I want to briefly point to three additional approaches with which historians have contributed to our understanding of the 'politics of value' so crucial to Appadurai's initial 'social life of things' (Appadurai, 1986). These concern practices, knowledge, and the agency and ethics of consumers.

The 'circuits of culture' approach developed by geographers emphasizes the variety of practices and knowledges at play between producers, merchants and consumers of a particular good (Cook, 2004). The emphasis here is on segmentation and contestation – a flower, a chicken, or a papaya mean different things to different people in the commodity chain. What deserves equal attention is that practices have the power of integration and interaction, stabilizing meaning and creating shared forms of use and reception. One way forward, therefore, may be to focus even more on the practices and the synergies and networks between them. An illustration is Bob Batchelor's comparison of porcelain in north-western Europe and Asia in the 17th and 18th centuries (Batchelor, 2006). Batchelor emphasizes how consumption practices were tied to different geographic regimes of production and communication. A porcelain bowl was read as well as a container for eating or drinking. Practices were mutually constitutive. Porcelain had performative powers, and these were shaped by different regional networks of print and production – the typographic regime of the Atlantic world centred on London and Amsterdam, the calligraphic regime in south-east Asia and old Islamic trading networks, and the xylographic network of coastal China. In all these regions, porcelain circulated ever more freely. But what we see here is ultimately not a story of the same article reaching ever more consumers across the world. Rather it is about the diverse genres of representations, systems of production, and habits of reading through which porcelain passed in each of these regimes. Speaking more generally, the

global history of consumption involves the coming together, interweaving and unravelling of clusters of practices.

Globalization involves the encounter between established bundles of practices and creates openings for their transfer, domestication or extermination. In anthropology and geography, the thrust of research has been to question the hegemonic power of global goods and brands and to reclaim the active role of local consumers in domesticating Coca Cola® or McDonalds® (Howes, 1996; MacDougall, 2003; Miller, 1995b; Watson, 1997). In historical research, by contrast, the opposite direction has received more attention, especially regarding the transfer of exotic foods and beverages from the new world to the old. How to account for the revolution in taste and lifestyle, from the initial repulsion in the 17th century to their ever more popular adoption in the following century? One recent attempt to reclaim Indian agency has stressed how Spanish missionaries acquired new tastes through a proximity with Indian cultural milieus. Rather than manipulating local food and custom to suit their own imperial identity, they internalized the indigenous social aesthetics and habits of drinking chocolate in New Spain, including frothing and the use of honey and special receptacles (Norton, 2006). Spanish missionaries acted as ambassadors of chocolate in the old world, though it is debatable whether they alone would have been able to initiate its popular triumph, which took over a century.

To recognize that taste has some autonomous force need not mean that it was not also tied to a politics of value and social hierarchies that legitimated, prized and channelled taste. Before new forms of sociability (the chocolatada, the tea-party) and new quotidian routines (hot breakfast drinks) could evolve around these exotic goods, they had to be domesticated. The Galenic theory of humours helped by assigning exotic foods and beverages specific medicinal benefits. Equally important for the dietary transformation of taste was, arguably, the prior, more general upgrading of taste in systems of knowledge. Botanists, explorers, scholars and doctors in 17th-century Holland accorded taste a central role in their investigations. Instead of abstractions or discourse, they prized 'tasteful objectivity' as a key to understanding the world, acquired through practical acquaintance, exploration, and demonstration (Cook, 2007: 41; Cowan, 2007). This involved the collecting and cultivation of exotic goods in Europe, and an analysis of their beneficial properties. Exotic goods such as nutmeg and tea acquired their status within this scientific-cultural hierarchy of taste and knowledge.

A growing number of geographers and anthropologists have explored the active role played by local consumers in globalization. This retrieval of

agency has mainly focused on how local people appropriate global goods, fitting them into local values and practices (see Foster, 2006 for an overview). Meanwhile, a contemporary interest in caring and the ethics of consumption has led to calls for a 'new moral political economy' where consumers in the North mobilize their agency to help distant producers (for critical discussion, see Trentmann, 2007). For all their insights, both of these approaches tend to picture consumers as outside the centres of political economy, perhaps with enough agency to domesticate a Barbie doll, stripping it of its exported corporate meaning, or to buy Fairtrade products, but nonetheless at one remove from the mainsprings of globalization associated with trade, capital, and multinational corporations. Yet, globalization was not simply a process steered by capitalists and imperialists. Consumers played an active role in it, not only as beneficiaries of cheaper goods but as political groups and social movements, most notably in the popular support in Britain for Free Trade a century ago (Trentmann, 2008).

Globalization and consumers therefore have entwined histories. Conversely, the consumer as a public actor and social identity would not have evolved the way it did without globalization and the conflicts to which it gave rise. The identity of the consumer as a public interest was moulded in campaigns against slavery and for Free Trade and has continued to evolve in more recent campaigns in the international consumer movement over world food security, trade policy, and health and safety (Hilton, 2007; Sussman, 2000; Trentmann, 2006b). Globalization placed new moral burdens on consumers, sharpening a sense of the conflicting obligations between caring for distant others and for those near at home. This tension has an intellectual history that reaches back to Adam Smith's thoughts on sympathy and that has been well explored in the history of ideas. It is worth emphasizing that ordinary consumers, too, have ideas about the world and their place in it, which has affected the course of globalization.<sup>7</sup> The current interest in ethical consumption and Fair Trade should therefore be viewed less as a contemporary innovation and break, than as an evolving story, steeped in earlier imperial as well as international traditions that helped to shape the global world we live in.

## OUTLOOK

Globalization is more than financial flows and commodity trade. It involves human actors whose ideas, identities, anxieties and power can facilitate, manipulate or contain global exchanges. Consumption has been a decisive arena for global encounters, precisely because so many things are central to



life, identity and social order. Globalization therefore is not all about integration. It has come with conflicting modes of imperialism, nationalism and internationalism. Tensions about what and how to consume reached new levels in the late 19th and early 20th centuries just as global markets became fully integrated. Consumers played an active role in this process. Their role in these earlier conflicts deserves recognition, not least since 'the consumer' is today imagined to be a new product of late modernity or 'advanced liberal' governmentality. A more historical engagement with the entangled stories of consumption and globalization is helpful not so much because it identifies precursors ('we have seen it all before') or because it creates symmetrical connections between equals (present globalization is just a bigger version of the past). Rather it provides perspective on the quite different constellations of power and ideas that have shaped globalization over time. Globalization and its politics has a history that bears the marks of these earlier developments.

Placing 'consumerism' in a global historical perspective offers a critical space for reflecting on several core assumptions in the contemporary debate. The focus on the 'dark side of consumerism' (Mazlish, 2005) echoes the still heavily moralistic suspicion of consumption amongst American and European commentators as dangerous, selfish and addictive, the enemy of community and citizenship. This critique has a long history (Davidson, 1999; Hilton, 2004; Horowitz, 1992, 2004). Significantly, the closer scholars move to the present, the darker their image of consumption. The bright new textiles in brilliant colours and new tastes and freedoms that dazzled people in the late 17th and 18th centuries are replaced by a bleak image of contemporary shopping addicts who are selling their souls on an ever-faster hedonistic treadmill (Frank, 1999; Offer, 2006; Schor, 1999; Schwartz, 2005). An emphasis on diversity, novelty and new freedoms gives way to one on uniformity, stress and the tyranny of choice.

Recognition of the longer history of consumer culture should not be confused with positive endorsement. It does, however, call for a more realistic and less historically myopic politics. Much soul-searching about the adverse effects of consumer culture on citizenship, personal well-being and the environment, which have led generations of scholars to think about the subject, continues to operate with a more or less explicit simple view of modern history. Until recently, in this view, people had community, authenticity, virtue and a responsible attitude towards the material and natural world. These were lost as societies entered an age of affluence and became addicted to growth and consumerism. Some scholars and commentators come to this position via the Frankfurt school, others via behavioral

economics, yet others from a psychological concern with 'affluenza'. What they share is a presumption that consumerism is a disease of fairly recent origin that can be healed by weaning societies off their obsession with endless growth and ever more stuff and leading them to more sustainable future. These are noble intentions but they draw on a dubious view of the past which makes for bad politics for the present. People's attachments to things are older than the post-war age of affluence and fixation on growth. Consumer culture thrived in the 18th century when no one even conceived of sustained growth. To recognize this richer history does not mean to minimize the real dangers of consumption today. Nor is it to celebrate choice or the agency of the consumer, as the above emphasis on imperialist and nationalist consumer movements should have made abundantly clear. It is to acknowledge that a consuming lifestyle is far more deeply entrenched than often thought, and for reasons that are often ignored or misunderstood in mainstream critiques of consumerism. To target primarily external agencies as responsible for the creation of new desires – be they advertising, corporations, or governments calling on citizens to be patriotic consumers – is to miss the internal attractions that have led people to use, want and find themselves in things in the past. Our material self has been growing for a long time.

In our understanding of the global history of consumption, then, we have reached a point where the conventional chronological markers of tradition, modernity, and late modernity have lost their fixed positions. Similar suspicions and anxieties about feverish consumption and materialist habits were heard in 18th century Europe and late Ming China. Researchers should look back past the 1960s, which currently still stands like a temporal wall in the head of the social science community. A more global view of consumption holds out a profound challenge to a simple binary between modernity associated with the West (individualism, markets, science, dynamism) and tradition associated with the East (community, gift, religion, stasis). The period since the sixteenth century saw a rapid expansion of the world of goods in many parts of the globe. Its flow and appropriation was not the preserve of the West, nor was it simply steered by individualism and markets. Self-fashioning, a reflexive interest in other cultures, care and hybridity have a longer past than accounts of contemporary 'consumerism' tend to recognize. Community, politics and social mobilization have continued to envelop the global flow of commodities.

## Notes

1. The significance of this communicative logic against the more conventional emphasis on emulation and conspicuous consumption has been rightly stressed in my view by Glennie and Thrift (1992). People increased their consumption of things for a range of reasons and causes. The analysis of 18th-century inventories in particular has suffered from a certain leap of faith, suspecting emulative motives behind the rising number of possessions at the exclusion of other possible factors, including professional knowledge and identities, suggested by the growing number of professional and religious books owned by doctors and lawyers. Even status-oriented consumption is not automatically emulative in the strict sense of copying or aping social superiors. The turn to wallpaper and refurbishing in 18th-century England, for example, was mediated through a language of balance, propriety, and decorum. Consumption had to be in accordance with one's rank, not aim too high or be seen as flashy. Emulation could backfire, and upholsterers were urged to downscale inappropriate ostentation or showiness (Vickery, 2006).
2. For a critique of Schivelbusch's (1992) association of hot beverages with a modern bourgeois West, see Clarence-Smith, 2008 and Norton, 2006. In Asia, the stimulating properties of tea were valued in Buddhism as an aid to meditation, not industriousness. The relation of alkaloids to addiction, social customs and behaviour change is complex and variable across the world (Clarence-Smith, 2008; Schivelbusch's, 1992).
3. Actor-network theorists such as Bruno Latour have presented modern history as if there was an advancing estrangement between individual self and things, a split traced to Descartes and other thinkers. This is debatable. The 18th and 19th century also promoted a turn to things and recognition of what William James in 1890 would call the 'material self'. See further, Trentmann, 2009.
4. De-centring the role of the USA in global histories of consumption also points to the role of other transnational networks and relations. In the case of Japan, which did not receive Marshall plan aid, links with Europe were especially important for savings policy which shaped the country's post-war dynamics of expanding consumption (see Garon, 2006; Garon and Maclachlan, 2006).
5. Diversity reaches all the way into everyday life, not least in the side-by-side of old and new technologies, old and new routines, and so forth. Consumers lived in multiple time zones, as the Lynds found in their pioneering study of Middletown in 1929: 'A single home may be operated in the 20th century when it comes to ownership of automobile and vacuum cleaner, while its lack of a bathub may throw it back into another era and its lack of sewer connection and custom of pumping drinking-water from a well in the same back yard with the family "privy" put it on par with life in the Middle Ages' (Lynd and Lynd, 1929). See now Edgerton (2006). For the rhythmic flow and disruption of everyday life, see Lefebvre (2002[1961], 2004), Shove et al. (2009).
6. The simultaneity of different systems of provision may be one reason why historians, keen on integrating groups, practices and ideas in a given period, have been less inclined to pursue individual commodity biographies which became a prominent genre in anthropology and geography in the 1980s and 1990s as a way of connecting producers and consumers across space and for tracking the 'politics

of value' over time (Appadurai, 1986; Mintz, 1985; for recent discussion see Foster, 2006; Nuetzenadel and Trentmann, 2008).

7. The importance of imperial and internationalist ideas for consumers and other social movements is now well established for Britain and the British Empire. Research on post-war continental Europe has only started and mainly focused on artists, radicals and intellectual critics (Mausbach, 2006; Poiger, 2006; Ross, 1996). We still need to know more about how the people who did the consuming viewed the world.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Brian Cowan, Martin Daunton, Karl Gerth, Rick Wilk, and the anonymous referees for comments, and to the Economic and Social Research Council for grant no. RES-052-27-002.

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