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Title

The Limits of a Success Story: Fair Trade and the History of Postcolonial Globalization¹ (review article)

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Abstract

The history of fair trade is the matter of a heated debate wrapped up in differences regarding the ideals, goals and allies of a movement which has achieved highly visible successes in recent years. The emerging historiography challenges the common narrative of recent and sudden success. It draws attention to fair trade's relation to a broader tradition of consumer activism, to the diverse means and ends employed by the movement, and to the networks of people and ideas in which it operated. A review of recent historiography reveals that by a shift in emphasis away from the purported revamp of the movement in the late 1980s to a more sober and nuanced picture, the history of fair trade yields valuable insight into the postcolonial aspect of postwar globalization. Regarded as an attempt to arrive at a postcolonial world order, the history of fair trade activism provides a unique window on how 'postcolonial globalization' took shape.

Article

1. Introduction

Fair trade is a hot topic. As sales figures for fair trade products have continued to rise through the recent economic crisis, a broad audience is interested in the historic roots of this currently successful movement.² The history of fair trade can also be termed 'hot', because it is very much caught up in the present. It is not the object of cooled off, detached attempts to analyze it, but the battleground for heated debates about the future of the movement.³ The spirited fair trade movement is as divided as ever over defining its ideals, goals and potential allies, and as a result, interpretations of its history have been caught up in these divisions. In particular, history is invoked to claim the remarkable success of fair trade since the late 1980s, which is then either greeted as a remarkable breakthrough or depreciated as the cause of the demise of purer forms of fair trade activism.

¹ The author would like to thank Matthew Anderson, Valerio Verrea and Ruben Quaas for making manuscripts of as of yet unpublished work available for this review. Matthew Anderson will publish a revised version of his dissertation as *A History of Fair Trade in Contemporary Britain: From Civil Society Campaigns to Corporate Compliance* with Palgrave MacMillan in 2015, whereas Quaas' dissertation *Fair Trade: Eine global-lokale Geschichte am Beispiel des Kaffees* has recently appeared at Böhlau Verlag. Insightful comments on earlier versions of this text by Wouter van Dis, Bram Mellink and Keir Plaice were much appreciated.

² Fairtrade International, Strong Producers, Strong Future: Annual Report 2013-14, Bonn 2014; J.-M. Krier, *Fair Trade 2007: New Facts and Figures from an Ongoing Success Story. A Report on Fair Trade in 33 Consumer Countries*, Culemborg 2008.

³ C. Lorenz, "Hete geschiedenis": over de temperatuur van de contemporaine Duitse geschiedenis, in: *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 120 (2007) 1, pp. 4–19.

The emerging historiography on fair trade has challenged this notion of a watershed in fair trade history during the 1980s. In reviewing recent research on fair trade history, I will argue that these challenges provide an opportunity to reconsider the historical relevance of fair trade. Regarded as an attempt by citizens across the globe to arrive at a postcolonial world order, fair trade history provides a unique window on what I will call 'postcolonial globalization'. Older traditions of consumer and development activism were reinterpreted within this postcolonial framework, which extends into our present day and age. Before outlining this promising perspective, I will explore the limits of fair trade's success story.

2. Fair Trade: Developing a Story of Success

Fair trade activism emerged during the postwar years as a reaction to global economic inequality. As decolonization and a shared critique of Northern economic dominance forged a shared sense of identity among countries in Asia, Africa and South-America, they channeled their attempts at reform through international governing bodies such as the United Nations.⁴ The resulting negotiations under the auspices of organizations such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) also drew the attention of the public in the North. The insistent pleas for a restructuring of the global market by the spokespeople of the Third World and the frustration over the lack of progress achieved through these negotiations provided decisive sparks to light the fire of fair trade activism in Western European countries. Initiatives to reform the global marketplace were especially taken up among groups which were concerned with issues of global development since the 1950s. Activists promoted fair trade locally, nationally and internationally by selling products to provide financial aid and to raise awareness among citizens, through boycotts and informational campaigns, and by lobbying politicians and pressuring companies. Recently, the quick expansion of fair trade sales through 'mainstream' outlets has especially drawn the attention of both scholars and a wider public.

Most publications concerning fair trade history are situated right at the borders of historiography. Next to retrospective works by members of the movement⁵, the movement has predominantly drawn the attention of social scientists. Their works roughly divide into two categories.⁶ On the one hand, a growing number of studies are concerned with measuring the effectivity of fair trade.⁷ Such

⁴ S. Kunkel, *Zwischen Globalisierung, Internationalen Organisationen und "global governance"*. Eine kurze Geschichte des Nord-Süd-Konflikts in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 60 (2012) 4, pp. 555–577.

⁵ F. van der Hoff/N. Roozen, *Fair trade: het verhaal achter Max Havelaar-koffie, Oké-bananen en Kuyichi-jeans*, Amsterdam 2001; M. Kocken, *Sixty Years of Fair Trade. A Brief History of the Fair Trade Movement*, 2006 (<http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org/efta/Doc/History.pdf>, accessed November 20, 2014); J. van der Stelt, *Since 59: 50 jaar Fair Trade Original*, Culemborg 2009; H. Lamb, *Fighting the Banana Wars and Other Fairtrade Battles: how we Took on the Corporate Giants to Change the World*, London 2008; F. Eshuis/J. Harmsen, *Handel onder voorwaarden: 15 jaar koffie met Max Havelaar Keurmerk*, Utrecht 2003; Stichting Max Havelaar, *18 jaar Max Havelaar: Fairtrade labelling wordt volwassen*, Utrecht 2007; J. Harmsen, *25 jaar Fairtrade Max Havelaar: Van koffie tot nu*, Utrecht 2013; J. Harmsen/B. Meindersma, *25 jaar Fairtrade Max Havelaar: Bananen met toekomst*, Utrecht 2013.

⁶ Cf. V. Verrea, *The Fair Trade Innovation: Tensions Between Ethical Behaviour and Profit*, unpublished dissertation, University of Leipzig, 2014, p. 14.

⁷ Cf. P. Hoebink et al., *The Impact of Coffee Certification on Smallholder Farmers in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia*, Nijmegen 2014; R. Ruben/R. Fort, *The Impact of Fair Trade Certification for Coffee Farmers in Peru*, in: *World Development* 40 (2012) 3, pp. 570-582; R. Ruben/S. Verkaart, *Comparing Fair and Responsible Coffee Standards in East Africa*, in: B. Helmsing/S. Vellema eds., *Value chains, Social Inclusion and Economic Development: Contrasting Theories and Realities*, London 2011, pp. 61-81; V. Nelson/A. Martin/J. Ewert, *What Difference Can They Make? Assessing the Social Impact of Corporate Codes of Practice*, in: *Development in*

studies can be regarded as a sub-branch of impact studies on the practices development, which have come to flourish in recent years.⁸ By and large, they conclude that fair trade does make a difference in the lives of producers, albeit oftentimes only a small one. Moreover, they point to the limitations of the system, which often leads to producers selling only part of their yields through the fair trade system.⁹ However valuable such studies are in noticing the strengths and shortcomings of current practices, their attempts to avoid debates about the morality of different forms of co-operation are misleading. By substituting the a priori question concerning proper relations between trading partners or between those providing and receiving aid for the post hoc question concerning which practice has proven most effective, this approach all too readily suggests that 'if it works, it's good'.¹⁰ Thus, it sidesteps debates about the morality of different approaches to development while implicitly defining 'good' development above all in terms of economic impact within the countries which receive aid.

On the other hand, a host of studies on fair trade are concerned with recent developments in the ideas and practices of the movement. Such studies above all chart the rise of fair trade certification, the model which has spurred the recent surges in the turnover of fair trade products. Although partly retrospective, this type of studies is at least as much concerned with the future of fair trade.¹¹ In their analyses, these scholars by and large agree that attempts to remake fair trade as a mainstream phenomenon since the 1980s were successful. At the same time, they are often critical of this approach, pointing to the limits of this kind of 'market-driven justice'.¹² By selling small amounts of fair trade products, large companies may attempt to co-opt the ethical claims of the movement without committing themselves to them.¹³ Consumers may choose to buy fair trade products not because they support the ideal of a more equal global marketplace, but simply to distinguish themselves as 'good' people through consuming 'good' products.¹⁴ By looking to the marketplace for social justice, the market may also be given too much credit: to what extent can and should buying fair trade be a substitute for national and international market regulations?¹⁵

Many scholars concerned with recent developments within the movement provide a cursory overview of the history of fair trade. What relevance do they ascribe to the history of fair trade?

Practice 15 (2005) 3–4, pp. 539–45; J. Valkila/A. Nygren, Impacts of Fair Trade Certification on Coffee Farmers, Cooperatives, and Laborers in Nicaragua, in: *Agriculture and Human Values* 27 (2009) 3, pp. 321–33; A. Ohnmacht, *Fair Trade and Poverty Alleviation: A Critical Analysis on the Impact of Fair Trade Networks*, Aachen 2007. Cf. D. Reed/B. Thomson/I. Hussey/J.-F. LeMay, Developing a Normatively Grounded Research Agenda for Fair Trade: Examining the Case of Canada, in: *Journal of Business Ethics* 92 (2010), pp. 151–79.

⁸ A. V. Banerjee/E. Duflo, *Poor Economics: Barefoot Hedge-fund Managers, Diy Doctors and the Surprising Truth About Life on Less Than \$1 a Day*, London 2012.

⁹ Cf. J. Harmsen: 25 jaar Fairtrade Max Havelaar (see note 5), pp. 43–50; J. Harmsen/B. Meindertsma, 25 jaar Fairtrade Max Havelaar (see note 5), pp. 46–72.

¹⁰ P. van Dam/W. van Dis, Beyond the Merchant and the Clergyman: Assessing Moral Claims About Development Cooperation, in: *Third World Quarterly* 35 (2014) 9, pp. 1636–1655.

¹¹ Cf. G. Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee: the Prospects and Pitfalls of Market-driven Social Justice*, Toronto 2007; idem, *Alternative Trade: Legacies for the Future*, Winnipeg 2013; B. Granville/J. Dine, *The Processes and Practices of Fair Trade: Trust, Ethics and Governance*, Abingdon 2012; M. Hudson/I. Hudson/M. Fridell, *Fair Trade, Sustainability and Social Change*, Houndmills 2013; D. Jaffee, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*, Berkeley 2007.

¹² M. Hudson/I. Hudson/M. Fridell, *Fair trade, Sustainability and Social Change* (see note 11), pp. 60–68.

¹³ D. Jaffee, *Weak Coffee: Certification and Co-Optation in the Fair Trade Movement*, in: *Social Problems* 59 (2012) 1, p. 94–116.

¹⁴ G. Fridell, *Fair-Trade Coffee and Commodity Fetishism: The Limits of Market-Driven Social Justice*, in: *Historical Materialism* 15 (2007) 4, pp. 79–104; K. Wheeler, *Fair trade and the Citizen-consumer: Shopping for Justice?*, Basingstoke 2012.

¹⁵ G. Fridell: *Alternative Trade* (see note 11).

First, the recent history above all of certification has been detailed in order for scholars to make sense of the current array of organizations and approaches in the field of fair trade.¹⁶ Second, the history of the movement is invoked to illustrate the fact that radical and more moderate groups have co-sponsored initiatives for fair trade. Present-day difference over the question of the viability of mainstreaming fair trade are traced back to a dual origin of the movement in groups promoting religious charity and activists promoting solidarity with Third World countries. Both groups, such accounts suggest, resorted to trading products from the global South, but with different intentions. Whereas solidarity activists wanted to support struggles for liberation and even a global overthrow of capitalism, those promoting charity sold produce to provide people in more dire circumstances with means to support themselves.¹⁷

A third reason why many authors allude to history is to highlight the break in the development of the movement which purportedly occurred during the late 1980s. Scholars have often accentuated this break by speaking of a transition from 'alternative trade' to 'fair trade' during these years. The introduction of product certification is regarded as the principal cause for this transition.¹⁸ This practice allowed companies outside the fair trade movement to sell individual products labeled as 'fair'. The 'brilliant idea' first conceived by the initiators of *Max Havelaar*-coffee in 1988 is seen to have led to a fundamental transformation of the movement itself and of its social position: the movement started to focus on selling products on a large scale and in due course even collaborated with many large retail companies it formerly regarded as its enemies, such as Walmart and Ahold. Fair trade moved from the fringes to the mainstream.¹⁹

Several authors have presented a more nuanced view of the history of fair trade, which represents the history of fair trade as a succession of 'waves'.²⁰ During the first wave, which lasted from the early postwar years until the 1960s, charitable organizations in the United States and in Great Britain attempted to sell handcrafted products made by German refugees, Puerto Rican women and other underprivileged groups in order to improve their living conditions. In the second half of the 1960s, a second wave took off. Groups promoting alternative trade set up organizations to import goods from developing countries. At the same time, a network of world shops and similar initiatives where people could buy these imported goods and learn about the injustices of the global trading system came into existence throughout the global North.

The advent of a third wave is marked by the introduction of labeling and certification, initiated by the *Max Havelaar*-initiative in 1988. Similar attempts, such as CaféDirect in Great Britain, soon appeared. The practices of labeling and product certification soon spread throughout Europe and the United States. During this third wave, the new-found opportunities were predominantly used by organizations sympathetic to the fair trade movement. The fourth wave, which began around the

¹⁶ E. Bennett, A Short History of Fairtrade Certification Governance, in: B. Granville/J. Dine, *The Processes and Practices of Fair Trade* (see note 11), pp. 53–78.

¹⁷ D. Jaffee, *Brewing Justice* (see note 11), p. 12; J. Bowes ed., *The Fair Trade Revolution*, London 2011, pp. 3–4; M. von Hauff/K. Claus, *Fair Trade: ein Konzept nachhaltigen Handels*, Konstanz 2012, pp. 86–89; C. Gendron/V. Bisailon/A. I. Otero Rance, *The Institutionalization of Fair Trade: More than Just a Degraded Form of Social Action*, in: *Journal of Business Ethics* 86 (2008), pp. 64–66.

¹⁸ D. Jaffee, Daniel, *Brewing justice* (see note 11), p. 13; C. Gendron/V. Bisailon/A. I. Otero Rance: *The Institutionalization of Fair Trade* (see note 17), pp. 66–67; E. Bennett, *A Short History of Fairtrade Certification Governance* (see note 16), pp. 47–49; M. Hudson/I. Hudson/M. Fridell, *Fair Trade, Sustainability and Social Change* (see note 11), pp. 36–37.

¹⁹ J. Bowes, *The Fair Trade Revolution* (see note 17), p. 4.

²⁰ A. Nicholls/C. Opal, *Fair trade. Market-driven Ethical Consumption*, London 2005, pp. 19–20; M. von Hauff/K. Claus, *Fair Trade* (see note 17), pp. 86–92; K. Wheeler, *Fair Trade and the Citizen-consumer* (see note 14), pp. 36–40.

turn of the century, has been characterized by the consolidation of the popularity of fair trade and the attempts of large companies to make a profit from its success by introducing fair trade products as part of a broader range of products targeting specific groups of consumers.

Regarding fair trade history as a succession of waves has enabled a more nuanced view, but retains the crucial characteristics of its cruder companions: the notion of a 'watershed' in fair trade history during the late 1980s and the linear depiction of a movement slowly moving from the fringes towards the mainstream, becoming ever more successful on its way there.

3. Behind the Success Story: Insights from Fair Trade Historiography

Slowly but surely, the history of fair trade has also started to draw attention among historians. Their research cautiously raises several questions about the popular narratives of fair trade history. These questions primarily concern the relation of fair trade to a broader tradition of consumer activism, the development of the means and ends of the fair trade movement, and the networks of people and ideas in which the movement operated. Taken together, these historical analyses of fair trade present its history as a series of more or less continuous transformations rather than a history marked by a watershed during the late 1980s.

The recent historiographical interest in the history of consumption has provided an important impulse for a reevaluation of fair trade history. Fair trade can be regarded as one of many initiatives of citizens contesting the morals of their society through consumption. Drawing above all on the work of Karl Polanyi, many histories of fair trade recount the rise of amoral modern markets, which subsequently have to be morally reclaimed by social movements such as the fair trade movement. Scholars such as Frank Trentmann have pointed out that this perspective fails to take into account the ongoing struggle over the morals of consumption, which presumably goes along with any form of consumption from ancient times up to the present.²¹ Instead of regarding fair trade as a new phenomenon, Trentmann proposes to regard it as a variety of consumer activism. He has particularly highlighted the interwar campaigns to 'Buy empire goods' in Britain and the attempts stemming from the 1930s to address food security as a global problem which had to be solved through international organizations as immediate precursors to the fair trade movement.²²

Similarly, the analysis of consumer activism by Lawrence Glickman invites a view of fair trade activism as a specific instance of a broader tradition of consumer activism, which he distinguishes from the consumer movement: the latter takes consumers as its explicit object, whereas consumer activism uses consumption as a means to express political positions, therewith regarding consumers as agents of change.²³ According to Glickman, citizens have used consumption as a means to express long-distance solidarity at least since the 18th century. Different episodes of consumer activism have not usually been regarded as instances of a longer tradition, because they served a wide range of political goals. As a result, the activists did not develop a 'memory of shared political activism', instead regarding their individual struggles as singular attempts at achieving their goals through consumer actions. They can be seen to be united by 'a vision of the consumer as a potentially robust political actor, whose power extended as far as the factories, distributors, and stores (as well as the people that owned and worked in these facilities) producing and selling the goods he or she

²¹ F. Trentmann, *The Long History of Contemporary Consumer Society: Chronologies, Practices, and Politics in Modern Europe*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 49 (2009), pp. 107–128.

²² F. Trentmann, *Before "Fair Trade": Empire, Free Trade, and the Moral Economies of Food in the Modern World*, in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (2007) 6, pp. 1079–1102.

²³ L. B. Glickman, *Buying Power: a History of Consumer Activism in America*, Chicago 2009, p. xii.

bought.²⁴ Comparing the statutes of the influential fair trade organization Transfair to the statutes of the German consumers' league drafted a hundred years earlier, Harald Homann and Verena Ott have also found a shared focus on the perceived injustices accompanying the production of consumer goods, as well as similar strategies and a common, predominantly bourgeois, audience.²⁵

Regarding fair trade as a variety of consumer activism also calls attention to a second corrective recent historiography has to offer to prevailing accounts of fair trade history. Following the common linear narrative of the growing – if ambivalent – success of fair trade, the focus has been almost exclusively on the attempts to sell ever more products to an ever wider audience. These activities have indeed been very successful since the 1980s, but the range of means which have been employed to further the cause of the movement has historically been much broader than just selling products: drawing the attention of the media, lobbying politicians, confronting the public in the streets with rallies or manifestations, pressuring businesses through boycotts or 'shaming' campaigns. Moreover, the goals connected to attempts to sell products have differed considerably. Finally, the scope of fair trade activism has constantly alternated between attempts to reach a broad public and activities self-consciously restricted to alternative niches.²⁶

Strategies such as testing and labelling products have been a common feature of consumer activism. For example, the National Consumers League whitelisted companies which provided good working conditions for their employees around the turn of the 19th century.²⁷ Discouraging consumers to buy certain goods was an equally common strategy both within consumer activism and throughout the history of the fair trade movement.²⁸ British activists during the 1970s made note of the working-conditions on tea plantations from which several British companies obtained their tea.²⁹ In similar fashion the Clean Clothes Campaign has devised 'shaming'-campaigns which expose the exploitive practices of large clothing companies since the 1980s through international media campaigns, but also through manifestations in front of local stores of targeted companies.³⁰

These examples point towards the different strategies, as well as to the array of ends, which have been pursued by fair trade activists. Regarding the goals of selling products, struggles occurred constantly over whether to regard products exclusively as symbols that might draw attention to unfair trading conditions, or whether sales in themselves were also a viable goal, because producers would benefit from them. Konrad Kuhn has demonstrated how the Swiss *Organisation Schweiz-Dritte Welt OS3* during the 1970s and 1980s opted to import only products that had 'political value', meaning that they could be used to inform the buying public in Switzerland about the disadvantageous structure of world trade regarding developing countries. At the same time, this approach alienated several potential partners, which wanted to focus on selling products for the

²⁴ Ibidem, pp. 1–26, citation p. 5.

²⁵ H. Homann/V. Ott, Das Europa der Konsumenten: Konsumkultur, Konsumentenmoral und Kulturkritik um 1900 und 2000, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2013 (<http://www.europa.clio-online.de/2013/Article=575>, accessed October 4, 2013). Cf. G.M. König, Konsumkultur: inszenierte Warenwelt um 1900, Wien 2009.

²⁶ V. Verrea, The Fair Trade Innovation (see note 6).

²⁷ K. Kish Sklar, The Consumers' White Label Campaign of the National Consumers' League, 1898-1918, in: S. Strasser/C. McGovern/M. Judt eds., Getting and Spending: American and European Consumption in the Twentieth Century, New York 1998, pp. 17–35.

²⁸ L. B. Glickman, Buying Power (see note 23), pp. 303–305.

²⁹ M. Anderson, "Cost of a Cup of Tea": Fair Trade and the British Co-operative Movement, c. 1960 - 2000, in: L. Black/N. Robertson eds., Consumerism and the Co-operative Movement in Modern British History: Taking Stock, Manchester 2009, pp. 243–244.

³⁰ P. B., Making Political Consumers: The Tactical Action Repertoire of a Campaign for Clean Clothes, in: Social Movement Studies 9 (2010) 3, pp. 311–329.

benefit of producers, regardless of their educational potential.³¹ Such considerations also shaped international alliances: the Protestant and Catholic West-German youth groups which were mounting a fair trade campaign preferred to co-operate with the Dutch importing organization *SOS Wereldhandel* instead of the British Oxfam, because SOS supported the political approach to selling products pioneered by Dutch world shops.³²

Apart from the reasons why activists sell fair trade products, consumers also have a mind of their own when deciding to buy these products. The historiography concerning consumer activism reminds us that consumption and the expression of political sentiments have often gone hand in hand. Social movements such as the civil rights movement, the women's movement and environmental activists have all underlined their political claims by developing specific practices of consumption which serve to distinguish members of the movement from others, but also might be used to voice support for the political positions represented by these products.³³ Seen as such, the notion of a shift in activism from politics towards the market is not as straightforward as it is often presented in the history of fair trade.³⁴ Buying fair trade products is an incidental act for some consumers, whereas to others it is a constant priority. As research by Kathryn Wheeler has pointed out, many fair trade supporters regard buying fair trade products as only a small part of their commitment: informing others about the problems of the global trading system, encouraging people to buy fair trade or discouraging them to buy certain other products, organizing local coalitions in order to obtain the designation of Fair Trade Town' for their municipality – all these paths are regularly chosen by fair trade supporters.³⁵

A third corrective recent historiography has to offer concerns the importance of what takes place outside the marketplace. Fair trade activism has often resorted to means other than selling products. For example, in 1975 several Dutch world shop groups hosted a campaign which displayed packets of cane sugar next to packets of beet sugar to highlight the different retailing prices of the two. Shoppers displaying an interest were engaged in conversations which were not intended to sell them the sugar. Instead, they were meant to encourage citizens to reflect on the disadvantages the European tariff policies caused to sugar producers in developing countries and on how the capitalist structure of the sugar trade similarly oppressed European beet sugar farmers. The campaign thus aimed to underline the need for people all over the world to liberate themselves from capitalism.³⁶

Campaigns by fair trade activists made extensive use of informing the public by distributing flyers and brochures, by staging local protest events, and by devising national protest rallies. Different settings provided different opportunities to promote fair trade. In Switzerland, the possibility of enforcing referenda on issues related to fair trade was an important incentive for the mobilization of a fair trade movement.³⁷ Conversely, in Great Britain the Charity Commission severely restricted the

³¹ K. Kuhn, "Handelsförderung ist notwendig und problematisch zugleich". Die Entstehung des fairen Handels als neue Handels- und Unternehmensform, in: H. J. Gilomen ed., *Dienstleistungen. Expansion und Transformation des "Dritten Sektors"* (15.-20. Jahrhundert), Zürich 2007, pp. 107–124.

³² R. Quaas, *Selling Coffee to Raise Awareness for Development Policy. The Emerging Fair Trade Market in Western Germany in the 1970s*, in: *Historical Social Research* 36 (2011) 3, pp. 164–181.

³³ L. B. Glickman, *Buying Power* (see note 23), pp. 270–273.

³⁴ Cf. G. Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee* (see note 11).

³⁵ K. Wheeler, *Fair Trade and the Citizen-consumer* (see note 14).

³⁶ M. Goos/W. van het Hekke, *Wereldwinkels en producten: theorie & praktijk*, Utrecht 1977.

³⁷ K. Kuhn, *Entwicklungspolitische Solidarität: die Dritte-Welt-Bewegung in der Schweiz zwischen Kritik und Politik (1975 - 1992)*, Zürich 2011, p. 417.

possibilities for organizations concerned with development to engage the public in discussions of political dimensions of global inequality.³⁸

The coalitions which the fair trade movement brought about were equally important. Historical analyses have long pointed out the broader network of people and ideas in which fair trade operated. Particularly, the close ties between fair trade and development have received considerable attention. Since the 1960s, the fair trade movement has been closely connected to other organizations concerned with development. Early contemporaries regularly presented the fair trade movement as part of a 'Third World movement'.³⁹ Ever since, it has not been uncommon to find elaborate descriptions of fair trade initiatives in studies on the history of Third World movements.⁴⁰ Many debates about the direction fair trade should take were closely tied to wider debates about trajectories of development. For example, Konrad Kuhn has stressed how theories of dependency were an important catalyst for fair trade activism during the 1970s. The demise of this perspective during the 1980s had a centrifugal effect on fair trade groups in Switzerland.⁴¹ This relation between fair trade and the Third World movement has lost some of its prominence in recent years. There appear to be two main reasons for this development. On the one hand, the movement was gradually eclipsed over the last twenty-five years, as the concept of a 'Third World' itself lost its appeal.⁴² Secondly, the successful professionalization of fair trade initiatives and the focus of many publications on its aim of selling products turned attention away from fair trade as a social movement.

There is reason for welcoming the shift of focus away from regarding fair trade activism as part of a broader Third World movement. The suggestion of a Third World movement as a new and largely autonomous movement was always misleading. It should not be disregarded as a marker of identity for groups of activists during the 1970s and 1980s, which identified themselves and potential allies through the notion of the Third World. It is nonetheless of limited use as an analytical concept for analyzing fair trade history. Like the concept of 'new social movements', which is often accompanying it, the focus on a Third World movement precludes the longer traditions within which these movements were situated and the crucial importance of the coalitions they forged with other institutions, both 'new' and 'old', both directly concerned with development and oriented towards other goals.⁴³ For example, fair trade activism has had strong and influential ties to 'old' institutions such as churches, trade unions and political parties. Successful formations of broad alliances between old and new institutions are among the more striking aspects of impactful postwar social movements such as the fair trade and the 'green' movement.

The shift away from narratives deriving from the historiography of the Third World movement also provides an opportunity to address the alleged division between charity-minded Christian activists

³⁸ M. Anderson, *The British Fair Trade Movement, 1960 - 2000: a New Form of Global Citizenship?*, Dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2008, chapter 2.

³⁹ J. Miltenburg, *Van morele verontwaardiging ... tot anti-imperialisme. Aanzet tot een analyse van de derde wereld beweging in Nederland*, Amsterdam 1975, pp. 36–63.

⁴⁰ H. Beerends, *Tegen de draad in: een beknopte geschiedenis van de (derde)wereldbeweging*, Amsterdam 2013; H. Beerends/M. Broere, *De bewogen beweging: een halve eeuw mondiale solidariteit*, Amsterdam 2004; H. Beerends, *De Derde Wereldbeweging: geschiedenis en toekomst*, Den Haag 1992; K. Kuhn, *Entwicklungspolitische Solidarität* (see note 37); C. Olejniczak, *Die Dritte-Welt-Bewegung in Deutschland: konzeptionelle und organisatorische Strukturmerkmale einer neuen sozialen Bewegung*, Wiesbaden 1999.

⁴¹ K. Kuhn, *Entwicklungspolitische Solidarität* (see note 37), pp. 417–419.

⁴² M. Berger, *After the Third World? History, Destiny and the Fate of Third Worldism*, in: *Third World Quarterly* 25 (2004) 1, pp. 9–39.

⁴³ P. van Dam, "Een stukje ellende in uw eigen wereldje". *Solidariteit met de derde wereld in de Nederlandse vakbeweging*, in: P. van Dam/B. Mellink/J. Turpijn eds., *Onbehagen in de polder: Nederland in conflict sinds 1795*, Amsterdam 2014, pp. 231–252.

and radical secular groups, which has been a prominent feature in analyses of the Third World movement and the fair trade movement alike. In the Netherlands, initiatives by secular humanists to sell handicrafts on behalf of Southern producers at the end of the 1970s were far more moderate than the anti-capitalist campaigns devised by the ecumenical groups such as Sjaloom and Solidaridad during the 1970s and early 1980s.⁴⁴ Second, in many cases, it is not all that easy to draw a line between Christian and secular activists. On the contrary, the successful cooperation between activists from diverse denominational and ideological backgrounds within the movement for fair trade has been one of its more striking features.⁴⁵ Sebastian Tripp has pointed out the importance of a shift towards the 'world church' as the framework in which local and national churches should situate themselves for the rise of many fair trade groups.⁴⁶ The continuity between attempts to confront hunger on a global scale which arose in the context of the League of Nations and the United Nations during the 1930s and 1940s and later initiatives for fair trade also demonstrate that fair trade activism has not just been a variety of development activism.⁴⁷

The networks and alliances in which fair trade activists operated appear have been much more fluid and changeable than is suggested by an alignment of fair trade with the Third World movement. Ruben Quaas has pointed out how the integration of fair trade within the West-German alternative *Milieu* during the 1980s at first broadened the support for fair trade initiatives and paved the way for a successful combination of developmental and ecological concerns in fair trade initiatives since the latter half of the 1980s.⁴⁸ By gaining distance from the perspective of fair trade as a Third World movement, depictions of a break in fair trade history around the end of the 1980s are fruitfully questioned once more. For example, Valerio Verrea has made clear that groups promoting alternative trade with partners in the global South have continued their activities throughout the 1990s and 2000s.⁴⁹ Conversely, Matthew Anderson has also called attention to alliances within the North which did not materialize, even though they appeared likely. For example, relations between fair trade activists and the co-operative movement and trade unions were awkward in Great Britain, even though members of these movements acknowledged overlapping goals.⁵⁰

Similarly, attempts to make an impact through reaching a broad audience were by no means typical only of the late 1980s or of the dissolution of an earlier, more radical version of the movement. Activists have targeted a large public with varying success since the 1960s. Early attempts at reforming the structure of world trade, such as the cane sugar campaign which was set up in the Netherlands in 1968 to address the disadvantages farmers in developing countries experienced

⁴⁴ F. Bieckmann/E. Lammers, *Hivos! 1968-2008: een onvoltooide geschiedenis van hulp naar andersglobalisme*, Amsterdam 2008.

⁴⁵ P. van Dam, *Handel im Tempel? Fair trade und Kirchen in den Niederlanden seit 1945*, in: W. Damberg/T. Jähnichen eds., *Neue Soziale Bewegungen als Herausforderung sozialkirchlichen Handelns*, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 279–296.

⁴⁶ S. Tripp, *Die Weltkirche vor Ort. Die Globalisierung der Kirchen und die Entstehung christlicher "Dritte-Welt"-Gruppen*, in: *Soziale Strukturen und Semantiken des Religiösen im Wandel: Transformationen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1989*, Essen 2011, pp. 123–136; idem, *Das Programm zur Bekämpfung des Rassismus und die "Glokalisierung" der Kirchen*, in: K. Kunter/A. Schilling eds., *Globalisierung der Kirchen: der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen und die Entdeckung der Dritten Welt in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, Göttingen 2014, pp. 297–312.

⁴⁷ F. Trentmann, *Before "Fair Trade"* (see note 22), pp. 1088–1089. Cf. G. Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*, Philadelphia 2013; M. Mazower, *Governing the World: the History of an Idea*, New York 2012.

⁴⁸ R. Quaas, *Fairer Handel und Kaffee: eine global-lokale Verflechtungsgeschichte*, Dissertation, University of Bielefeld, 2013, Chapter 4.

⁴⁹ V. Verrea, *The Fair Trade Innovation* (see note 6).

⁵⁰ M. Anderson, *The British Fair Trade Movement* (see note 38), chapters 1 & 4.

because of European trade restrictions and subsidies.⁵¹ This campaign was explicitly aimed at the Dutch public at large, which it reached through newspapers, radio and television covering its activities. It also made extensive use of publications which were specifically developed for the campaign. Attempts to establish this campaign on a European level during the early 1970s speak to the ambitious perspective on the potential audience for fair trade among its proponents during this era.⁵² The attempts by the Dutch importer of fair trade goods SOS in the early 1970s to expand its operations to cover Western Europe entirely also speak to the large ambitions and considerable successes during the early days of fair trade history.⁵³

Taken together, these insights from fair trade historiography invalidate histories recounting the success story of fair trade resulting from a sudden transformation at the end of the 1990s or as a succession of waves during each of which the movement expanded. Surely, if the success of fair trade is measured merely in economic terms of sales, it is tempting to regard the late 1980s as a watershed and to dismiss earlier instances of fair trade as a pre-history of mostly marginal initiatives. Looking beyond sales figures, however, the 1980s did not bring about a watershed, but rather saw new ideas and strategies evolving much as they had in earlier years. On the one hand, new attempts to engage a broad public did not put an end to existing practices of alternative trade. The palette of activities employed by the movement has continued to include a host of activities other than selling products. The impressive sales figures easily draw the attention of observers away from the continued relevance of attempts to raise awareness about economic injustice, boycotts, shaming campaigns and political lobbying, as well as from new initiatives such as the private-public partnerships for fair trade forged through the 'fair trade towns'-campaign.

On the other hand, attempts to reach the mainstream during the latter half of the 1980s were closely connected to earlier attempts to reach a broad public, which had in some instances also been highly impactful. They grew out of forms of co-operation which had been forged since the late 1970s, such as the relationship between promoters of fair trade and ecological approaches. The evolution of the fair trade movement during the 1980s closely resembles the trajectory of organizations such as *Médicins sans Frontières*, which according to Eleanor Davey developed a more pragmatic and professional, less overtly ideological approach, without giving up on public engagement for moral causes.⁵⁴

The causes for this shift – which are still very much debated – include the disenchantment with radical politics at home and with the actual achievements of leftist 'distant paradises' abroad. Actors from the global South also played a crucial role: they stressed the need to move beyond symbolic actions by addressing acute problems through practical measures. The relationships between partners from the South and the North which had become closer since the late 1960s thus provided an important spark for the reorientation of many initiatives for transnational solidarity. In the case of fair trade, for some groups a more pragmatic and professional approach entailed a reorientation in means, if usually not in ideas – selling more coffee during the 1980s could just as well be undertaken in support of the revolutionary Nicaraguan government as it could be employed to support co-operatives of small farmers. The pragmatic approach led to a broadening of the repertoire to include

⁵¹ P. Reckman, *Riet: Het verhaal van de suiker*, Baarn 1969.

⁵² X-Y Working Group, *Towards Internationalised Development Action: Report*, The Hague 1971.

⁵³ P. Arnold, "Went v'r jet dunt dan dunt v'r jot!" De geschiedenis van de Kerkraadse Stichting Steun Onderontwikkelde Streken, later S.O.S. Wereldhandel, 1959-1986, in: *Studies over de sociaal-economische geschiedenis van Limburg* 46 (2001), pp. 2-43.

⁵⁴ E. Davey, *Beyond the 'French Doctors'. The Evolution and Interpretation of Humanitarian Action in France*, *HPG Working Paper*, Humanitarian Policy Group, London 2012; idem., *French Adventures in Solidarity: Revolutionary Tourists and Radical Humanitarians*, in: *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 21 (2014) 4, pp. 577-595.

selling products through regular retailing channels such as supermarkets, thus providing a broader audience with an opportunity to participate.

The limits of the recent success story of fair trade thus come into view. Many factors contributing to the rising sales figures were not the result of new strategies within the movement, but instead caused by changes outside of it. The drive for professionalization and mainstreaming within the movement came along gradually and was just one shift in a series of transformations. Before fair trade took a pragmatic turn during the 1980s, a focus on 'liberation' abroad and at home had replaced the aim of restructuring of the global market through international politics around the beginning of the 1970s.⁵⁵ During the 1990s, the focus on small producers would notably increase. The history of the fair trade is better understood as a series of transformations than as a history of two parts divided by a single dividing line between a marginal existence and a success which is predominantly defined through sales figures.

The linear success story ignores the ups and downs which have marked the history of fair trade and tends to idealize the movement's past.⁵⁶ As Matthew Anderson has recently pointed out, such idealizations tend to underplay the positives of the present and the negatives of the past. For example, it underplays the commercial approach of many fair trade activists during the 1960s and 1970s, whilst overemphasizing the recent importance of mainstreaming.⁵⁷ In locating a shift from radical to mainstream strategies during the 1980s, it all too readily mirrors the demise of the hopes of activists who regarded the Third World as a locus of global transformation.⁵⁸ It thus largely ignores the different approaches towards the issue of fair trade among activists.⁵⁹ The success story finally ignores past fair trade activism which did not have similarly spectacular results. It is by examining campaigns that failed, however, that we can better understand the reasons for the successes of other initiatives. Such failed alternatives might also provide useful impulses for current debates.

4. Contesting Postcolonial Globalization

The rich image emerging from the historiography discussed above goes beyond the 'hot' debates about fair trade history, which have presented a one-sided account of this history by focusing on the story of unparalleled commercial success since the 1980s and the viability of mainstreaming. Recent historiography challenges the common notion that the movement is unique in its ideas, strategies and means. This historical contextualization of fair trade therefore challenges us to rethink what distinguishes it from other forms of transnational activism and to find a framework which unites the wide variety of networks, ideas and initiatives around the notion of 'fair trade' since the 1960s.

The identification as a Third World movement, as *wereldwinkel*, *Eine-Welt-Laden* or *Magasin du Monde* points towards a characteristic of fair trade activism which may serve as a point of departure. As David Kuchenbuch has pointed out, the 1960s saw the rise of a specific moral view of daily life,

⁵⁵ Cf. K. O'Sullivan, *The Search for Justice: NGOs in Britain and Ireland and the New International Economic Order, 1968-82*, in: *Humanity* 6 (2015) 1, pp. 173–187.

⁵⁶ M. Anderson, *NGOs and Fair Trade: the Social Movement Behind the Label*, in: N. Crowson/M. Hilton/J. McKay eds., *NGOs in Contemporary Britain. Non-state Actors in Society and Politics since 1945*, Basingstoke 2009, pp. 222–241.

⁵⁷ M. Anderson, *Fair Trade: Partners in Development? A Reassessment of Trading Partnerships within the Fair Trade Model*, in: J. Dine/B. Granville: *The Processes and Practices of Fair Trade* (see note 11), pp. 79–95.

⁵⁸ M. Berger, *After the Third World?* (see note 42); K. Kuhn, *Entwicklungspolitische Solidarität* (see note 37), pp. 417–418.

⁵⁹ L. T. Raynolds/M. A. Long, *Fair/alternative trade: historical and empirical dimensions*, in: L. T. Raynolds/D. Murray/J. Wilkinson eds., *Fair Trade: The Challenges of Transforming Globalization*, London 2007, pp. 15–32.

which centered around regarding the world as interdependent and therefore pleaded to consider individual decisions in the light of their effects on 'the world'.⁶⁰ In this vein, fair trade activists not just operated within an increasingly interconnected world. With their actions, they were explicitly addressing the issue of global interconnectedness especially between the North and the South. In arguing that Northern consumers, companies and governments should consider their actions in relation to global development, they specifically contested a postcolonial world order. Their asserted connection between a view of a 'moral economy' of North-South-relations to daily life in the North can be regarded a novel element, which has been continually present in fair trade activism.⁶¹

Views of global development could take many different forms, ranging from the idea that equal access to global markets would suffice to even out current inequalities between North and South, to attempts to realize a globally governed division of labor, or to pleas to support autonomous development beyond global capitalism. The demise of Third Worldism from this perspective did not end the attempts to challenge postcolonial globalization around 1989. Attempts to sell fair trade products through mainstream channels were argued for by pointing towards the larger difference which increased sales could make for producers in the global South. Recent attempts to 'bring the moral charge home' by demanding fair trade for producers in European countries have put pressure on the exclusive link between fair trade and development, just as attempts to link fair trade to a struggle for liberation in the lives of world shop members caused uneasiness during the 1970s and 1980s. Nevertheless, the critique of a North-South-divide in the global distribution of wealth continues to be an essential underpinning of the arguments presented by fair trade activists.

Fair trade can be regarded postcolonial first because it occurred in an era shaped directly and indirectly by decolonization. The calls to reform the structure of the global market were carried above all by countries from the global South, who explicitly framed their attempts at reform as initiatives – such as the United Nations Conferences on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) since 1964 – to overcome the legacy of colonialism. As Giuliano Garavini has pointed out regarding the motives behind European economic cooperation, institutions such as the European tariffs with which these initiatives took issue were partly the result of attempts to account for the effects of decolonization.⁶²

Second, fair trade activism in the global North can be examined as a postcolonial phenomenon, because it was reacting to initiatives from the global South, such as the UNCTAD-conferences and the critique of global capitalism formulated by voices from the Third World. Thus, the agency of actors from the global South comes into focus, just as its limits – which became apparent in the failure of achieving reforms through platforms such as UNCTAD – were an important force behind the attempts to publicize the issue within the Northern countries themselves. Lastly, taking up Bill Schwarz's notion of postcoloniality, fair trade can be regarded as an initiative which challenged existing notions of morality by linking notions of citizenship to the perspective of global development and by giving a voice to groups challenging those in power by mobilizing the public behind alternative views of a global moral economy.⁶³ Moreover, Northern activists took their cue from their Southern partners in framing their challenge as an attempt to overcome a colonial order. In some instances, the colonial legacy was directly linked to the colonial past of the country in which the activists were

⁶⁰ D. Kuchenbuch, "Eine Welt". Globales Interdependenzbewusstsein und die Moralisation des Alltags in den 1970er und 1980er Jahren, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 38 (2012) 1, pp. 158–184.

⁶¹ Cf. G. Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee* (see note 11), pp. 277–286.

⁶² G. Garavini, *The Colonies Strike Back: The Impact of the Third World on Western Europe, 1968–1975*, in: *Contemporary European History* 16 (2007) 3, pp. 299–319.

⁶³ B. Schwarz, *Actually Existing Postcolonialism*, in: *Radical Philosophy* (2000) 104, pp. 16–24.

located. In other instances, activists presented the global economic structures which they challenged as the result of a continuation of colonial exploitation.

Fair trade history can thus be connected to a developing body of work which highlights the importance of decolonization and the postcolonial condition for post-war history. It creates a stimulating relation between insights about postcolonial history and the historiography of globalization.⁶⁴ One does not need to go as far as to claim that postcoloniality was the single most influential phenomenon in postwar history in order to recognize it as one of its defining and often overlooked features.⁶⁵ Postcolonial globalization provides a fitting framework to analyze the postwar relations between North and South. Matthew Anderson's analysis of 'partnership' within the fair trade movement point out that the tensions surrounding the relationship between actors in North and South were not just present where 'aid' was provided by the North. Although actors in the South provided both the products and the legitimization for fair trade activism, members of the movement were constantly at odds about how and how much they should determine the course of action.⁶⁶

However, postcolonial globalization also shaped the relations within the South and North themselves. Regarding the South, the history of fair trade points to ways in which decolonization invited postcolonial states to present themselves as nation-states and to co-operate in order to gain influence within the international community and thus address issues of global inequality.⁶⁷ In shaping postcolonial globalization, the South converged around the notion of the nation-state and attempts to co-operate as a separate block in global politics. Such attempts could also prove divisive, as the politics of oil since the 1970s proved on the international level, just as successful relations with Northern partners in the course of fair trade initiatives could create new disparities in individual regions.

Regarding postcolonial globalization in the North, the history of fair trade suggests that a postcolonial perspective is relevant beyond the lives of migrants from former colonies.⁶⁸ The ways in which Northern states conducted global politics and in which the European project was directed also took shape within a world explicitly and implicitly shaped by postcolonial conditions.⁶⁹ Closer to home, fair trade history shows how postcolonial globalization challenged the ways in which people thought about their responsibilities as citizens and as consumers, shaped critiques of the moral economy and drove attempts to make governments and companies accept a newly defined global

⁶⁴ R. Krishnaswamy, *Postcolonial and Globalization Studies: Connections, Conflicts, Complicities*, in: R. Krishnaswamy/J. C. Hawley eds., *The Postcolonial and the Global*, Minneapolis 2008, pp. 2–21; S. Sassen, *The Many Scales of the Global: Implications for Theory and for Politics*, in: *ibidem*, pp. 82–93; T. D'haen, *The "Ends" of Postcolonialism*, in: E. Boehmer/S. de Mul eds., *The Postcolonial Low Countries: Literature, Colonialism, and Multiculturalism*, Lanham 2012, pp. 59–72.

⁶⁵ R. J. C. Young, *The Postcolonial Condition*, in: D. Stone ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, Oxford 2012, pp. 600–612; S. Howe, *Internal Decolonization? British Politics since Thatcher as Post-colonial Trauma*, in: *Twentieth Century British History* 14 (2003) 3, pp. 286–304; *idem*, *When - if Ever - Did Empire End? Recent Studies of Imperialism and Decolonization*, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 40 (2005) 3, pp. 585–599.

⁶⁶ M. Anderson, *Fair Trade: Partners in Development?* (see note 57).

⁶⁷ J. D. Kelly/M. Kaplan, *Nation and Decolonization: Toward a New Anthropology of Nationalism*, in: *Anthropological Theory* 1 (2001) 4, pp. 419–437; V. Prashad, *The Darker Nations. A People's History of the Third World*, New York 2007.

⁶⁸ G. Oostindie, *Postkoloniaal Nederland: vijftenzestig jaar vergeten, herdenken, verdringen*, Amsterdam 2010; C. Laarman, *Oude onbekenden: het politieke en publieke debat over postkoloniale migranten in Nederland, 1945-2005*, Hilversum 2013; Cf. E. Boehmer/S. de Mul, *The postcolonial Low Countries* (see note 64).

⁶⁹ G. Garavini, *After Empires: European Integration, Decolonization, and the Challenge from the Global South, 1957-1985*, Oxford 2012; O. A. Westad, *The Global Cold War. Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, Cambridge 2005.

economic responsibility.⁷⁰ The relevance of postcoloniality for such a wide array of issues within and between South and North thus invites us to explore the perspective of postcolonial globalization for postwar history. To this end, the history of fair trade provides a highly stimulating point of entry.

⁷⁰ T. Burke, *Unexpected Subversions. Modern Colonialism, Globalization, and Commodity Culture*, in: F. Trentmann ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption*, Oxford 2012, pp. 467–484.