

Fair Trade: Dynamic and Dilemmas of a Market Oriented Global Social Movement

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Received: 18 December 2006 / Accepted: 8 February 2007 / Published online: 26 June 2007
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Abstract Fair Trade is analysed as a new economic social movement to the extent that it is based on new forms of collective action and directs its demands primarily to the market rather than to the State. In addition, it is intrinsically a global movement harnessing development goals to new market relations. It differs, however, from similar movements (organics, animal welfare) to the extent that it focuses primarily on traditional issues of redistributive justice rather than a new generation of rights and duties. Fair Trade is understood as having three components: (i) the organization of alternative trading networks; (ii) the marketing of Fair Trade labelled products through licensed conventional traders and retailers; and (iii) the campaign-based promotion of Fair Trade to change both purchasing practices and the rules of conventional trade. As a market oriented movement, Fair Trade relies crucially on the emergence of a new politicization of consumer activity comprising not only “consumer-activists” but also the State as consumer and a new layer of political consumers sensitive to issues of social justice in their daily purchasing practices.

Keywords Fair Trade · New economic social movement · Consumer-oriented social movement · Social justice through markets · Southern Fair Trade

Fair Trade began some 50 years ago as a mixture of charity and solidarity and for some 30 years it remained politically and economically marginal. This situation has changed drastically over the last 15 years which have simultaneously seen the *institutionalization* of the movement, the mainstreaming of its products, i.e., the entry of Fair Trade products into conventional shopping circuits supported by labels

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and certifications, and the incorporation of its objectives into dominant *political discourses*. The shift to mainstreaming has been based on the identification of a broad category of “political consumers” (Micheletti 2003) beyond the social networks of the movement’s activists, sensitive to issues of social justice.¹

The success of mainstreaming, making Fair Trade products among the fastest growing food segments in Europe and the US, has been the origin of considerable tension within the movement with many arguing that the key challenges of the Fair Trade movement are no longer those of promotion but the prevention of cooption. The response of the “alternative trading organization” (ATO) wing of Fair Trade,² which operates through networks of dedicated shops, has been twofold. On the one hand, it has adopted a more market oriented sales strategy, professionalizing its staff and relocating its shops. On the other, it has directed its attention to mobilizing State support, both through official recognition of its goals and as a key institutional consumer via public procurement initiatives.

In this article, the different components of the Fair Trade movement are explored. In spite of the more obvious tensions, there are also unexpected synergies and it is, precisely, the multifaceted nature of the movement that has accounted for its success to date. As the South moves to develop its own Fair Trade markets, however, the nature of the movement’s consumer base emerges as a central issue. We show that Fair Trade is situated along a continuum from corporate social responsibility to notions of the “solidarity economy”³ and that this latter is strengthened with the emergence of Southern Fair Trade movements. This wing of Fair Trade favours the promotion of local markets targeting poor consumers, both in the North and the South. At the same time, the existence of solid middle classes in these countries also raises the hopes of “mainstreamers” who wager on the emergence of the political consumer in Southern markets. The traditional tensions between the mainstream and the alternative wings of the movement become amplified as Fair Trade moves from a North (consumer)–South (producer) to a truly global movement with national organizations in both North and South.

The article is organized as follows. The first part briefly explains the specific features which define and distinguish Fair Trade, identifies its principal components, and provides an up-to-date profile of its activities, focussing on Europe and the US. The article then discusses the hybrid nature of Fair Trade (straddling traditional and new style social movements), identifies the internal factors responsible for its dynamic, exploring also their increasing complexity under the impact of globalization. After an examination of the realignment of Fair Trade as the South begins to

¹ Already in 1980, Toffler coined the word “prosumer” to capture a new relation between production and consumption, an approach developed more recently by Rochefort (1997). Since then a variety of terms have been used to capture the specifically citizen aspects of consumer practices. In France a play on words transforms consumers into consumer-actors (*consom'acteurs*). Others approach these same tendencies from the perspective of ethical consumption (Gosseries 2003; Van Parijs 2002).

² We refer here to the coordination of production-consumption circuits which, rather than resorting to formal certification schemes, relies on the confidence generated by the movement’s social networks, selling the products in the movement’s own shops. They are also known as “alternative networks.”

³ The solidarity economy, itself a movement within and alongside Fair Trade, is heavily influenced by the writings of Laville (1994) and colleagues which in turn draw heavily on Polanyi (1944).

develop its own conception of Fair Trade, the article concludes with a discussion of future directions for the movement.

What Is Fair Trade?

Charitable organizations linked to a variety of religious affiliations were responsible for the emergence of Fair Trade networks both in Europe and the United States.⁴ These organizations were subsequently complemented through trading activities motivated by political solidarity. Handicraft production was largely sourced from Asia and Africa and food/drink more identified with Latin America. Within the multilateral arena, the second UNCTAD Conference in 1968 argued that trade not aid should provide the basis for Third World development.⁵ In this context, charity and solidarity gave way to a more explicitly political focus on the need for Fair Trade. Coffee, already the object of political solidarity campaigns uniting producer and consumer organizations, became the symbol and product leader of the nascent Fair Trade movement—a position which it still retains (Raynolds 2002; Renard 1999). Fair Trade groups became organized on a national basis first around importers (ATOs) and dedicated shops and later on the basis of labelling organizations licensing products for mainstream markets.

The second half of the 1980s saw a phase of institutionalization of the movement affecting both mainstream and alternative network components. In 1987, the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) was created bringing together 11 leading traders/importers from nine countries.⁶ In 1989, the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) was formed initially providing a forum for Northern Fair Trade organizations but quickly extending to include Southern producer groups, thereby transforming it into the global expression of the movement. The 1990s saw the institutional consolidation of the various networks of dedicated Fair Trade shops with the establishment of the Network of European World Shops (NEWS). In 1997, the different national labelling initiatives which had emerged as a product certification strategy to gain entry into mainstream markets (beginning with the Max Havelaar label in the late 1980s) gave rise to the Fairtrade Labelling Organization International (FLO).⁷ As from 1998 these four organizations began to coordinate their activities leading to the creation of FINE, the name being an acronym based on the first letter of each of the above four organizations, whose “aim...is to enable these networks and their members to cooperate on strategic levels on crucial issues affecting the future of the Fair Trade movement, such as advocacy

⁴ For overviews, see Barratt-Brown (1993) and Tallontire (2001); www.ifat.org (accessed January, 2007).

⁵ www.ifat.org.

⁶ Information in this section draws on data from the sites of the various organizations mentioned.

⁷ For an account of the Max Havelaar initiative from the viewpoint of its promoters, see Roozen and VanderHoff (2002).

and campaigning, standards and monitoring.’’⁸ In 2001, the following consensus definition was agreed on by the members of FINE:

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers—especially in the South. Fair Trade organizations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising, and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade.

While this definition is limited to general principles, Fair Trade has developed a series of more precise prescriptions. In the first place, as a consequence of its development goals, Fair Trade contracts and trading agreements are conducted with producer organizations and not with individuals. The Fair Trade price is calculated on the basis of production and broader reproduction costs. In the case of FLO certified products a minimum price is established, calculated according to the above criteria, which gives way to the market price whenever this is above the minimum. The purchaser, if requested, should advance at least 60% of working capital largely inaccessible to small-scale producer groups who often have to depend on middlemen. In addition to the minimum price, the purchaser should also pay a premium to be used at the discretion of the producer organization for development purposes (education, health infrastructure, etc.). These same principles are adopted in a more flexible spirit by ATOs which often work with products for which no price structure exists.

In practice, Fair Trade can be understood as having three components: (i) the organization of alternative trading networks, known as ATOs; (ii) the marketing of Fair Trade labelled products based on FLO registered producer groups and licensed traders and retailers; and (iii) the campaign-based promotion of Fair Trade ranging from specific initiatives for the adoption of Fair Trade purchasing practices by the public sector to political campaigns to change the rules of conventional trade.

The Organization of Alternative Trading Networks, Known as ATOs

These networks, in principle, involve the direct articulation of producer groups, traders, dedicated shops (largely based on volunteers) and consumers into interdependent trading circuits which very quickly assume the character of social networks and in this way can underwrite Fair Trade claims without formal guarantees. The campaign by producer groups in the South for recognition of participatory rather than third party audited certification schemes has emerged in this context. Direct farmer to consumer Internet sales create new opportunities for ATO trading. In these circuits, the consumer is barely distinguishable from the activist since trust with regard to “quality” is an extension of direct knowledge of the members of the network and, in addition, the consumer must break with conventional shopping routines to access the products.

⁸ www.worldshops.org, accessed January, 2007.

The Marketing of Fair Trade Labelled Products Based on FLO Registered Producer Groups and Licensed Traders and Retailers

The national labelling initiatives grouped together in the FLO correspond to a strategy for the development of a formal certification system for Fair Trade products. Producer groups and traders are registered with FLO and the national labelling initiatives offer licenses to manufacturers, retailers or service sector companies. In this way, Fair Trade products can enter mainstream marketing channels based now on the formal guarantees of a certification system. Initially, in contrast with other certification systems, the costs were borne by the purchaser rather than the producer groups. The need to respond to ever greater demands for certification has led to a reversal of this situation and FLO is now aligning its certification system to the requirements of ISO 65.

The FLO system presupposes the existence of a layer of consumers whose routine shopping choices are influenced by ethical or political considerations. The explosion of sales once Fair Trade products were made available in conventional outlets would seem to confirm this supposition.⁹ The critique of FLO strategy from within the movement is threefold. For some, certification schemes in themselves break down the producer–consumer network since the inter-personal basis of trust is replaced by standardized, auditing systems (Carimentrand and Ballet 2004). For others, the problem arises when big business is licensed to operate in Fair Trade even when they are seen to be the “enemies” in response to which Fair Trade emerged and for whom Fair Trade represents a minimal proportion of total turnover (Ctm altromercato 2005). Thirdly, the FLO certification system is seen to be the thin end of the wedge allowing for the creation of softer Fair Trade criteria, as in the Utz Kepeh scheme promoted by the Dutch retailer, Ahold, opening the way for private supermarket brands.¹⁰

The Campaign-Based Promotion of Fair Trade

Fair Trade is above all a social movement for which new terms of trade represent a strategic tool for the promotion of development and social inclusion. As such it both “grows the market” through campaigns (Fair Trade coffee on campus, Fair Trade towns, Fair Trade weeks, etc.) and promotes political campaigns and advocacy to “make trade fair” in international forums. Much of this campaigning work is made possible through the networks of dedicated shops themselves largely staffed with volunteers. These activities target the “institutional consumer” through efforts to influence public procurement policies. They also focus on the political construction of the consumer in their emphasis on campaigns directed at schools. At the same

⁹ In some cases, however, it is retail which redefines consumer options through the conversion of an entire line of products to Fair Trade sourcing, as in the case of the Coop chain in England for sales of coffee and tea in its restaurants (www.cooponline.coop/about_campaigns_fairtrade.html, accessed 02/02/2007). The relation between retail strategy and consumer demand is highly complex. While retail avails itself of consumer surveys, patterns of Fair Trade adoption would also seem to be influenced by intra-sector marketing and/or corporate social responsibility strategies.

¹⁰ <http://www.artisansdumonde.org/commerce-equitable.htm>, accessed 02/02/2007

time, they define the objectives and provide a specific focus for “the individualized collective action” (Micheletti 2003) of the political consumer.

While different organizations may specialize in one or other of the above three activities (Oxfam UK, for instance, one of the pioneering alternative traders, is now focusing more on advocacy and political campaigning), most combine involvement in trading with campaign style activity. The different trading strategies can often be complementary. Alternative trading networks provide outlets for producers and products which may not have access to labelling circuits, particularly in the case of handicrafts, or for which no labelling system as yet applies. On the other hand, labelling has enabled Fair Trade products to access supermarket shelves, with a consequent sharp increase in global sales, benefiting also sales in the networks of dedicated shops. Nevertheless, the two forms of trade at the limit involve different conceptions of Fair Trade and considerable tension exists between these wings of the movement. At one extreme, Fair Trade sees itself as a component of the solidarity economy movement, while at the other it blends into the objectives of corporate social responsibility and ethical trade (Conroy 2001; Gendron 2004; Tallontire and Vorley 2005).

Profile of Fair Trade in Europe

Two recent studies conducted by the Fair Trade movement, *Fair Trade in Europe 2005*—jointly produced by the four members of FINE (Krier 2006)—and *2005 Report: Fair Trade Trends in North America and the Pacific Rim*—produced by the Fair Trade Federation (2006)—provide an authoritative overview of global tendencies. Table 1 summarizes the structure and evolution of Fair Trade in 25 European countries in the first years of the new millennium.

Table 1 provides key insights into the evolution of Fair Trade in Europe. The dominant position of mainstreaming is clearly confirmed both in absolute figures (some €600 million) and relative growth (186%). On the other hand, the World Shops have not stagnated and the sharp increase in paid staff in this sector confirms the adoption of more professional marketing strategies. A striking feature is the increase in the number of importers and the role which they have assumed in “growing the market” as reflected in education/PR/marketing expenditures. This growth reflects both the shift to supermarket outlets and the concomitant predominance of food products, but also corresponds to a diversification in products and sources of supply. This has led to the emergence of new actors—Altereco in France, Agrofair in the Netherlands, CaféDirect and the Day Chocolate Company in the UK—and to very strong growth for some more traditional actors—Ctm altromercato in Italy. It is notable also that while the number and turnover of importing organizations have both more than doubled, the increase in paid staff has been limited to 14%.

There is a marked heterogeneity in the profile of the Fair Trade movement and in the market dynamic of Fair Trade in each country. Certain countries have market shares which may be considered mature for some products—Switzerland (coffee, 6% and bananas, 47%), UK (coffee, 20%)—while others are beginning a process of rapid

Table 1 Five years of Fair Trade dynamics in Europe: A statistical overview

	1999	2004 or latest year available	% Change
Importing organizations	97	200	+106
Sales outlets			
Worldshops	2,740	2,854	+4
Supermarkets	43,100	56,700	+32
Others	18,000	19,300	+7
Total	63,800	78,900	+24
Paid staff			
Importing orgs	746	851	+14
Worldshops assocs	32	107	+234
Labelling orgs	71	113	+59
Total	849	1,071	+26
Turnover in 000 €			
Importing orgs	118,900	243,300	+105
Worldshops (net retail value)	41,600	103,100	+148
Labelling orgs (net retail value)	208,900	597,000	+186
Education/PR/marketing in 000 €			
Importing orgs	5,600	11,400	+104
Worldshops assocs	1,000	1,700	+70
Labelling orgs	3,500	5,100	+46
Total	10,100	18,300	+81
All world shops in 000 €			
Net retail value estimate	92,000	120,000	+30
All FT products in 000 €			
Net retail value, estimate	260,000	660,000	+154

Source: Krier (2006)

growth—France—in the same or a more diversified range of products. The importance of large-scale retail sales relative to dedicated outlets varies not only according to features relating to the internal dynamic of the Fair Trade movement but also to the uneven presence of supermarkets (very low in Italy compared with similar *per capita* income countries) which in turns depends on broad macro-economic and cultural factors but also on public regulation affecting the sector. It is of note that the two countries with the highest net retail value of labelled products and the highest per capita expenditure—Switzerland and the UK—were strongly influenced by the early adoption of Fair Trade products by Cooperative supermarket chains.

The Netherlands is the only country that shows equally strong sales of both World shop and FLO products, followed at a considerable distance by Austria. In all other countries of Northern Europe labelled products are now firmly leading market growth. The situation in Southern Europe is less clear since the data are incomplete. Numbers of Fair Trade shops do not necessarily coincide with the relative or absolute importance of sales. Germany with some 800 such shops has only double the turnover of England with no more than a 100 shops. At the same time, in

Germany the sale of labelled products is three times that of the dedicated shops. In Spain, where Fair Trade grew through handicraft products sold in networks of shops, food sales had by 2003 assumed a leading role and towards the end of 2005 the Spanish labelling organization was recognized, although no data are as yet available on FLO sales. For Italy no information was provided on Worldshop sales, but Ctm altromercato, Italy's leading importer, has had spectacular growth over the last 5 years (turnover increasing from €9.3 million to €34.3 million) and has a strong base in networks of dedicated shops. Italy is second only to Germany in the number of dedicated shops—some 500—and Ctm altromercato is their principal supplier.

Many factors explain the heterogeneity of the movement in Europe. Among these are the specific colonial history of each country, the profile of “charitable” organizations, the length of time involved in Fair Trade, the patterns of consumption and the importance of large-scale retail, the nature of State policy to Fair Trade and the relative importance of different ideological positions within the movement. Such heterogeneity is also reflected in North South relations. In this sense, Latin Europe—Spain, Italy, France—appears to be ideologically closer to the movement in the South and especially Latin America which is more aligned to the solidarity economy movement and critical of FLO strategy. In Spain, for instance, IDEAS, the third largest trader with a network of Worldshops, is firmly based in the solidarity economy movement. In Italy, the Ctm altromercato has dissociated itself from the national labelling organization, Transfair Italy, and has openly opposed the concessions of Fair Trade licenses to leading food firms such as Nestlé. The French Artisans du Monde, with its network of 160 shops run by 5,000 volunteers is also at the solidarity economy end of the movement. In spite of this persistent heterogeneity, the dominant tendency of the European Fair Trade Movement over the last 15 years has been characterized by institutional convergence, the shift to mainstream marketing and the growing importance of political campaigns for trade reform.

Profile of Fair Trade in the US

The origins of Fair Trade in the US go back to the 1940s with the Mennonite initiative to buy handicraft products from poor communities in the South. ATO-style Fair Trade was later promoted by IFAT and Fair Trade Federation members—importers, wholesalers, retailers and NGOs. It was however with the creation of Transfair in 1998, the only US labelling organization, that Fair Trade sales exploded as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2 Total gross sales of Fair Trade in North America (US, Canada, Mexico) in US\$ millions

Country/entity	2001	2002	2003	2004	Change 2002–2003 (%)
FTF and IFAT	48.20	56.20	65.73	75.81	17
Transfair USA (coffee)	85.60	131.00	208.00	369.00	59
Transfair Canada	5.40	9.10	17.46	27.14	92
Comercio Justo	No info	No info	0.22	0.30	–
Total	139.20	196.30	291.41	472.25	48

Transfair's own data for coffee point to a further sharp increase with retail sales reaching US\$499.36 million in 2005. The US coffee market was worth US\$22 billion in 2005 with 50% of this dedicated to specialty coffee. Fair Trade's market share has in the years 2000–2006 increased from 0.6% to 4.3% in the specialty sector, the fastest growing product in this sector, and from 0.2% to 2.2% for total coffee sales. The evolution of Transfair's coffee licenses has been equally impressive, with some 31 in 1999 increasing to a total of 417 in 2005. The market was initially grown by small dedicated roasters but more recently global brand names have been licensed such as Dunkin Donuts, Newman's Own supplied to more than 650 McDonald's restaurants, and Starbucks. Although the Fair Trade segment only represents a fraction of the sales of these leading actors, their participation is reshaping the Fair Trade market. Starbucks alone now accounts for over 15% of total Fair Trade coffee sales.

In the last 3 years, Transfair has moved into cocoa (34 licenses), teas (67 licenses), fresh fruit, principally banana (7 licenses), sugar (6 licenses) and rice (3 licenses). The US market is now the fastest growing Fair Trade market and with Wal Mart the latest of the large players to show interest in Fair Trade and organics, it is likely that this high growth rate, which has averaged over 40% in the last 4 years, will continue. As in the case of Europe, it is expected that non-food products, particularly clothing (following on the campaign No Sweat against Nike, Gap and other firms' outsourcing based on sweatshops), but also accessories and jewellery, will similarly experience strong growth in the coming period.

Although the growth of traditional alternative sales outlets in the US is sluggish when compared to the increase of labelled products on mainstream shelves, there has been a vigorous student movement in support of Fair Trade which has led to the adoption of Fair Trade coffee sales on 400 campuses throughout the country. Fair Trade is also benefiting from the positive externalities of adjacent social movements. The "No Sweat" campaign mentioned above is a major factor in the renewed focus on non-food Fair Trade products. The struggles against NAFTA and the extension of free trade agreements to Latin America have also provided a focus for the growth of Fair Trade activism. Such synergies are further promoted by the multipurpose activism of human rights organizations such as Global Exchange which campaign simultaneously on all of these issues and also have their own Fair Trade retail outlets. Fair Trade Coalitions have sprung up in various regions, often paralleling the orientation to local governments noted in the European context. The integration of Mexico into NAFTA and its position as the first developing country to have its national labelling organization recognized by FLO is a further factor favouring the strengthening of the Fair Trade movement in the US. Radicalization on the issue of trade was particularly in evidence during the Seattle protests which were a landmark in the anti-WTO movement.¹¹

¹¹ For an excellent overview of the different actors and their platforms, see Cáceres Benavides (2006).

What Sort of Social Movement?

Fair Trade (together with movements around issues such as organics, sustainability, animal rights, regional/cultural values or biodiversity), can be understood as a new economic social movement to the extent that it is based on new forms of collective action—NGOs and networks—rather than trade unions¹² and political parties, and directs its demands primarily to the market rather than to the State. In addition, it is intrinsically a global movement harnessing development goals to new market relations. On the other hand, it differs from the above movements to the extent that it focuses primarily on traditional issues of redistributive justice rather than a new generation of rights and duties. It also works to reinforce traditional organizations—cooperatives and trade unions—as instruments of collective action. As a reflection of this ambiguity, the market option while dominant is permanently contested both in the promotion of alternative trading circuits by the solidarity economy wing of the movement, and in the priority which key Fair Trade organizations (Oxfam in England, Cooperation Sud in France¹³ and Global Exchange in the US) give to campaigning and negotiations around national, regional and global trade policy.¹⁴

The market option itself is also permeated with tensions. Given the focus on the redistribution of “value added” along the supply chain, its central feature involves agreement on new criteria for determining the workings of the price mechanism. The definition of a fair price based not on supply and demand but production costs and minimum living standards certainly draws on religious traditions of the just price and notions of the moral economy.¹⁵ Religious figures have played a decisive role in the development of Fair Trade in the South and were at the origin of the labelling strategy (Roozen and VanderHoff 2002). Interestingly, however, it can also call on giants of modern economic theory and policy. Keynes argued that prices should be able to provide producers “with proper nutritional and other standards in the condition in which they live...it is in the interest of all producers alike that the price of a commodity should not be depressed below this level, and consumers are not entitled to expect that it should” (Keynes 1980, cited in Oxford Policy Management 2000). The focus on redistributive justice has also benefited from the developments in moral philosophy and especially the highly influential work of Rawls arguing for the primacy of justice as a precondition for the diversified pursuit of the good (Rawls 1971).¹⁶

¹² Trade unions may have some convergent interests to the extent that they espouse the “social clause” to prevent competition from sweatshop labour. Their motivations, however, have been largely protectionist.

¹³ The French Federation of International Cooperation NGOs.

¹⁴ For an excellent comparative analysis of the labelling (FLO) and ATO wings of the movement, see Hubbard et al. (2002).

¹⁵ For the Thomist and Christian Socialist roots of the notion of a just price, see Gide (2001).

¹⁶ In a personal communication, Andreas Follesdal drew attention to critiques of Rawl’s initial lack of and subsequently inadequate discussion of issues of distributive justice in an international context (Follesdal and Pogge 2005).

Nevertheless, while the principle of fair trading prices can find authoritative backing in a variety of traditions, the market strategy imposes additional demands. Fair Trade coffee was initially bought as an act of political solidarity in spite of its taste. As a mainstream market option, however, it has become clear that Fair Trade products must incorporate two other groups of values, relating, respectively, to conditions of production and “intrinsic” quality. In the first place, social justice is no longer dissociable from demands for the sustainability and healthiness of production systems. It is increasingly required, therefore, that Fair Trade products also be both organic and environmentally friendly. This fusion of social, health and environmental criteria, which is present also in the mainstream both in the form of triple bottom line auditing and in private labels, represents in practice a return to the holistic values that underlay each of these endeavours.

The institutionalization of these values into separate movements has however created a series of barriers to their convergence (certification costs, organizational interests, competition for resources and differing objectives), even though the notion of sustainability can now be understood to comprehend these different components. FLO and International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) have carried out pilot joint certification projects and certification bodies are increasingly recognized by both movements. New consumer organizations, which include social, ethical, environmental and health criteria under a more generic umbrella, such as the European Network for Responsible Consumption (ENRC, see Commene 2005), increase the pressure for convergence between the different movements. The Bio-Équitable label launched by an association of small and medium firms in France is perhaps the most explicit response to these pressures for convergence.¹⁷

Secondly, the products themselves must have competitive “intrinsic” qualities, defined by the high quality segment of each market. Solidarity may guarantee one-off sales but repetitive purchasing on which market growth depends demands an attention to product in addition to production quality, including appearance, taste, aroma, packaging and nutritional characteristics (Lecomte 2003). The more so since Fair Trade has a heavy focus on “pleasure” products—coffee, chocolate, wines, flowers and fruits. The attractiveness of the focus on redistributive justice is that it is eminently compatible with strategies for social inclusion. To the extent, however, that other values become indispensable, whether relating to production conditions or intrinsic product quality, social inclusion becomes conditioned on the upholding of minimum standards which in principle are less accessible to the “disadvantaged producers,” the privileged producer group of the Fair Trade movement. While decisive for market creation and expansion, mainstreaming therefore exerts a substantial toll not only on the image of the movement downstream but also on the extent to which it becomes distanced from its targeted producer base (Jacquot 2003).¹⁸

¹⁷ www.bioequitable.com

¹⁸ The resistance to accepting Bio-Équitable into the French Fair Trade Platform (PFCE) highlights concerns that organic production, with its more demanding technique will lead to an exclusion of the more marginalized small farmers who are the *raison d'être* of Fair Trade (Jacquot 2003).

Redefinition of the Producer–Consumer Relationship

A further characteristic of these new market oriented social movements, to which Fair Trade belongs, is their effort to redefine the producer–consumer relationship. A common feature is their focus on the producer community rather than the product, or more precisely the social and environmental conditions of production, as constituent elements of the “qualification” of the product. To a large extent they can be understood as new style consumer movements, mirroring the “buyer” rather than “supplier” driven production chains which are seen to typify current global production networks (Gereffi 1994). Consumer groups have been participants in National Labelling Initiatives, and in the form of responsible, ethical and organic consumption, they are an essential component of the Fair Trade movement. At an analytical level the distance between producer and consumer is a social one, capable in principle of being reduced or eliminated by new contractual arrangements, transparency and independent certification and auditing systems. In practice, however, the promotion of new consumer awareness tends to lead to a preference for closing the physical distance between consumer and producer. The Fair Trade movement, therefore, has become aligned also with the promotion of local markets and consumer supported agriculture, a feature common to the organics movement. A component of the Fair Trade movement, as a result, extends the notion of Fair Trade beyond the North/South divide to reconnect producer and consumers wherever they may be for the promotion of mutually sustainable production and consumption (Jaffe et al. 2004).

The peculiar dynamism of the Fair Trade movement is to be found in its combination of three different components—alternative trading circuits based on interpersonal relations and network sustained trust; the promotion of Fair Trade products in mainstream markets through a formalized labelling and certification system; and political campaigning or advocacy for the adoption of changes both in trade rules and leading firm strategies. While these components are in principle complementary, they are often seen as competitive and even incompatible alternatives by the militants and groups situated preferentially in one or other component of the movement. In recent years, the increasing institutionalization of the movement has pressured different organizations into a more specialized position within the movement. The scale of activities, whether this involves monitoring and participating in multilateral and transnational negotiations, consolidating mainstream markets or sustaining alternative trading circuits, has led organizations increasingly to opt for one or other of these different activities. Oxfam would be perhaps the most notable case, withdrawing from its trading functions to concentrate on advocacy.

Different consumer dynamics are associated with each of these components. In the case of the alternative circuits, the consumer is more likely to be also an activist or related to the social networks within which ATO's operate. The success of mainstream certified products, however, depends on the existence of the “responsible,” “ethical,” or “political” consumer whose presence is made felt through new patterns of “individualized collective action” (Micheletti 2003). Political campaigns for the implementation of Fair Trade procurement practices, on the other

hand, explore the potential provided by the institutional consumer whose level of awareness is secondary to the efficacy of the campaigning organization.

The growing specialization within the movement allows greater autonomy for the different components of the movement and at the same time sharpens dissensions over its “the true spirit.” To the extent that mainstreaming deepens, those mobilized around alternative trading circuits see the principles of the movement as being placed in jeopardy. Italy’s largest alternative trading association, Ctm *altromercato*, has issued an open letter (Ctm *altromercato* 2005) calling for a campaign against the decision of the UK Labelling Initiative to license Nestlé, which has been echoed also by leading actors in the US, such as Global Exchange. Tensions also occur at the advocacy level where Oxfam’s anti-subsidy campaign is seen by others in the movement—Coordination Sud, the French Federation of NGOs—as fundamentally a defence of free trade, similar to that adopted by the G20.

At the same time, however, that tensions and conflicts have increased, the institutionalization of the movement has led to convergences on the need for professionalism and greater responsiveness to market signals, confirming the relative importance of the “political” consumer vis-à-vis the activist even in ATO circuits. This, together with the extension of mainstreaming now to non-food products, has led to greater collaboration between the alternative (IFAT) and labelling (FLO) wings of the movement. These two umbrella organizations, nevertheless, maintain very different approaches. In 2004 at the World Social Forum in Mumbai, IFAT launched its trade mark responding to the pressures of adjustment to market demands but involving a format—certification, largely participatory, of producer organizations rather than individual products—close to existing grassroots practices.¹⁹

The specialization of the movement, therefore, may provoke more open conflict but it simultaneously creates space for this conflict to be negotiated and the tensions between the alternative and the labelling wings do not require a solution since both can dedicate themselves to autonomous activities. In important ways the opposed wings of the movement are reinforced by the activities of the other. The campaigns conducted by the ATOs—consumer awareness, Fair Trade festivals, days/weeks—are a powerful factor in promoting the market and directly benefit mainstreaming. Without the World Shops’ networks of volunteer militants, Fair Trade mainstreaming could rapidly be overtaken by own-label strategies of retail and dominant food firms. Similarly the political campaign and advocacy segment reinforces the public legitimacy of the Fair Trade movement endorsing its definitions and inhibiting its dilution into a mere marketing strategy. For its part, the entry of large-scale retail into Fair Trade exponentially expands awareness of Fair Trade products and principles and in doing so increases the public for alternative trading and campaigns. Analysis of the growth of the cotton products segment of Fair Trade would show how mainstreaming, political campaigning and the promotion of alternative trading and retail circuits have created a virtuous dynamic benefiting all wings of the movement.

¹⁹ www.ifat.org

Fair Trade, therefore, is a hybrid social movement based on traditional values of redistributive justice but sharing with modern social movements an organizational base in NGOs and networks and a priority focus on the market for the realization of the movement's objectives. To the extent that it has adopted a market focus it has been forced to take on board a range of production and product qualities which define the preferences of its potential consumer base and bring it closer to other movements that focus on health, environmental, nutritional and aesthetic values. At the same time, the parallel institutionalization of these movements increases the costs of what is nevertheless an already consummated convergence. The social movement's different components represent complementary functions but also respond to alternative strategic options, creating a mix of cooperation and conflict which while often seeming to threaten the future of the movement also provides professional and ideological space for autonomous growth and often with reciprocal beneficial externalities. Globalization and the emergence of independent southern actors, however, have currently tipped the pendulum in the direction of tensions and conflict and it is to these who we now turn.

The Emergence of a Southern Agenda and the Globalization of the Fair Trade Movement

Fair Trade has its roots in philanthropy and political solidarity. In both cases the South entered into the equation in the role of beneficiary. All the major organizations of the movement represent the institutionalization of Northern actors, whether traders (EFTA), dedicated shops (NEWS), labelling organizations (FLO) or Fair Trade organizations (IFAT). Although the latter began as a Northern organization, it was the first to provide a platform for Southern producer groups and by the end of the 1990s these groups, primarily from Asia and Africa, had assumed a majority position, with a primary focus on handicrafts.

The labelling strategy, on the other hand, emerged as a joint initiative of Northern NGOs working with Latin American producer groups in the coffee commodity sector. While originally conceived as a strategy enabling greater market access for producers, the demands of mainstreaming imposed a buyer driven logic to which producer groups had to adjust. Formal criteria deliberated in the Northern national labelling bodies were introduced covering organizational forms, labour conditions and production practices. Reaction to these criteria encouraged the development of a collective identity in the South transforming the beneficiaries of alternative fair trading into the producer component of a rules-based certified trading system. The Latin American Coordinating Committee (CLAC) of Fair Trade producer organizations was created to negotiate participation and specific demands (especially opposition to the registration of plantations that, in addition to being the symbol of unfair trade, are seen as direct competitors to family farm supplies) within the Northern labelling organizations now unified in the form of FLO. Similar organizations developed in Africa to defend local adaptations of FLO rules, in this case to plantation norms. In Asia, the key component of a Southern agenda was identified as the need to extend Fair Trade to small and medium enterprises. In its

turn, as we saw above, IFAT developed regional forums in Asia, Africa and Latin America which also increased the autonomous profile of Southern Fair Trade movements (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas forthcoming).

The emergence of a Southern agenda can be associated principally with the increasing recognition that, even in the context of expanding markets, exports provide at best only a partial solution to income generation for peasant communities. According to FLO up to 5 million people indirectly benefit from access to certified Fair Trade markets. In all some 500 producer groups representing more than a million small farmers in 49 countries are registered with FLO.²⁰ While this is an enormous organizational achievement, we are talking about an average of some 10 producer groups per country. It is estimated that there are some 400 million very small (under 2 ha) farms worldwide and a further 100 million family farms (Nagayets 2005). North–South Fair Trade, therefore, while a key component, could of itself never be a sufficient strategy for rural development. In addition, it has been calculated that Fair Trade sales average only 20% of total sales by FLO registered producer groups. While individual and collective benefits from Fair Trade prices have been widely documented, many analysts have concluded that the enduring benefits are to be found rather in the capacity building component of Fair Trade, the “embedded business services” in the language of international cooperation (Murray et al. 2003; Redfern and Snedker 2002).

In this light, an indicator of Fair Trade’s success would be the degree to which registered producer groups enhanced their marketing capacity either with regard to conventional exports or insertion into the domestic market. The turn to the domestic market by Southern Fair Trade activists can be seen therefore to be an extension of North South Fair Trade itself. Strategies based on adaptation to Northern political consumers are increasingly combined with an orientation to Southern consumers. It is interesting to note now the presence of consumer organizations in Southern Fair Trade movements (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas forthcoming). In addition it corresponds to two further tendencies that characterize the movement in the South.

The first of these tendencies is a generalized hostility to the “export oriented modernization model,” seen as undermining food sovereignty in favour of luxury demand in the North. As a result, the solidarity economy orientation of many Southern Fair Trade activists has led to a focus on the promotion of alternative domestic marketing networks. This approach is shared by ATO organizations in the North which likewise combine North South Fair Trade with the support for local, direct sales markets in the North.

A second tendency however corresponds more directly to the transformation of the North South axis in the wake of globalization. In this case, we are dealing with the creation of the conditions for mainstreaming within the domestic markets of the South, as important middle classes become consolidated. The potential of this market is beginning to attract the attention of retail and business oriented fair trading groups in developing countries. Mexico was the first Southern country to create a national Fair Trade system and similar tendencies are now at work in other countries—Brazil, South Africa and India. In addition to tensions articulated by the

²⁰ www.fairtrade.net

FLO producer groups in these countries, these national movements must also negotiate a wide range of interests from the solidarity economy to ethical trade. They are also influenced by the nature of the social movements which have emerged around the agrarian question, patterns of international cooperation, the profile of NGOs and the relations established between these diverse forces and the State in each country. The move to national Fair Trade systems in the South has been accompanied by the consolidation of South–South networks and the aspiration to substitute North–South by South–South Fair Trade. If the Brazilian case is indicative of future trends we can expect to see the reproduction of the different components of the Northern movement within the South. Mainstreaming will be accelerated by the transnationalization of large-scale retail. It is likely however, that the solidarity economy component will assume greater importance in the South, particularly in those countries where the State is active in the elaboration of policies related to food security.

Where Is Fair Trade Going?

Analyzing Fair Trade as a new social movement with the market as a key terrain for the realization of its objectives allows us to eschew unilateral interpretations of the current acceleration of mainstreaming. Rather than this latter representing a simple cooption of the movement, we have seen that mainstreaming has been accompanied both by a professionalization and revitalization of alternative trading networks and a sharp increase in political campaigning and promotional activities largely dependent on voluntary activism. The élan of the social movement is also evident in the increased resort to networking with convergent movements—organic, ecological, abuse of corporate power and especially workers' rights.

These new social movements are primarily market oriented but a variety of factors has led policy oriented campaigning to accompany the advance of mainstreaming. This is much more the case in Europe than in the US where, although public procurement campaigns for instance are in evidence, political campaigning is largely focused on the use of Fair Trade to counter the Free Trade Agreements. In Europe, where the principal Fair Trade organizations are located, policy oriented activities are motivated by a variety of factors. Important components of the movement (such as Oxfam, GB) have in the recent period focused their activity on the campaign for the adoption of alternative trade policies, whether national, regional or global. “Make Poverty History” and the “Trade Justice Movement” include specific demands for the reformulation of trade policy—debt relief, relaxation of quotas and tariff escalation (Oxfam 2002).²¹

Campaigns in support of public policies favouring the public endorsement and regulation of Fair Trade are also very much in evidence. In principle this may seem

²¹ Oxfam also makes demands on the leading corporations as in the demand that Nestlé dedicate a percentage of its sales to Fair Trade. When Nestlé subsequently adopted this policy (albeit, at least initially, on a more modest scale than demanded) and was duly licensed by the British Fair Trade Labelling Organization, strong opposition emerged among proponents of the alternative trading networks. See Ctm altromercato's Open Letter on this issue (2005).

curious since, with its roots in charity and/or political solidarity, the Fair Trade Movement emerged as a private initiative and has developed a sophisticated organizational and institutional structure. In addition, as a private certification movement it converges with the current dominant pattern towards the private regulation of new quality food markets (Henson 2006). Nevertheless, a number of factors have led the campaign for public policy support to assume increasing centrality. On a very operational level, the increasing complexity of its organizational structure makes the search for financial support a pressing concern.²² Second, the identification of Fair Trade as a development strategy makes it a natural policy option for international cooperation programmes. The British Government, through its Department for International Development (DFID), has been a key supporter of Fair Trade, not only in the provision of enabling services, but also in the promotion of innovative business structures, evidenced in its role in the promotion of the Day Chocolate Company, where the producer cooperative participates as shareholder (DFID 2001).²³

The Fair Trade movement has been very successful in winning support within the European Union, via both the European Commission and the European Parliament. The European Commission has positioned itself favourably with regard to Fair Trade since 1998 and has provided support on two fronts—the promotion of consumer awareness and the implementation of public procurement policies. The former is very much in line with the Commission's efforts to strengthen consumer organizations as a counterweight to the power of corporations in deregulated markets. Public procurement, on the other hand, may well fall foul of the WTO.

In France public support has gone a step further initiating measures for the regulation of the Fair Trade market. After a long period of discussions with Fair Trade movement representatives, the French norms body, AFNOR, has now reached agreement on a definition of Fair Trade which it is hoped will provide the framework for future regulation. The pressure for public regulation of Fair Trade has in this case come from the ATOs who hope that in this way they will prevent the shift to mainstreaming from reducing Fair Trade to a niche market segmentation strategy. This would become the case, it is argued, if food companies and retail resort to their own Fair Trade labels, rather than licensing the movement's label. Anchoring Fair Trade within broader development principles through the mechanism of public regulation is considered by these organizations to be the most effective way to preserve the movement characteristics of Fair Trade. The European Parliament's approval of a resolution in support for Fair Trade in July 2006 and its request that the European Commission produce a specific recommendation on Fair Trade, may well mean that a European-wide regulation of Fair Trade is adopted

²² Funds for the FLO certification system were included in FINE's request for support to the G8 Summit in Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005, provoking sharp opposition from alternative traders such as Ctm altromercato.

²³ The complexity of public–private involvement represents a challenge also for governments as can be seen in the case of DFID which wanted to be formally part of the Ethical Trade Initiative (discussed earlier) but found that the WTO rules opposed Governments' being members of bodies which demanded the adoption of specific social standards (see Redfern and Snedker 2002).

along the lines of the AFNOR reference text which is specifically cited in the resolution.²⁴

Countering market mainstreaming, therefore, looks likely to take the form of public mainstreaming of the Fair Trade movement. Within the movement itself, the debate on certification is a key issue. IFAT—which had long worked in accordance with the alternative integrated trading model based on network generated trust—adopted a certification system at the Mumbai World Social Forum in 2004. While also being a response to the need for more formal criteria of quality recognition, this system, differently from FLO, certifies producer organizations rather than individual products. Nestlé, Starbucks and other corporations would therefore not be eligible since only a tiny fraction of their total sales obey Fair Trade principles.

International Fair Trade Association also adopts a certification system which converges with the participatory system being supported by grassroots organizations in some developing countries, a mixture of individual, mutual and external monitoring.²⁵ Participatory schemes have been adopted by movements which incorporate Fair Trade within a broader commitment to agro-ecology, and who are also active in pressuring for the adoption of such systems within the international organics movement—Ifoam. In addition to questions of transparency and alternative viewpoints on collective learning and democracy, the participatory systems are also seen to be more amenable to the promotion of convergences between different movements—social, organic and ecological—without incurring additional costs. The US Organic Consumers Association is an excellent example of this convergence being dedicated simultaneously to food safety, organics, Fair Trade and sustainability. It is leading the movement for joint certification systems and it may be via this avenue that public regulation on Fair Trade emerges also in the US.

Concluding Remarks

Fair Trade is currently “on a roll” with its legitimacy high both in the market place and the State. Although the latter element is not found in the US, public sector involvement should not be seen as a European peculiarity since it also extends to the UN system, particularly UNCTAD. Many in the movement and much academic analysis have focused on the dangers of mainstreaming and it is clearly a risk for the independent image of the movement. Some, however, would see mainstreaming as the ultimate goal of Fair Trade with its standards being adopted as the bottom line for all trade (Tallontire and Vorley 2005). As I have mentioned earlier, at one end of the spectrum fair and ethical trade clearly tend to merge (see also Smith and Barrientos 2005). On the other hand, we have seen that political mainstreaming is

²⁴ <http://www.artisansdumonde.org/commerce-equitable/Accord-AFNOR-AC-X50-340.htm>, accessed 04/02/2007.

²⁵ These systems have now reached a considerable degree of formal sophistication, as in the case of Brazil’s Ecovida model. See Lernoud and Fonseca (2004).

also advancing at speed and in this case is being promoted by the more alternative wing of the movement, particularly in the efforts to establish a public regulatory system. Such an approach is also evident in developing countries as in the case of Brazil (Wilkinson and Mascarenhas forthcoming).

I have suggested that Fair Trade should be viewed in a holistic manner as a new social movement that combines very different dynamics, which are often in conflict but are equally often mutually reinforcing. In this sense mainstreaming has been accompanied by an intensification of campaigning activities and the expansion of the movement into new areas. Many other factors are currently working in a similar direction, among which the most important are probably the convergence between Fair Trade and organics, public procurement programmes, the promotion of Fair Trade towns, cities and even countries,²⁶ and the development of Internet marketing networks. Globalization is undermining the traditional North–South polarization and the movements for National Fair Trade systems in developing countries are evidence of this. We can expect therefore a greater convergence between Fair Trade and movements supporting a food system based on more direct producer consumer relations and local markets.

Mainstreaming as we have seen is premised on the increasing politicization of everyday consumer practices. The “political consumer” extends way beyond the activist base of the movement and provides the bridge for a broader questioning of conventional trade. In the same way that the different wings of the organized movement are mutually reinforcing, the growth of the Fair Trade political consumer base is strengthened by the campaigning of the “activist-consumer” and by the political initiatives promoting institutionalized consumer markets.

Mainstreaming does not represent a mortal threat to Fair Trade as a movement but should be understood as one of its strategic components. Nevertheless, the popularity of Fair Trade will certainly attract both opportunists and critics. Already the movement is being attacked for reproducing exactly the evils against which Fair Trade first positioned itself (Jacquiau 2006; Oppenheim 2005). Transparency, it is argued, occurs only at the producer end of the chain while the profits are still concentrated downstream where neither transparency nor price controls are in operation. In addition, the traditional structure of the production chain is largely maintained with the South still reduced to raw material production and the “value added” activities remaining the privilege of the North. Tariff escalation and the persistence of tariff barriers, which make upgrading, i.e., advancing from raw material production to processing, extremely problematic, are the object of political campaigning and innovative alternatives such as equity participation are also being tried out.²⁷ As the big corporations buy into Fair Trade, transparency and the relative participation of the different actors in the production network will become crucial issues.

²⁶ The Welsh and Scottish Assemblies in Great Britain have passed resolutions in this sense.

²⁷ On the other hand, globalization has been accompanied by outsourcing and the disintegration of global production chains, allowing for the relocation of processing activities in developing countries. In this sense, Fair Trade suffers to the extent that it is still limited to a few commodities where either trade or technical barriers make upgrading difficult.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank the Edelstein Center for Social Research, Rio de Janeiro, the Center for Fair and Alternative Trade Studies, Colorado State University, and colleagues and students working in the research unit “Markets, Networks and Values” of the Brazilian National Research Council (CNPq), which I have the privilege of coordinating, for providing ideal intellectual and material conditions for the development of the reflections contained in this text. Special thanks go to the comments of the editors and reviewers which have led to substantial improvements in the final version of this article.

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