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**Tales of the Market: New Perspectives on Consumer Society in the  
20th Century**  
by Peter Van Dam

**Abstract**

*The current boom of scholarship on consumer society yields new insights into how the interplay of consumers and markets has created consumer societies. This review highlights how social history and cultural history have converged to demonstrate how citizen-consumers have constituted consumer societies. The alertness to the constitutive role of citizens is visible in definitions of consumer society which stress contemporary perceptions of consumption. In the same vein, the significance of civic organizations such as consumer associations, the labor movement, co-operatives and the fair trade movement for the evolution of consumer societies has come into view. Ultimately, this new focus in the history of consumption raises innovative questions about the entangled nature of consumers and their societies, and of scholars and their subject matter.*

**Abstract**

*Die Hochkonjunktur des Forschungsthemas Konsumgesellschaft bringt neue Erkenntnisse darüber hervor, wie das Wechselspiel von Konsumierenden und Märkten Konsumgesellschaften schafft. Dieser Forschungsbericht zeigt auf, dass Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte ineinandergreifen, wenn dargestellt wird, wie Kundenbürgerinnen und Kundenbürger Konsumgesellschaften formen. Die neue Sensibilität für ihre gestaltende Rolle findet sich in Definitionen der Konsumgesellschaft wieder, die zeitgenössische Wahrnehmungen des Konsums hervorheben. Zivilgesellschaftliche Organisationen wie Verbraucherverbände, die Arbeiterbewegung, Kooperativen und die Bewegung für fairen Handel haben als bedeutende Akteure für die Gestaltung von Konsumgesellschaften ebenfalls die Aufmerksamkeit auf sich gezogen. Letztlich führt diese Perspektive auf die Konsumgeschichte zu neuen Fragen über die Verflechtung von Konsumierenden, ihren Organisationen und ihren Gesellschaften, aber auch über das Verhältnis von Forschenden zu ihrem Forschungsgegenstand.*

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The recent economic crisis was accompanied by a boom of literature on the history of the consumer society. The turn towards cultural history since the 1980s had resulted in a neglect of the economic dimension outside the specialized realm of economic history. The current rediscovery of economic issues has produced a flood of new publications about how consumers have shaped markets and a broader consumer society, and vice versa. In this review, I will highlight how social and cultural history has converged in recent scholarship on how consumer societies have been constituted by citizen-consumers, particularly through civic organizations. Consequently, I will argue that this convergence raises new questions about the entangled nature of consumers and their societies.

The studies under review leave little room for the notion of a well-ordered consumer society populated by rationally acting *homines oeconomici*.<sup>2</sup> Instead, the emerging image of the consumer appears to be an – at times uncomfortable – hybrid. Consumers are autonomous and determined by social structures at the same time. They construct identities and markets, but are also manipulated by forces beyond their control. They apply economic perspectives to matters not traditionally related to markets, whilst social and cultural impulses from outside the market shape their behavior as consumers. Consumer societies are of an equally hybrid nature. They are constructed within a transnational force field of governments, companies, and consumers. Each of these actors attempts to shape society according to their own needs and views.

Within historiography, the history of consumption has played an important role in connecting economic history to cultural and social

<sup>1</sup>I would like to thank Felix Krämer for the stimulating collaboration on earlier versions of this review article.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Tomáš Sedláček, *Economics of good and evil: The quest for economic meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*, Oxford 2011; Joseph Vogl, *Das Gespenst des Kapitals*, Zürich 2010.

history.<sup>3</sup> Cultural history has focused on the practices of consumption, the meanings attached to consumption, and the ways in which consumers have constructed their identities through it. Social history has predominantly inquired into the structures of consumer society and the ideological frameworks underpinning it.<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship on how civic organizations have contested the morals of the marketplace has connected the microhistorical view of consumers to the macrohistorical view of consumer society. The ways in which governments, companies, consumers, and scholars have constituted consumer societies become particularly visible by focusing on processes of contestation.<sup>5</sup>

Attempts to come to grips with consumer society as a constantly evolving social phenomenon have also been spurred by perspectives from social sciences. Social scientists outside of economics have traditionally regarded the market as a social space.<sup>6</sup> Within economics, the importance of institutions for the development of markets has lately been highlighted by adherents of the so-called New Institutional Economics first and foremost.<sup>7</sup> These different routes to investigating consumer society have resulted in a broadly shared perspective, which

<sup>3</sup>Hartmut Berghoff / Jakob Vogel, *Wirtschaftsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte: Ansätze zur Bergung transdisziplinärer Synergiepotentiale*, in: idem (eds.), *Wirtschaftsgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte: Dimensionen eines Perspektivenwechsels*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, pp. 9–41.

<sup>4</sup>Hansjörg Siegenthaler, *Geschichte und Ökonomie nach der kulturalistischen Wende*, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 25,2 (1999), pp. 276–301.

<sup>5</sup>Nico Stehr, *Die Moralisierung der Märkte: Eine Gesellschaftstheorie*, Frankfurt am Main 2007; Eric J. Arnould / Craig J. Thompson, *Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty years of research*, in: *Journal of Consumer Research* 31,4 (2005), pp. 868–882; Joost Jonker, *Aller ogen gericht op...? De relevantie van de bedrijfsgeschiedenis*. Inaugural lecture given at the University of Amsterdam on 9 October 2015, in: <<http://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.377795>> (03.11.2015).

<sup>6</sup>Louis Dumont, *From Mandeville to Marx: The genesis and triumph of economic ideology*, Chicago 1977; Niklas Luhmann, *Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main 1988; Katherine E. Browne / Barbara Lynne Milgram (eds.), *Economics and morality: anthropological approaches*, Lanham 2009.

<sup>7</sup>Mark Bevir / Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Markets in historical contexts: Ideas and politics in the modern world*, Cambridge 2004; Corinna R. Unger / Stefanie Middendorff / Ulrike Schulz, *Institutional history rediscovered: Observing organizations' behavior in times of change*, in: *Comparativ* 24,1 (2014), pp. 8–17.

Mark Bevir and Frank Trentmann have summarized as „a concern with meanings or beliefs as constitutive of social and economic practices, an interest in the plurality of historical sites, an emphasis on contingency and context, and a recognition of the role of critique in the formation and development of modes of economic governance“.<sup>8</sup>

What (de)limits consumers? How have they constituted consumer societies? This review will trace answers to these questions in recent Anglophone, German and Dutch historical publications. In regard to the vast amount of insightful publications, this review can only hope to discuss a severely limited selection. It therefore references selected publications which highlight how consumer societies were constructed and how organized consumers have participated in its development. First, I will discuss literature on the sociocultural construction of consumer society. The second part will analyze scholarship on distinct attempts to shape consumer society by consumer organizations, and by the labor, co-operative and fair trade movement. In conclusion, I will outline how this recent scholarship presents us with new questions about the spatial, material and moral entanglements of consumer society.

## 2. Constructing consumer society

Attempts to define the relationship between the consumer and consumer society face a highly controversial question: when is it viable to speak of a consumer society? Whilst it is evident that consumption is, in one way or another, a regular element of human existence, most scholars have preferred to designate only some societies as consumer societies. When deciding whether a certain society should be regarded as a consumer society, both the definition of consumption and the relation of consumption to other social activities are called into question. Three approaches can be discerned: consumption as an anthropological constant, consumption as a defining characteristic

<sup>8</sup>Mark Bevir / Frank Trentmann, *Markets in historical contexts: Ideas, practices and governance*, in: idem (eds.), *Markets in historical contexts*, pp. 1–24, here: p. 5.

of a specific group of ‘consumer societies’, and consumer society as a specific interpretation of their own society by historical actors.

The scope of dissimilar choices which proliferate in the field of consumer history are aptly illustrated by two recent handbooks. On the one hand, „The Oxford Handbook of the History of Consumption“ chooses to define consumption as a phenomenon integral to human existence. It follows that the contributions in the volume cover not only all parts of the globe, but also span historical periods from ancient history to the present.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Claudius Torp decided to focus their volume on consumer society in Germany on the period from 1890 to 1990. In defining consumption, they take up the definition provided by the economist Karl Oldenberg in 1914: Oldenberg defined consumption simply as the satisfaction of a need. These needs were always subjective, and could be satisfied both by goods and services. As this definition makes clear, expansive and more restrictive approaches to defining consumer society are not so much at odds about defining consumption itself. Above all, they differ in deciding to what extent consumption determines the character of societies at large. In their introduction, Haupt and Torp argue for their focus on consumer society in the ‘long twentieth century’ by stating that around the turn of the century, German society developed the structures regarded as foundations of consumer society: a reduction of self-sufficiency, the growth and proliferation of distribution infrastructures and new forms of retailing, the rise of the consumer as a politically and scholarly interesting persona, and finally the development of critiques of and alternatives to regular consumer behavior.<sup>10</sup>

Traditionally, these approaches to consumer society have situated the rise of consumer societies within one of two overarching perspectives, which occupy the middle ground between generalizing and

<sup>9</sup>Frank Trentmann (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of the history of consumption*, Oxford 2012.

<sup>10</sup>Heinz-Gerhard Haupt / Claudius Torp (eds.), *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland 1890–1990: ein Handbuch*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, pp. 11–12.

individualizing approaches to consumption: the rise of industrialized capitalism and the making of a modern globalized world. Influenced by economic history, attempts to define consumer society have often recurred to theories of industrialization. Thus, Christoph Kleinschmidt connects the rise of a consumer society in Germany to the full-blown integration of private consumers into market systems. Whereas many people had produced for their private consumption until the 19th century, the consumption of goods produced by others through monetary transactions has become the norm since then. Kleinschmidt similarly relates the advent of a „mass consumer society“ to the regular consumption of mass-produced goods, which, after being smothered by the economic crisis of the late 1920s during the Weimar Republic, became the norm after 1945 in West-Germany.<sup>11</sup> Wolfgang König also defines a consumer society as a society in which consumption of industrially produced goods is ubiquitous. This „modern way of life“ could only exist after the introduction of mass production and mass distribution. In its wake, citizens regarded themselves above all as consumers.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, capitalism can be seen to have made a remarkable comeback as an interpretative framework. The edited volume „Kapitalismus: Historische Annäherungen“ highlights two novel aspects of this comeback. Whereas capitalism has traditionally been employed as a descriptive and critical concept at the same time, recent approaches take a more distanced stance. Secondly, capitalism is regarded as a phenomenon which concerns not just economic life, but deserves consideration from a wide range of perspectives. Thus, the volume concerns itself with literary depictions of financial crises, national traditions in thinking about capitalism, emotions, the limits of rationality on financial markets, family life, religion, the territorial embedding of economic systems and the different appearances of labor across the

<sup>11</sup>Christian Kleinschmidt, *Konsumgesellschaft*, Göttingen 2008.

<sup>12</sup>Wolfgang König, *Kleine Geschichte der Konsumgesellschaft: Konsum als Lebensform der Moderne*. 2nd ed., Stuttgart 2013, pp. 23–26.

globe.<sup>13</sup> At the end of the volume Jürgen Kocka, in whose honor the book was published, concludes that capitalism remains an apt category of analysis precisely because it points towards the psychological, cultural and social dimensions of the economy and its continuous evolution. However, Kocka advises to uphold an analytical separation between the domain of economic life and other realms of social life. Capitalism should not be regarded as a societal system, culture or epoch, but as a specific form of economic activity, which depends on non-economical preconditions and has extra-economic consequences.<sup>14</sup>

Despite such attempts to define capitalism as a timeless category, the kind of economic behavior it takes aim at is closely connected to the history of Western modernity. Joyce Appleby has recently depicted the rise of capitalism as a „relentless revolution“, which was rooted in the specific cultural circumstances found in Britain in the 18th century. Capitalism, in her view, did not simply sprout from the dynamics of earlier economic circumstances or an inherent logic of history. Instead, it should be regarded as a project to develop and disseminate a specific economic practice aimed at accumulating wealth through investment, accompanied by an ethos of responsibility and hard work. According to Appleby, it first developed in Britain and was then exported unevenly across the globe.<sup>15</sup>

These recent approaches to the history of industrialization and capitalism not only direct our attention towards their social context, but also stress the uneven dissemination of such modes of production, and point out the fact that these were not linear or irreversible trends. Although they highlight the ways in which consumption played a crucial role within these developments, consumption in this perspective ultimately retains its status as a reaction to the changing modes of production. Moreover, such studies privilege the history of Western

<sup>13</sup>Gunilla-Friederike Budde (ed.), *Kapitalismus: Historische Annäherungen*, Göttingen 2011.

<sup>14</sup>Jürgen Kocka, *Kapitalismus im Kontext*, in: Budde (ed.), *Kapitalismus*, pp. 176–188.

<sup>15</sup>Joyce Appleby, *The relentless revolution: A history of capitalism*, New York 2010.

societies, assuming the development of a unique economic system within the Atlantic world, which was then exported to other parts of the world through Western dominance.

Similarly, works focusing on the rise and global dissemination of consumerism have projected it as a development which originated in the West and followed a distinct path of evolution. For example, Christopher Bayly has integrated the rise of consumerism within his threefold categories of globalization. During „archaic globalization“ and „early modern globalization“ consumption had been based on specificity and the social status one could derive from it. The latter phase had seen a growing rationalization in the production of goods such as clothes and tobacco. These were increasingly produced on a large scale close to the homes of consumers. New social groups had joined the ranks of elite consumers. During the 19th century, commerce expanded and the impact of industrialization slowly made itself felt on production processes above all across the Atlantic world. This gave rise to „modern globalization“ and standardized consumerism, which valued goods not for their specificity, but for their homogeneity.<sup>16</sup> Granting consumption even more prominence, Bruce Mazlish has argued that consumerism can be seen as the driving force behind the globalization of capitalism, not just in earlier epochs, but also in the present. As it comes to dominate societies across the world, it causes „unacceptable environmental and other pressures“, resulting in a global awareness of the dangers of consumerism and the rise of global institutions to counter these dangers.<sup>17</sup>

Analyses built on concepts such as capitalism and globalization often fail to account for consumers as active and highly dissimilar actors, driven to diverse practices of consumption by a diverse set of motives. In fact, as John Brewer has noted, the search for early instances of a consumer society from this perspective resulted in an in-

<sup>16</sup>Christopher A. Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780–1914: Global connections and comparisons*, Malden 2004.

<sup>17</sup>Bruce Mazlish, *Consumerism in the context of the global ecumene*, in: Bruce Mazlish / Akira Iriye (eds.), *The global history reader*, New York 2005, pp. 125–134.

quiry into the origins of Western modernity, guided by the expectation of finding clear-cut differences between modern and traditional society. Such differences, however, could not be established, as the ever earlier dates proposed to mark the beginning of consumer society aptly made clear.<sup>18</sup> Frank Trentmann has criticized research based on these concepts, which present history as a stage model. According to Trentmann, such representations fail to account for the contingencies in the development of different modes of consumption. For instance, although mass consumption is deemed characteristic for modern consumer societies, consumption in the 19th and 20th centuries was marked by homogenizing as well as heterogenizing tendencies. At the same time, new patterns of consumption have not simply replaced older ones. More often than not, new and old patterns coexisted.<sup>19</sup>

An approach which stresses the manifold social constructions of consumption and consumers questions the notion of a fixed relationship between production and consumption. It thus calls for a reevaluation of the relation between capitalism or globalization on the one hand, and consumption on the other. Once modes of consumption no longer appear as the logical results of specific modes of production, economic behavior has to be contextualized to take identities and social norms into account.<sup>20</sup> The strictest interpretation of the latter question brings a third definition of consumer society to the fore, which only considers societies consumer societies once people label their own society as such. For example, Frank Trentmann has argued for an approach which pays close attention to the instances where people indeed defined themselves as consumers as opposed to other possible identities, and to the rise of the explicit notion of a consumer

<sup>18</sup>John Brewer, *The Error of our ways: historians and the birth of consumer society*. Paper given as a public lecture in the series organised by the Cultures of Consumption programme (ESRC-AHRB) on 23 September 2003, at The Royal Society, London. Cultures of consumption Working paper series, London 2003.

<sup>19</sup>Frank Trentmann, *Crossing divides: Consumption and globalization in history*, in: *Journal of Consumer Culture* 9,2 (2009), pp. 187–220.

<sup>20</sup>Manuel Schramm, *Einleitung: Vergleich und Transfer in der Konsumgeschichte*, in: *Comparativ* 19,6 (2009), pp. 7–15.

society during the 20th century.<sup>21</sup>

Taking their cue from the way in which citizens regarded their own societies, Brewer and Trentmann have pointed out that the notion of a consumer society is of relatively recent coinage. Although groups aiming to represent citizens as consumers had been active throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, talk of a consumer society only emerged after the Second World War. Usually, the expression was invoked to criticize contemporary practices of consumption. Andreas Wirsching has taken stock of the wide range of critical positions reacting to consumer practices in the 20th century, in which the rise of the term ‘consumer society’ should be situated. The well-known Marxist critique stressed the commodification and alienation resulting from capitalist production and consumption. From a bourgeois point of view, individuality was threatened by the rise of a mass society founded on mass production and consumption. A third line of reasoning, which had strong roots in American public life, regarded consumption more favorably: not only was private consumption a driving force behind the spread of prosperity, it also allowed individuals to express themselves.<sup>22</sup>

Such debates about the consequences of consumption highlight the benefit of individualizing approaches in writing the history of consumers. They make clear that there was no straight line from the rise of mass production and consumption to a shared vision of consumers. On the contrary, the morals of consumption were constantly contested. This resulted in different practices of consumption on an individual level as well as changing institutional arrangements. Recent historiography demonstrates how consumer societies have been shaped

<sup>21</sup>Frank Trentmann, The modern genealogy of the consumer: Meanings, identities and political synapses, in: John Brewer / Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Consuming cultures, global perspectives: Historical trajectories, transnational encounters*, Oxford 2006, pp. 19–63; Frank Trentmann, *Consumer Society – RIP. A Comment*, in: *Contemporary European History* 20,1 (2010), pp. 27–31.

<sup>22</sup>Andreas Wirsching, *From work to consumption: Transatlantic visions of individuality in modern mass society*, in: *Contemporary European History* 20,1 (2010), pp. 1–26.

by different approaches in political economy, different notions of the consumer transported through practices of marketing and retailing, and different views of citizenship.

Differentiating between consumer societies, recent studies analyze divergent approaches towards consumers which have prevailed over time. The need for attention to the specific circumstances is made especially clear by the historiography on consumption under National Socialism. Whereas it is possible to write the history of the National Socialist leisure organization *Kraft durch Freude* (‘Strength through Joy’) as part of a longer history of tourism, this would come at the peril of ignoring its significance for envisioning and experiencing a racially defined *Volks-gemeinschaft*.<sup>23</sup> The embeddedness of consumption in the period from 1933 until 1945 differed markedly from previous and subsequent times. The practices of consumption and the availability of consumer goods were determined to a large extent by racism, relations with party members, and political decisions. The regime did consider consumer interests, because it feared a loss of support might lead to revolution. Its politics of consumption, however, remained secondary to military considerations.<sup>24</sup>

The tension between factual standards of living and subjective experience is a recurrent theme in studies on consumer society under National Socialism.<sup>25</sup> On the one hand, scholars such as Wolfgang König have pointed to the failure of ambitious projects of mass-consumption like the attempt to provide a large number of people with a *Volkswagen*.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, authors such as Götz Aly have asserted

<sup>23</sup>Sascha Howind, *Die Illusion eines guten Lebens: Kraft durch Freude und nationalsozialistische Sozialpropaganda*, Frankfurt am Main 2013; Shelley Baranowski, *Strength through joy: Consumerism and mass tourism in the Third Reich*, Cambridge 2004.

<sup>24</sup>Tim Schanetzky, *„Kanonen statt Butter“: Wirtschaft und Konsum im Dritten Reich*, München 2015.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Michael Prinz, *„Konsum“ und „Konsumgesellschaft“ – Vorschläge zu Definition und Verwendung*, in: idem (ed.), *Der lange Weg in den Überfluss: Anfänge und Entwicklung der Konsumgesellschaft seit der Vormoderne*, Paderborn 2003, pp. 11–34.

<sup>26</sup>Wolfgang König, *Volkswagen, Volksempfänger, Volksgemeinschaft – „Volksp-Produkte“ im Dritten Reich: Vom Scheitern einer nationalsozialistischen Konsumgesellschaft*, Paderborn 2004.

that the 'Third Reich' successfully seduced many Germans through the material benefits it provided to those belonging to the *Volksge-meinschaft*.<sup>27</sup> Within these disputes, the relativity of factual indicators of standards of living has become abundantly clear. Even though measurable improvements were scarce, many Germans believed they were better off after 1933, because the years of the economic crisis were their main point of reference, and because of the availability of luxury goods – oftentimes robbed abroad – even in times of scarcity. The sense of improvement was also fostered by the images of welfare circulated by the regime and a narrative of momentary abstinence on the road to a glorious future.<sup>28</sup> These unfulfilled promises of consumption would remain influential after 1945, as the promise of abundance and the negative connotation of a state which could not provide such abundance haunted both postwar German states.<sup>29</sup>

Regarding the postwar history of consumer society, Lizabeth Cohen's account of the rise of a „purchaser as citizen“ has been a frequent point of departure. According to Cohen, this idealtypical variety of the citizen-consumer championed private consumption as a cornerstone of public or national interest. This view of consumption replaced an earlier ideal of the citizen-consumer, which had called upon the market power of consumers to further public interests. After the Second World War, private consumption itself became a public cause. Since the 1970s, Cohen asserts, this ideal has „transmogrified“ into a vision which equates citizenship with consumption, judging politics and government services by the standards of the marketplace.<sup>30</sup> Importantly,

<sup>27</sup>Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat: Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main 2005.

<sup>28</sup>Hartmut Berghoff, *Träume und Alpträume: Konsumpolitik im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, in: Heinz-Gerhard Haupt / Claudius Torp (eds.), *Die Konsumgesellschaft in Deutschland 1890–1990: Ein Handbuch*, Frankfurt am Main 2009, pp. 268–288, here: 270–272; Claudius Torp, *Wachstum, Sicherheit, Moral: Politische Legitimationen des Konsums im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2012, pp. 59–63.

<sup>29</sup>Hartmut Berghoff, *Gefälligkeitsdiktatur oder Tyrannei des Mangels? Neue Kontroversen zur Konsumgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 58 (2007), p. 518.

<sup>30</sup>Lizabeth Cohen, *A consumer's republic: The politics of mass consumption in*

Cohen's interpretation highlighted how notions of consumption were intertwined with conceptions of the public good and how these relations could change over time. Subsequent studies have critically examined its merits, focusing both on the specific perspectives on consumption developed in politics, civil society and within the domain of the market.

A pronouncedly political perspective on the consumer has been presented by Claudius Torp. Torp has taken the notions of growth, security and morality as key concepts to analyze the transformations of German consumer politics. According to Torp, the manifest national interests connected to German military efforts during the First World War and scarcity resulting from it drove the nation-state to actively engage with consumption. This involvement was led by a concern for securing the consumption aimed at basic needs. Even though in many instances the German state did not succeed in effectively distributing goods, the support for state intervention in consumer issues did not wane. After the Second World War and the experience of National Socialist collectivism, the state and the market were disentangled, but politics and the economy did not become strictly separate domains. As the now popular stress of individual freedom included the freedom to consume, the roles of citizens and consumers were increasingly overlapping. At the same time, politics in the postwar German 'social market economy' derived much of its legitimacy from economic success. In a similar vein, the integration of European markets was justified with references to the interests of consumers.<sup>31</sup>

Torp's description of political perspectives on consumption reiterates the importance of the notion of an autonomous consumer after 1945. Lydia Langer's dissertation on retail practices in West Germany seconds this interpretation. Studying the introduction of self-service

postwar America, New York 2003. Cf. Michael Prinz, *Bürgerrecht Konsum*, in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 44 (2004), pp. 678–690.

<sup>31</sup>Torp, *Wachstum, Sicherheit, Moral*. Cf. Jan-Otmar Hesse, „Der Mensch des Unternehmens und der Produktion“: Foucaults Sicht auf den Ordoliberalismus und die „Soziale Marktwirtschaft“, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 3 (2006), pp. 291–296.



retail practices, she is able to demonstrate how ideas about self-service were imported from the United States through intricate networks of experts. However, these practices did not simply supplant existing commercial traditions. Langer shows how self-service was accommodated to fit in with local and national traditions, resulting in a hybrid construction of local, national, European and American ideas and practices of retailing.<sup>32</sup> Undoubtedly, the notion of consumer autonomy was reinforced by these practices of self-service retailing. Nepomuk Gasteiger's study of the changing images of the consumer which were brought to the fore by different groups of economic experts in the Federal Republic of Germany has differentiated this view. Gasteiger has shown how consumers were at first envisioned as rational actors. That image, however, was replaced during the 1950s by the notion of a consumer who was easily influenced. During the 1960s, this notion evolved into the idea that consumers were manipulated subjects. Since the 1970s, Gasteiger records a more positive interpretation of the consumer as a sovereign actor who has the right to protection.<sup>33</sup>

The transnational influences which have shaped the views of consumers appear as a crucial element in many of these studies. In the debates on the changing configurations of consumption, the significance of Americanization has been its focal point. Following Victoria de Grazia's claim that a distinctly American variety of consumerism came to dominate Europe after 1945, much consideration has been given to the question of Americanization in the transnational history of consumption.<sup>34</sup> Regarding the domain of political economy, Sheryl Kroen has convincingly nuanced its significance. She demonstrated

<sup>32</sup>Lydia Langer, *Revolution im Einzelhandel. Die Einführung der Selbstbedienung in Lebensmittelgeschäften der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1949–1973)*, Köln 2013. Cf. Katja Girschik, Rezension zu: Langer, Lydia: *Revolution im Einzelhandel. Die Einführung der Selbstbedienung in Lebensmittelgeschäften der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1949–1973)*, Köln 2013, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 27.02.2014, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2014-1-146>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>33</sup>Nepomuk Gasteiger, *Der Konsument. Verbraucherbilder in Werbung, Konsumkritik und Verbraucherschutz 1945–1989*, Frankfurt am Main 2010.

<sup>34</sup>Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible empire: America's advance through twentieth-century Europe*, Cambridge 2005.

how United States officials indeed attempted to export the ideal of the autonomous consumer as „the fundamental building block of a new and stable democratic order“. Through programs such as the European Recovery Program, these ideas gained access to many European countries, where they received mixed reactions. The American Way was not simply adopted. This new vision of the consumer was integrated into domestic traditions of consumer politics. The attempted Americanization thus generated diverse concepts of the consumer, some integrating the notion of the autonomous consumer, some defined by rejecting it.<sup>35</sup>

The history of neoliberalism has become a second focus in debates about transnational influences in thinking about consumers. Just as capitalism and consumerism have been analyzed to stem from the Atlantic world, neoliberalism is identified as an intellectual movement with its roots in the Western world. Despite the literature on the pivotal importance of the vision of an autonomous consumer in reconstructing a democratic Europe after 1945, the historiography on neoliberalism often assumes the autonomy of individual consumers only gained currency from the 1970s on. After an epoch of consumption based on the conformity of social groups, new norms of consumption which have come to dominate since the 1970s stressed the importance of individual choice. Although this individualist perspective caused some consumers to critique mass consumption, soon their critique became integrated within the neoliberal marketplace, which provided critical consumers with products that could be identified as carriers of just morals or of authenticity.<sup>36</sup> Recent works by Daniel Stedman Jones and Angus Burgin persuasively question the uniformity and the ubiquity of neoliberalism, stressing the contingent nature of its rise

<sup>35</sup>Sheryl Kroen, *Negotiations with the American way: The Consumer and the social contract in post-war Europe*, in: John Brewer / Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Consuming cultures, global perspectives: historical trajectories, transnational exchanges*, London 2006, pp. 251–277.

<sup>36</sup>Anselm Doering-Manteuffel / Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970*, Göttingen 2010, p. 124.

and the opacity of its conceptual foundations.<sup>37</sup>

The narrative of the rise of neoliberalism could profit from a critical conversation with the historical analyses focusing on earlier visions of the autonomous consumer. The notion of a self-serving consumer had become an important concept well before the 1970s. In his analysis of the genealogy of consumption, Dominik Schrage has pointed out that an individualizing tendency in speaking of consumption has been present since the 18th century.<sup>38</sup> By engaging with these earlier visions of the consumer, the specificity of the economic visions proposed since the 1970s could be etched out with more nuance. Secondly, the debates about the rise of neoliberalism and consumption would do well to take into account the limits of the ideas which were developed under the wings of Hayek and Friedman. In a study on British attempts to reconstruct public services along market-oriented lines, for example, John Clarke has pointed out how those providing and making use of public services have often not responded to these attempts, declining to redefine their relationships as those between customers and business-like service providers.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding 20th-century societies as consumer societies thus has provided valuable insights into their dynamics. Throughout the era, the consideration of consumption as a crucial social process has played an important role in shaping political thought on citizenship and in informing concrete political strategies. These were closely related to the fundamental importance of consumption in citizens' everyday lives, but also in their attempts to shape consumption according to perceived notions of the public good. However, several limitations of a perspective focusing on the structures of consumer societies have also come to light. First of all, the perspective seems to have become more

<sup>37</sup> Angus Burgin, *The great persuasion: Reinventing free markets since the Depression*, Cambridge 2012; Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the birth of neoliberal politics*, Princeton 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Dominik Schrage, *The availability of things – a short genealogy of consumption*, in: *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 1 (2012), pp. 5–20.

<sup>39</sup> John Clarke, *Unsettled Connections: Citizens, consumers and the reform of public services*, in: *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7,2 (2007), pp. 159–178.

impactful during the post-war era, as consumer autonomy was defined as a cornerstone of democratic citizenship. Secondly, many forms of social interaction were at most tangent to practices of consumption, but certainly not determined by them. Thirdly, the focus on consumer society has often presented consumers as objects of or as driving forces for social transformations, but consumers have remained an eerily homogenous group.

### 3. Organized consumers

Consumers actively shape consumer society by making individual decisions about what to buy and who to vote for, and passively as aggregate objects of marketing strategies and politics. Another important means for shaping consumer society has been to organize. Rather than separating the roles people play as citizens and consumers, recent research has stressed their overlapping. The particular shape of a consumer society and the different consumer identities brought forward then come into focus as results of the ideas and practices of regular consumers. A special issue on citizenship and consumption by the „*Journal of Consumer Culture*“ has highlighted how consumption can be a powerful tool in the hands of organized citizens. Consumption can provide the means, but also the very issues at which organized citizens take aim.<sup>40</sup> As the contributions to this special issue demonstrated, it is fruitful to analyze how consumers' identities inform their perceptions of citizenship and their expectations of politics.<sup>41</sup>

Civil society organizations speak most directly to consumers' identities if they take the practice of consumption as the issue to rally around, such as organizations propagating consumer rights or providing citizens with the information needed to take deliberate decisions about what to buy. Such initiatives contributed markedly to shaping the relationship between citizenship and consumption. As Lawrence

<sup>40</sup> Frank Trentmann, *Citizenship and consumption*, in: *Journal of Consumer Culture* 7,2 (2007), pp. 147–158.

<sup>41</sup> John Brewer / Frank Trentmann, *Introduction. Space, time and value in consumer cultures*, in: idem (eds.), *Consuming cultures, global perspectives*, pp. 1–17.

Black has noted, the notion of the citizen as a consumer in Great-Britain was promoted early on by Michael Young, who was the driving force behind the British Consumers' Association (CA), founded in 1957, whilst also an active participant in the debates about the policies of the Labour Party. CA presented consumers as people simultaneously liberated and threatened by the growing affluence surrounding them. To counter the bewildering range of choices, they had to be provided with reliable information about the available products and deserved the state's protection. At the same time, CA stressed the individual freedom to choose and deemed it imperative citizens help themselves instead of relying on the state.<sup>42</sup>

On an extended trip through Europe in 1956, the American economist and president of the Consumers Union Colston E. Warne noted that consumer associations had sprung up in many of the countries he visited during the 1950s. These organizations soon banded together in the International Organization of Consumers Unions, constituting what Matthew Hilton has dubbed „a transnational social movement borne of the common experience of affluence“.<sup>43</sup> Internationally, the movement was divided over the question of whether to focus on social justice or on individual choice. Even so, it never rejected consumer society, but instead aimed at „ensuring it worked, and that it worked for all.“<sup>44</sup> Although most member organizations prioritized product testing and individual choice, Hilton has argued that their underlying ideals nonetheless aimed at reshaping postwar society. Their efforts embodied a critique of irrational consumption. They also endeavored to reconnect production and consumption, and promoted the ideal of consumer sovereignty.<sup>45</sup>

This wave of consumer organizations took off in Europe in the

<sup>42</sup>Lawrence Black, *Redefining British politics: Culture, consumerism and participation, 1954–70*, Basingstoke 2010, pp. 14–15.

<sup>43</sup>Matthew Hilton, *Prosperity for all: Consumer activism in an era of globalization*, Ithaca 2009, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 40–43.

1950s, but it had roots in earlier waves of organization. Gudrun König has described how civic organizations in Germany attempted to promote practices of consumption which were deemed suitable to good taste and sense. Analyzing the activities of buyers' leagues in Germany, France and the United States, she presents evidence of attempts to express consumer interests well before the postwar era.<sup>46</sup> Lawrence Glickman has similarly pointed at organizations explicitly aiming at consumers „as chief beneficiaries of political activism“ during the first half of the 20th century in the United States. Glickman charts how rival consumer organizations differed over whether to aim for collective action or focus on product testing during the interwar years. Behind these debates, he discerns different conceptions of the relationship between citizenship and consumption: whereas some regarded consumption as a private practice unrelated to public life, others promoted the notion that citizens should consider the choices they made as consumers against the background of their civic responsibilities.<sup>47</sup>

These consumer organizations played a crucial role in shaping consumption. Consumer activism also often was practiced by movements not primarily concerned by the interest of their members as consumers. The labor movement, the women's movement, the cooperative movement and the movement for global fair trade have all turned to consumption as an essential means to promote their goals. They, too, attempted to shape the ideals of what good consumers were and the structures in which these consumers acted.

Labor history – probably the most thoroughly researched field of civil society – demonstrates just how influential organized citizens have been in shaping the market both nationally and transnationally, both as producers and as consumers. Self-help associations set up by

<sup>46</sup>Gudrun M. König, *Konsumkultur: Inszenierte Warenwelt um 1900*, Wien 2009. Cf. Julia Laura Rischbieter, Rezension zu: König, Gudrun M., *Konsumkultur. Inszenierte Warenwelt um 1900*, Wien 2009, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 13.05.2010, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-13508>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>47</sup>Lawrence B. Glickman, *Buying power: A history of consumer activism in America*, Chicago 2009.

workers looked towards organized consumption as a way to bolster their societal standing.<sup>48</sup> The access of workers to mass consumption has been a highly contentious issue. It was often regarded as a litmus test for the constitution of a consumer society.<sup>49</sup> As a recent review of the field has highlighted, significant parts of labor history have been devoted to industrial relations, and to the roles workers' organizations played in shaping national economies into welfare states and corporatist arrangements.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, labor history provides an example of how workers felt the need to organize transnationally in reaction to the fact that markets and capital did not confine themselves to national borders.<sup>51</sup> The impact of these international activities of worker organizations has often looked disappointing when measured by their rhetoric and by the expectations of scholars.<sup>52</sup> Recent studies have nevertheless shown the importance of both international labor organizations on the international history of decolonization, development and human rights policies.<sup>53</sup>

The impact of international labor activism on the national arena has also tentatively been pointed out: in West-Germany, the foreign

<sup>48</sup>Manuel Schramm, *Arbeiterkonsum und Klassenbildung und Leipzig 1884–1933: Der Konsumverein Leipzig-Plagwitz*, in: *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 91,1 (2004), pp. 20–35. Cf. Dennis Bos, *Waarachtige volksvrienden. De vroege socialistische beweging in Amsterdam, 1848–1894*, Amsterdam 2001.

<sup>49</sup>Natalia Milanesio, *Workers go shopping in Argentina: The rise of popular consumer culture*, Albuquerque 2013. Cf. Katharina Schembs, *Rezension zu: Milanesio, Natalia: Workers go shopping in Argentina: The rise of popular consumer culture*, Albuquerque 2013, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 05.11.2014, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-21818>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>50</sup>Kim Christian Priemel, *Heaps of work. The ways of labour history*, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 11.04.2014, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2014-01-001>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>51</sup>Geert van Goethem, *The Amsterdam International: The world of the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), 1913–1945*, Aldershot 2006.

<sup>52</sup>Patrick Pasture, *A Century of International Trade Unionism*, in: *International Review of Social History* 47,2 (2002), pp. 277–289.

<sup>53</sup>Daniel Roger Maul, *Human rights, development and decolonization: The International Labour Organization, 1940–70*, Basingstoke 2012; Jasmien van Daele (ed.), *ILO histories: Essays on the International Labour Organization and its impact on the world during the twentieth century*, Bern 2010.

relations of members of the labor movement made them viable partners for more conservative members of the government at home. Later on, their foreign activities led German activists to organize resistance against German companies.<sup>54</sup> In the Netherlands, the involvement of trade union leadership in international affairs led to early and frequent public attention for issues relating to development and for the role and responsibilities of multinational companies.<sup>55</sup> Through these activities, trade unions brought the global market home to their respective countries, thereby stressing the need for Western citizens to consider their place as producers and consumers in a global setting. Despite the important role labor organizations have thus played in shaping the views on national and global markets and in shaping patterns of consumption of their members, recent explorations predominantly stress a different perspective. Both the proposed focus on the category of work in labor history and attempts to reconsider the importance of class for labor history point in the direction of neglecting the role of workers as consumers and their organized attempts to shape consumer society.<sup>56</sup>

Another attempt to reshape consumer society through organized consumption was initiated by the co-operative movement. During the second half of the nineteenth century, citizens throughout Europe set

<sup>54</sup>Quinn Slobodian, *West German labour internationalism and the Cold War*, in: Tobias Hochscherf / Christoph Haucht / Andrew Plowman (eds.), *Divided but not disconnected: German experiences of the Cold War*, New York 2010, pp. 77–89.

<sup>55</sup>Peter van Dam, „Een stukje ellende in uw eigen wereldje“: *Solidariteit met de Derde Wereld in de Nederlandse vakbeweging*, in: Peter van Dam / Bram Mellink / Jouke Turpijn (eds.), *Onbehagen in de polder. Nederland in conflict sinds 1795*, Amsterdam 2014, pp. 231–252.

<sup>56</sup>Marcel van der Linden, *The promise and challenges of global labor history*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2013), pp. 57–76; Franco Barchiesi, *How far from Africa's shore? A response to Marcel van der Linden's map for global labor history*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2013), pp. 77–84; Prasanna Parthasarathi, *Global labor history: A dialogue with Marcel van der Linden*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2013), pp. 108–113; Peter Winn, *Global labor history: The future of the field?*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2013), pp. 85–91; Jürgen Kocka, *Reviving labor history on a global scale: Some comments to Marcel van der Linden*, in: *International Labor and Working-Class History* 82 (2013), pp. 92–98.

up jointly owned retail businesses. These redistributed profits among the members of the co-operative by way of dividends and through projects to develop their communities. Even though the United Nations have dubbed 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, from a European point of view the history of consumer co-operatives is not a success story. During the postwar era, the movement dwindled throughout Europe. Although it managed to retain an influential presence especially in Scandinavian countries and in Great Britain, Lawrence Black and Nicole Robertson have pointed out how critics and admirers alike have presented its history in terms of „declinism“.<sup>57</sup> The decline of the co-operative movement has usually been attributed to a focus on consumption as a means to satisfy basic needs, which was not compatible with the tastes of postwar consumers. However, Brett Fairbairn has cautioned scholars in presenting the history of co-operatives as a history of decline. Such a perspective disregards the continued presence of co-operative organizations in Europe, not just in retail branches, but also in construction, banking and insurance.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, a perspective stressing decline is Eurocentric, because it neglects the steadfast presence of similar initiatives in countries like Japan and the United States.<sup>59</sup>

The significance of the co-operative movement derives not only from the continued relevance of its ideas. Many organizations continue to practice its ideas, and many non-co-operative companies are rooted in a co-operative tradition. As recent studies by Mary Hilson and Piebe Teeboom have shown, co-operation has also functioned as an international frame of reference in debates about economic policies especially

<sup>57</sup>Lawrence Black / Nicole Robertson (eds.), *Consumerism and the co-operative movement in modern British history: Taking stock*, Manchester 2009, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup>Jan-Otmar Hesse, *Co-operatives in Germany in the 20th Century: An overview and some hypotheses*, in: *Entreprises et histoire* 56,3 (2009), pp. 49–61.

<sup>59</sup>Brett Fairbairn, *Konsumgenossenschaften in internationaler Perspektive: Ein historischer Überblick*, in: Michael Prinz (ed.), *Der lange Weg in den Überfluss: Anfänge und Entwicklung der Konsumgesellschaft seit der Vormoderne*, Paderborn 2003, pp. 437–461.

in the interwar years.<sup>60</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests co-operative practices – such as the notion that part of the profits could be refunded to the consumers through membership discounts – were also taken up by regular retailers.<sup>61</sup> In two recent edited volumes on the co-operative movement, the entanglement of the history of consumption with other historiographical traditions becomes evident. „Co-operatives and the social question“ opens up a transnational perspective on attempts to reform the market, in which international congresses and transnational communication played an important role. At the same time, the volume notes the tension also present in many other internationalist movements: whilst promoting international co-operation, these movements at the same time stressed their commitment to nationalist projects.<sup>62</sup> In „Consumerism and the co-operative movement in modern British history“, the history of co-operation is presented as part of the larger history of consumer society, shedding light on the postwar transformation of practices of consumption, the ways in which women intertwined their roles as consumers with different political agendas, and on the history of material culture.<sup>63</sup>

The studies that highlight the entanglement of the co-operative movement not only underscore its relevance for a broad array of topics, but also warn of limiting its history to the organization of consumers. In many instances, co-operative organizations were also active outside the realm of the market. Moreover, the relationship between producer and consumer co-operation was a recurring theme.<sup>64</sup> Matthew Ander-

<sup>60</sup>Mary Hilson, *Consumer co-operation and economic crisis: The 1936 Roosevelt inquiry on co-operative enterprise and the emergence of the Nordic „middle way“*, in: *Contemporary European History* 22,2 (2013), pp. 181–198; Piebe Teeboom, *Searching for the middle way: Consumer cooperation and the cooperative moment in New Deal America*, Dissertation, University of Amsterdam 2009.

<sup>61</sup>Ton Oosterhuis, *Niet om het gewin, maar voor het gezin: de geschiedenis van de verbruikcoöperatie in Nederland vanaf 1865*, Den Haag 2000.

<sup>62</sup>Mary Hilson / Pirjo Markkola / Ann-Catrin Östman (eds.), *Co-operatives and the social question: The co-operative movement in Northern and Eastern Europe, c. 1880–1950*, Cardiff 2012.

<sup>63</sup>Black / Robertson, *Consumerism and the co-operative movement*.

<sup>64</sup>Hesse, *Co-operatives in Germany in the 20th Century*.

son has drawn attention to the connections between co-operation and the movement for fair trade. Co-operative organizations in Europe are currently steadfast supporters of fair trade. Many fair trade products are also produced by co-operatives. The ideal of a fair market also connects co-operatives and fair trade initiatives. However, a fruitful collaboration has only blossomed since the 1990s. Before, British co-operatives above all focused on offering competitive prices. This even made the British co-operative tea production in Sri Lanka into one of the targets of fair trade activists in the 1970s. Only after the British co-operative movement rediscovered its social ideals during the 1980s, fair trade initiatives appeared as natural allies.<sup>65</sup>

Coalitions have been an important theme in the emerging historiography of the movement for fair trade.<sup>66</sup> Until recently, the historical perspective on fair trade has predominantly been presented by members of the movement itself and by social scientists. They usually trace its beginnings to charitable initiatives during the 1950s and 1960s. These were purportedly complemented by alternative trade aiming at solidarity since the end of the 1960s. In this common narrative, fair trade only became a force to be reckoned with from the late 1980s on, as the certification of goods as fair trade products catapulted them into mainstream markets.<sup>67</sup> This narrative of sudden success during

<sup>65</sup>Matthew Anderson, „Cost of a cup of tea“: Fair trade and the British co-operative movement, c. 1960–2000, in: Black / Robertson, Consumerism and the co-operative movement, pp. 240–259.

<sup>66</sup>The author would like to thank Matthew Anderson, Ruben Quaas and Valerio Verrea for making the manuscripts of their recent publications available. Matthew Anderson's „A history of fair trade in contemporary Britain: From civil society campaigns to corporate compliance“ appears in 2015 at Palgrave MacMillan. Ruben Quaas' dissertation was accepted at the University of Bielefeld in 2014 and appeared in 2015 at Böhlau as „Fair trade: Eine global-lokale Geschichte am Beispiel des Kaffees“. Valerio Verrea's dissertation „The fair trade innovation: Tensions between ethical behavior and profit“ was accepted at the University of Leipzig in 2014. For an extended review of the historiography of fair trade, see: Peter van Dam, The limits of a success story: fair trade and the history of postcolonial globalization, in: *Comparativ* 25,1 (2015) pp. 62-77.

<sup>67</sup>Alex Nicholls / Charlotte Opal, Fair trade. Market-driven ethical consumption, London 2005, pp. 19–24; Michael von Hauff / Katja Claus, Fair Trade: Ein Konzept nachhaltigen Handels, Konstanz 2012, pp. 85–92; Kathryn Wheeler, Fair trade and the

the 1980s has led many scholars to distinguish between a phase of „alternative trade“ until the 1980s and the rise of „fair trade“ since the advent of labelling.<sup>68</sup> Given the contested nature of attempts at mainstreaming fair trade, the supposed 1980s watershed is dubbed by some to be the result of a „brilliant idea“<sup>69</sup>, whereas others regard it as a dubious decision which resulted in the co-optation of the fair trade movement by large businesses and the displacement of trust among movement members by rationalized certification.<sup>70</sup>

These debates about recent developments easily lose sight of the history of the fair trade movement before the 1980s and the context within which it arose. The relevance of the pre-1980s past is reduced to highlighting the stages the movement went through before it took off, pointing out how later tensions between moderate and radical elements were prefigured by the roots in Christian charity and left-wing solidarity. Alternatively, the past is held up as an example of a more principled approach to fair trade against which to judge recent approaches. Historians have adjusted these images in several ways. First, they have demonstrated how many of the issues the movement currently grapples with have been present in different guises before the 1980s. For example, Matthew Anderson has presented the problem of establishing an equal partnership between producers in the South, and civil society organizations and consumers based in the North.<sup>71</sup> Valerio

citizen-consumer: Shopping for justice?, Basingstoke 2012, pp. 37–40.

<sup>68</sup>Daniel Jaffee, Brewing justice: Fair trade coffee, sustainability, and survival, Berkeley 2007, p. 13. On the history of certification, see Elisabeth Bennett, A short history of Fairtrade certification governance, in: Janet Dine / Brigitte Granville (eds.), The processes and practices of fair trade. Trust, ethics, and governance, London 2013, pp. 53–78.

<sup>69</sup>John Bowes, A brilliant idea, in: John Bowes (ed.), The fair trade revolution, London 2011, pp. 1–17, here: p. 4.

<sup>70</sup>Daniel Jaffee, Weak Coffee: Certification and Co-Optation in the Fair Trade Movement, in: *Social Problems* 59,1 (2012), pp. 94–116; Mark Hudson / Ian Hudson / Mara Fridell, Fair trade, sustainability and social change, Houndmills 2013; Gavin Fridell, Fair trade coffee: the prospects and pitfalls of market-driven social justice, Toronto 2007; Gavin Fridell, Alternative trade: Legacies for the future, Winnipeg 2013.

<sup>71</sup>Matthew Anderson, Fair trade: Partners in development? A reassessment of trading partnerships within the Fair Trade model, in: Brigitte Granville / Janet Dine (eds.), The

Verrea has stressed the persistence and the relevance of networks of alternative trade after the 1980s.<sup>72</sup>

Second, historians have demonstrated how the fair trade movement did not develop in a linear fashion, pointing out how 1970s activists presented selling coffee not as a goal in itself, but as a means to raise awareness about global inequality.<sup>73</sup> As Ruben Quaas' analysis of the West-German case indicates, fair trade became an integral part of the alternative movement in the late 1970s, only to dissociate again at the end of the 1980s. Generally, Quaas has made clear how fair trade has been associated with different groups of producers ranging from state-led exporting to small farmers' co-operatives and individual companies, and directed at different groups of consumers in churches, world-shops, and supermarkets.<sup>74</sup> Anderson has gone beyond pointing out the successful co-operation between fair trade and religious groups to analyze the tense relations with what appear to be like-minded movements, such as the co-operative movement and the labor movement.<sup>75</sup> Third, by demonstrating the radical positions taken up by fair trade activists in religious organizations and by highlighting the extent to which religious and non-religious groups were able to co-operate, historians have questioned the division between radical secular and moderate religious groups.<sup>76</sup>

processes and practices of fair trade, London, pp. 79–95.

<sup>72</sup>Valerio Verrea, *The fair trade innovation: Tensions between ethical behaviour and profit*, Dissertation, University of Leipzig, 2014.

<sup>73</sup>Ruben Quaas, *Selling coffee to raise awareness for development policy. The emerging fair trade market in Western Germany in the 1970s*, in: *Historical Social Research* 36,3 (2011), pp. 164–181.

<sup>74</sup>Ruben Quaas, *Fair Trade: Eine global-lokale Geschichte am Beispiel des Kaffees*, Köln 2015.

<sup>75</sup>Matthew Anderson, *A history of fair trade in contemporary Britain*.

<sup>76</sup>Sebastian Tripp, *Die Weltkirche vor Ort. Die Globalisierung der Kirchen und die Entstehung christlicher „Dritte-Welt“-Gruppen*, in: Wilhelm Damberg (ed.), *Soziale Strukturen und Semantiken des Religiösen im Wandel: Transformationen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1989*, Essen 2011, pp. 123–136; Konrad Kuhn, *„Entwicklung heisst Befreiung“. Strategien und Protestformen der schweizerischen Dritte-Welt-Bewegung am Symposium der Solidarität 1981*, in: *Mitteilungsblatt des Instituts für soziale Bewegungen* 38 (2007), pp. 77–95; Peter van Dam, *Handel im Tempel? Fair trade*

Lastly, historians have proposed to regard the fair trade movement within the broader context of consumer movements. Other activists had mobilized consumers to buy 'good' products long before the 1960s, challenging them to take into account the way the products they bought were produced.<sup>77</sup> In some instances, such movements also bridged long distances, aiming for example to bolster the trade in „Empire goods“.<sup>78</sup> Approaching fair trade from this angle, two important questions arise: In what ways and to what specific ends did organizations aiming to promote fair trade try to mobilize consumers?<sup>79</sup> And how have consumers responded to these attempts? In this vein, Kathryn Wheeler has cautioned observers to equate the consumption of fair trade products with supporting the visions fair trade organizations ascribe to these products. The morals of the citizen-consumer have to be constructed continually, while attempts at such constructions have to deal with willful humans.<sup>80</sup>

Peculiarly, these historical approaches to fair trade have hardly challenged the dominance of the national framework. For a subject both so evidently transnational in character and so locally disparate,

und Kirchen in den Niederlanden seit 1945, in: Wilhelm Damberg / Traugott Jähnichen (eds.), *Neue Soziale Bewegungen als Herausforderung sozialkirchlichen Handelns*, Stuttgart 2015, pp. 279–296.

<sup>77</sup>Harald Homann / Verena 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>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>78</sup>Frank 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* 25,6 (2007), pp. 1079–1102.

<sup>79</sup>Matthew Anderson, *NGOs and Fair Trade: The social movement behind the label*, in: Nick Crowson / Matthew Hilton / James McKay (eds.), *NGOs in contemporary Britain. Non-state actors in society and politics since 1945*, Basingstoke 2009, pp. 222–241; Alexander Sedlmaier, *Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany*, Ann Arbor 2014; Martin Gerth, *Rezension zu: Sedlmaier, Alexander, Consumption and Violence: Radical Protest in Cold-War West Germany*, *Ann Arbor* 2014, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 01.09.2015, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-23694>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>80</sup>Wheeler, *Fair trade and the citizen-consumer*; Trentmann, *Citizenship and consumption*.

the history of fair trade still regularly summarizes the developments within different countries without probing the limits of such a national perspective. Closer examinations of the transfer of ideas and mutual perception within the movement have by and large been limited to describing the spread of the certification model and to anecdotal evidence of foreign examples taken up by fair trade activists.<sup>81</sup> A closer look at the balances between local, national and transnational perspectives formulated by fair trade activists could further our understanding of the history of the movement: who did activists regard as their allies, who as their prime targets? Did they position themselves as local agents in a global market, or were their views of the market more differentiated?

By studying consumers as active subjects in the context of 'critical' initiatives such as the labor movement, co-operation and fair trade, two risks have to be taken into account. On the one hand, however notable the influence of some of these movements, we should be aware of their limitations. Even though ideas propagated by these movement have at times been highly influential, it is by no means clear to what extent their popularity resulted from the activities of these organizations. The assertion that many consumers did not adopt the views of such movements even if they responded to their undertakings underlines this limitation. On the other hand, the extent to which 'critical' initiatives in fact accommodate market integration deserves more attention. Did the organizations under consideration carve out more autonomy for consumers? Was this autonomy defined as autonomy from the market, or self-determination within the market?<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup>Bennet, A short history of Fairtrade certification governance.

<sup>82</sup>John Brewer / Frank Trentmann, Introduction. Space, time and value in consumer cultures; Bryant Simon, Not going to Starbucks: Boycotts and the out-scouring of politics in the branded world, in: *Journal of Consumer Culture* 11,2 (2011), pp. 145–167; Gavin Fridell, Fair trade and neoliberalism: Assessing emerging perspectives, in: *Latin American Perspectives* 33,6 (2006), pp. 8–28.

#### 4. The entanglements of consumer society: spatial, material, and moral

In stressing its embedded character, recent scholarship thus invites us to reconsider the entangled nature of the practices, spaces and moral evaluations which constitute consumer society. This realization goes beyond the notion that the autonomy of markets is limited by external factors. Rather, it suggests that the sphere of consumption is intrinsically intertwined with structures and practices which are not usually considered part of the world of consumption.<sup>83</sup> The attempts of the labor, co-operative and fair trade movement to shape consumer society were informed by and in turn themselves influenced the activities in other domains of social life. For example, whilst the boycotts and boycotts of the fair trade movement can be regarded as consumer activism, its attempts at lobbying politicians for reforms and raising awareness about the injustices of the global market by distributing leaflets and media campaigns were only indirectly related to the domain of consumption.

Regarding the activities of consumers as fundamentally entangled provides a tentative answer to the question of what (de)limits consumers. They wield partial autonomy through attempts to individually and through organizations shape consumer societies. At the same time, the existing structures of these societies limit them in their attempts. This tension between the autonomy and heteronomy of consumers can also be observed in two emerging fields of research on consumption, which focus on bodily experiences and on the material aspects of consumption.<sup>84</sup> In both instances, practices of consumption

<sup>83</sup>Christof Dejung, Einbettung, in: Christof Dejung / Monika Dommann / Daniel Speich Chassé (eds.), *Auf der Suche nach der Ökonomie*, Tübingen 2014, pp. 47–71. Cf. Ines Prodöhl, Rezension zu: Dejung, Christof; Monika Dommann; Daniel Speich Chassé (eds.), *Auf der Suche nach der Ökonomie. Historische Annäherungen*. Tübingen 2014, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 30.04.2015, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-22950>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>84</sup>Peter-Paul Bänziger, Fordistische Körper in der Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts: Eine Skizze, in: *Body politics: Zeitschrift für Körpergeschichte* 1,1 (2013), pp. 11–40; Ruth Oldenziel / Mikael Hård, Consumers, tinkers, rebels: The people who shaped



and structures of consumer society are constituted through a dialogue between what have traditionally been regarded bodily and material aspects on the one hand and cultural traditions on the other.<sup>85</sup>

The realization that consumer society is an embedded phenomenon calls for a consideration of the spaces in which it is localized.<sup>86</sup> Naturally, the recent increase in attention for transnational perspectives has not left the history of consumption untouched. As the discussion of literature on consumer society above has demonstrated, the transfer of cultures of consumption in particular has received scholarly attention, especially regarding the transfers from the United States to Europe. Similarly, the history of multinational companies has been studied to compare their conduct in different national frameworks.<sup>87</sup> These transnational perspectives have predominantly focused on transfers from one national space to another. Transnational political spatial orders can be just as important as national perspectives in framing consumption. Events such as the often reported 'kitchen debate' at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow between Nikita Krushchev and Richard Nixon point towards the significance of consumption within the Cold War confrontation of East and West. In a similar vein, the transformation of global politics and markets through the process of decolonization provided the crucial impetus for fair trade activism in the North. Postwar consumer society, then, did not only underpin the legitimacy of the West versus the East, but also

Europe, Houndmills 2013; Adri August Albert de la Bruhèze / Ruth Oldenziel (eds.), *Manufacturing technology, manufacturing consumers: The making of Dutch consumer society*, Amsterdam 2009. Cf. Andreas Ludwig, Rezension zu: Gerritsen, Anne; Giorgio Riello (eds.), *Writing Material Culture History*, London 2015, in: H-Soz-Kult, 07.05.2015, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-22340>> (02.09.2015).

<sup>85</sup>Cf. Bruno Latour, *Das Parlament der Dinge: Für eine politische Ökologie*, Frankfurt am Main 2001.

<sup>86</sup>David Blaazer, Review article: Globalization, markets and historiographical perspective, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 42,3 (2007), pp. 505–514; Hannes Siegrist / Manuel Schramm (eds.), *Regionalisierung europäischer Konsumkulturen im 20. Jahrhundert*, Leipzig 2003.

<sup>87</sup>Keetie Sluyterman / Ben Wubs, *Over grenzen: Bedrijfsleven in Nederland in de twintigste eeuw*, Amsterdam 2009.

defined the North vis-à-vis the South.<sup>88</sup>

Recent histories of civic activism provide additional insight into the ways in which the spatial framework of consumer societies can be questioned. The citizen-consumers who appear in these accounts were not just situated within nation-states, but were also affected by local, European and global events and processes. Nor did these citizen-consumers position themselves exclusively as national citizens. Matthew Hilton's account of the history of transnational consumer activism demonstrates that these activists were part of transnational organizations and took part in debates which were partly influenced by national concerns, but also transcend them.<sup>89</sup> The historiography of consumer society can thus fruitfully be connected to approaches which stress the entanglement of spatial perspectives, not focusing exclusively on one or another spatial framework, but analyzing the relative weight and interconnections of the several frames in which specific histories were situated.<sup>90</sup> How have local and translocal perspectives been entangled in cultures of consumption?

Finally, moral evaluations of the consumer society bring the entanglement between scholars and their subject matter to the fore. A roundtable discussion on „critical and moral stances in consumer studies“ published in the „*Journal of Consumer Culture*“ notably addressed two dimensions of these evaluations.<sup>91</sup> Relating the reluc-

<sup>88</sup>Frederick Cooper, What is the concept of globalization good for?, in: *African Affairs* 100 (2001), pp. 189–213; Ralph A. Austen, Africa and globalization: colonialism, decolonization and the postcolonial malaise, in: *Journal of Global History* 1,3 (2006), p. 403.

<sup>89</sup>Hilton, *Prosperity for all*.

<sup>90</sup>Erik Swyngedouw, Neither global nor local: „Glocalization“ and the politics of scale, in: Kevin R. Cox (ed.), *Spaces of globalization: Reasserting the power of the local*, New York 1997, pp. 137–164; Saskia Sassen, The locational and institutional embeddedness of electronic markets: The case of the global capital markets, in: Mark Bevir / Frank Trentmann (eds.), *Markets in historical contexts. Ideas and politics in the modern world*, Cambridge 2004, pp. 224–246; Angelika Epple, Lokalität und die Dimensionen des Globalen. Eine Frage der Relationen, in: *Historische Anthropologie* 21,1 (2013), pp. 4–25.

<sup>91</sup>Juliet Schor / Don Slater / Sharon Zukin, Critical and moral stances in consumer studies, in: *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10 (2010) 2, pp. 274–291.

tance of many contemporary scholars to critically discuss consumer society to a legacy of scholarly disdain for consumption by the likes of Theodor Adorno, Juliet Schor warned against avoiding the subject. To her mind, such moral evaluations have fundamentally shaped consumption. Therefore, they present an important field of investigation.<sup>92</sup> Taking this a step further, Don Slater and Viviana Zelizer focused on discerning different critiques of practices of consumption and critical images of consumer society.<sup>93</sup> Explorations of these critiques have repeatedly demonstrated how they were inseparable from views which were not exclusively related to consumption. Rather, they were part of broader social constellations.<sup>94</sup> Notably, the influence of religious views on evaluations for consumption has recently been reconsidered in this respect.<sup>95</sup>

The roundtable discussion did not just highlight the entanglement of moral views and consumption by actors who are the object of research, but also clearly signaled the importance of moral viewpoints in how scholars approach their subject matter.<sup>96</sup> The concern about the future of consumer societies is evident in the increased historiographical attention it has received in recent years. Analyses of historical trajectories of ideas and practices of consumption can provide valu-

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., pp. 281, 287–290.

<sup>94</sup>Monika Dommann, Markttabu, in: Christof Dejung / Monika Dommann / Daniel Speich Chassé (eds.), *Auf der Suche nach der Ökonomie*, pp. 183–205.

<sup>95</sup>Michael Hochgeschwender / Bernhard Löffler (eds.), *Religion, Moral und liberaler Markt: politische Ökonomie und Ethikdebatten vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Bielefeld 2011. Cf. Marcel Nieden, Rezension zu: Hochgeschwender, Michael; Bernhard Löffler (eds.): *Religion, Moral und liberaler Markt. Politische Ökonomie und Ethikdebatten vom 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*. Bielefeld 2011, in: *H-Soz-Kult*, 21.11.2012, <<http://www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-17905>> (02.09.2015). Jan Hüsken, *Die Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde als globales Unternehmen*, in: *Zeitschrift für Weltgeschichte* 14 (2013) 1, pp. 13–27; François Gauthier / Tuomas Martikainen, *Religion in consumer society brands, consumers, and markets*, Burlington 2013; Jan Behnstedt / Marcus Sandl, *Religion*, in: Christof Dejung / Monika Dommann / Daniel Speich Chassé (eds.), *Auf der Suche nach der Ökonomie*, pp. 237–262.

<sup>96</sup>Juliet Schor / Don Slater / Sharon Zukin, *Critical and moral stances in consumer studies*, pp. 282–284.

able impulses for present debates. Despite the widespread concern about the current state of consumer society, recent scholarship on its constitution has not returned to dismissive perspectives. The revival of studies on capitalism in the works of scholars such as Jürgen Kocka and Joyce Appleby may serve as a case in point<sup>97</sup>: whilst explicit references to capitalism do signal a critical perspective, scholarship on capitalism tends to signal a cautious acceptance rather than present critical alternatives. Much to their benefit, they present capitalism not as a single static system, but as a historical phenomenon which is constantly changing, heterogeneous, and interwoven with other social spheres. A comparable stance dominates much of the scholarship on the history of consumer society. This reluctant acceptance by members of a generally critical profession in itself underlines the triumphant rise of consumer society in the 20th century.

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<sup>97</sup>Joyce Appleby, *The relentless revolution*; Jürgen Kocka, *Geschichte des Kapitalismus*, München 2013.

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