

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

A SIP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION:  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAIR TRADE COFFEE

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BY

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Coffee is more than just a drink. It is about politics, survival,  
the Earth and the lives of indigenous peoples.

Rigoberta Menchu

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## ABSTRACT

In the past decade, fair trade as a social movement has grown rapidly in the coffee sector. McCarthy and Zald's resource mobilization theory provides a framework for analyzing three pillars in the fair trade movement: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), certifiers, and corporate interests. NGOs galvanized the movement by educating consumers, mobilizing resources, and campaigning to change the rules of conventional trade. Certifiers have used public relations and marketing tactics to re-embed coffee in the context of relationships between coffee farmers and consumers. Building upon social movement theory, this research extends the literature on fair trade by examining strategic communications used online and in coffee packaging. By examining corporate involvement in the movement, this research also seeks to provide a foundation for understanding fair trade and offer insights into the emerging challenges faced by the social movement.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, significant efforts have been made to connect consumers with the implications of the coffee they buy. New coffee certifications, such as organic, fair trade, Rainforest Alliance, Utz Kapeh and shade-grown, have emerged to give coffee social and environmental credentials. Fair Trade has grown rapidly in the coffee sector because the movement has engaged a network of grassroots nongovernmental organizations, involved business interests including coffee retailers and roasters, and utilized strategic communications to achieve key tasks. Although fair trade constitutes less than one percent of the global coffee market, its implications are far-reaching and especially relevant to scholars of social movements and the coffee value chain.

The value chain, based on the concept of “commodity chains” introduced by Gereffi and applied to coffee by scholars like John Talbot, provides a useful framework in analyzing the structure of the coffee industry.<sup>1</sup> Coffee begins in Southern producer countries such as Brazil, Vietnam, Colombia and Costa Rica where it is grown and processed often by small farmers. Scholars estimate that 20 to 25 million families in 80 different countries produce and process coffee beans.<sup>2</sup> Farmers sell coffee to importers or to local middlemen. During the 1990s, the volatility of coffee prices left millions of

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement: The Political Economy of the Coffee Commodity Chain* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Bacon, “Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Can Fair Trade, Organic, and Specialty Coffees Reduce Small-Scale Farmer Vulnerability in Northern Nicaragua?,” *World Development* 33, no. 3 (March 2005): 497-511.

coffee farmers in a precarious situation, forced to sell their coffee beans at less than the cost of production. The sudden price collapses were the outcome of decisions made by traders on the coffee futures market. Concurrently, consumers in the global North encountered a “coffee renaissance” with the expansion of gourmet roasters and retailers and the proliferation of cafés such as Starbucks.<sup>3</sup> The gap between Northern coffee-drinkers and Southern coffee producers illustrates the global inequities fostered by “free trade” and evident in lengthening commodity chains.

Fair trade was created primarily as an alternative network to the traditional coffee commodity chain.<sup>4</sup> The certification system specifically addresses the beginning and end of the coffee commodity chain and seeks to re-embed coffee in the context of the relationship between producers and consumers. By becoming fair trade certified, cooperatives can sell coffee at an above-market price set by Fairtrade Labelling Organization International (FLO) and receive a ten-cent per pound premium for social initiatives. Fair trade cooperatives can also request a 60 percent credit from buyers to pay for inputs, empowering the cooperatives to be less dependent on local middlemen. These incentives are powerful. The primary challenge of fair trade coffee is that current export capacity exceeds fair trade sales by 700 percent.<sup>5</sup> Only one-fifth of coffee produced by fair trade cooperatives is even sold as fair trade.

Partnerships with corporate roasters and retailers provide a solution to the gap between supply and demand. However, engaging powerful actors in the coffee

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<sup>3</sup> Stefano Ponte, “The Latte Revolution? Regulation, Markets and Consumption in the Global Coffee Chain,” *World Development* 30, no. 7 (July 2002): 1099-1122.

<sup>4</sup> Bacon, “Confronting the Coffee Crisis”; Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> David Goodman, “The International Coffee Crisis: A Review of the Issues,” in *Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Fair Trade, Sustainable Livelihoods and Ecosystems in Mexico and Central America*, ed. Christopher M. Bacon et al. (The MIT Press, 2008), 7.



commodity chain has proven controversial. As corporations such as Dunkin' Donuts, Starbucks, Sam's Club, and McDonalds have joined the fair trade bandwagon, some advocates of fair trade worry that the movement has lost its political meaning and become a marketing ploy.

The emergence of mainstreaming reflects complexities within the development of the fair trade movement. McCarthy and Zald's resource mobilization theory provides a framework for analyzing three pillars in the fair trade movement: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), certifiers, and corporate interests. NGOs galvanized the movement by educating consumers, mobilizing resources, and campaigning to change the rules of conventional trade. Certifiers have used public relations and marketing tactics to re-embed coffee in the context of relationships between coffee farmers and consumers. By examining corporate involvement in the movement, this research also seeks to provide a foundation for understanding fair trade and offer insights into the emerging challenges faced by the social movement.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *The Sociology of Social Movements and Resource Mobilization*

Social movements make change happen. In the 1960s, emerging social movements redefined the way sociologists studied social movements. The “resource mobilization approach” was introduced to study social movements.<sup>6</sup> The approach replaced previous explanations by Weber and Michels, which claimed that once a social movement gained an economic and social base, it replaced charismatic leaders, developed a bureaucratic structure, accommodated to society, and altered its goals.<sup>7</sup> Resource mobilization theory provided an alternative in which political opportunities and an organizational base of support are major factors in the development of movements.<sup>8</sup> The theory broadened the definition of social movements, providing a more optimistic trajectory for the development of social movement organizations. Although there are myriad definitions for a “social movement,” most reference a preference within a

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<sup>6</sup> John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 82, no. 6 (May 1977): 1212-1241; Anthony Oberschall, *Social Conflict And Social Movements* (Prentice Publishing, 1973); Charles Tilly, “Does Modernization Breed Revolution?,” *Comparative Politics* 5, no. 3 (April 1973): 425-447; Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, “Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change,” *Social Forces* 44, no. 3 (March 1966): 327-341.

<sup>7</sup> Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 4th ed. (Charles Scribners Sons, 1952); Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (Free Press, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> Oberschall, *Social Conflict And Social Movements*; McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements”; Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields,” *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 2 (April 1983): 147-160; J. Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9 (1983): 527-553; Verta Taylor, “Social Movement Continuity: The Women's Movement in Abeyance,” *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 5 (October 1989): 761-775.

population for changing some elements of the social structure or reward distribution of society. The most comprehensive and most frequently cited definition, by McCarthy and Zald, describes a social movement organization as “a complex or formal organization, which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement these goals.”<sup>9</sup> Within this conception, scholars emphasize the way social movement organizations organize themselves internally and interact with outside actors. Stakeholders within a social movement organization pursue set goals and are bound together by a tangled web of incentives.<sup>10</sup> Scholars analyzed the rise and decline of various movements by examining their goals, incentives, structures and mobilization of resources.

### *Fair Trade as a Social Movement*

Recent scholars describe fair trade as a social movement.<sup>11</sup> Fair trade 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.”<sup>12</sup> Scholars highlight several different reasons for the emergence of fair trade and other types of

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<sup>9</sup> McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements,” 1218.

<sup>10</sup> Zald and Ash, “Social Movement Organizations”; McCarthy and Zald, “Resource Mobilization and Social Movements”; Daniel M. Cress, “Nonprofit Incorporation among Movements of the Poor: Pathways and Consequences for Homeless Social Movement Organizations,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 343-360.

<sup>11</sup> Sasha Courville and Nicola Piper, “Harnessing Hope through NGO Activism,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 592 (March 2004): 39-61; Elisabeth Paul, “Evaluating Fair Trade as a Development Project: Methodological Considerations,” *Development in Practice* 15, no. 2 (April 2005): 134-150; Gary Gereffi, “The Global Economy: Organization, Governance, and Development,” in *The Handbook of Economic Sociology*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Richard Swedberg, 2nd ed. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 160-180; Tim Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization: The Rise of Transnational Private Regulation of Labor and Environmental Conditions,” *American Journal of Sociology* 113, no. 2 (2007): 297-351; John Wilkinson, “Fair Trade: Dynamic and Dilemmas of a Market Oriented Global Social Movement,” *Journal of Consumer Policy* 30, no. 3 (September 2007): 219.

<sup>12</sup> Wilkinson, “Fair Trade,” 232.

certification. One view is that certification is a form of “transnational private regulation” that emerged to fill a vacuum left by governments amid globalization.<sup>13</sup> Controversies over sweatshops, child labor, unfair wages and tropical deforestation prompted the formation of dozens of nongovernmental certification associations, including fair trade, that engage in transnational private regulation.<sup>14</sup> Others see certification as the result of decisions by market actors seeking to preserve their credibility when barraged by activist campaigns.<sup>15</sup> However, the market actor approach overly emphasizes the role of corporations in the development of these nongovernmental certification associations. A third view is that certification is an outcome of settlements that arise out of conflicts between states, NGOs, and non-market actors.<sup>16</sup> Although Bartley places these three conceptions in conflict with each other, an analysis of fair trade certification that incorporates all three explanations would provide a more complete picture of the emergence of the fair trade movement.

### *Traditional Studies and the Failure to Combine Commodity Chain Analysis with Social Movement Analysis to Study Fair Trade*

Although fair trade has been defined as a social movement, most scholarship on the subject examines fair trade outside the context of social movements. Many scholars

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<sup>13</sup> Gary Gereffi, Ronie Garcia-Johnson, and Erika Sasser, “The NGO-Industrial Complex,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 125 (July 2001): 56; Gereffi, “The Global Economy: Organization, Governance, and Development”; Courville and Piper, “Harnessing Hope through NGO Activism.”

<sup>14</sup> Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization”; Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser, “The NGO-Industrial Complex.”

<sup>15</sup> Debora Spar and David B. Yoffie, “A Race to the Bottom or Governance from the Top?,” in *Coping with Globalisation*, ed. Aseem Prakash, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2000), 31-51; Matthew Potoski and Aseem Prakash, “Green Clubs and Voluntary Governance: ISO 14001 and Firms’ Regulatory Compliance,” *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 2 (2005): 235-248.

<sup>16</sup> Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization.”

have analyzed fair trade coffee using the framework of global commodity chains.<sup>17</sup> Gereffi developed the concept of global commodity chains within the framework of world-systems analysis, which sees the entire world as a unitary social system with one capitalist division of labor.<sup>18</sup> Global commodity chains are embedded within this world system and link production processes that are carried out across the globe. The commodity chain approach provides insight into the global organization of coffee production, processing, and distribution. Although this analysis helps explain the significance of fair trade certification within the coffee commodity chain, the approach fails to provide useful information to social movements not focused on commodities. Because commodity chains are so different from each other, lessons from the coffee chain may not apply to other commodities.<sup>19</sup> Another less prevalent approach analyzes fair trade certification as a development initiative.<sup>20</sup> While helpful, this development-oriented framework emphasizes evaluation of fair trade's successes and failures without discussing the process of mobilization.

The institutional theories in economic sociology need to be combined with research on global commodity chains, according to Gereffi.<sup>21</sup> Bartley sought to fill this void by combining the theories in his analysis of forest certification and the garment

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<sup>17</sup> Bacon, "Confronting the Coffee Crisis"; Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*; Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*; Laura T. Raynolds, "Mainstreaming Fair Trade Coffee: From Partnership to Traceability," *World Development* In Press, Corrected Proof (December 28, 2008), <http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxyau.wrlc.org/science/article/B6VC6-4V6YT3T-1/2/4f2f34ea0ba29e55a3557d3f04663ed8>; Stefano Ponte, "Behind the Coffee Crisis," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 46/47 (November 24, 2001): 4410-4417.

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System. Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, 1st ed. (Academic Press, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*.

<sup>20</sup> Paul, "Evaluating Fair Trade as a Development Project."

<sup>21</sup> Gereffi, "The Global Economy: Organization, Governance, and Development."

industry.<sup>22</sup> His analysis of these examples of transnational private regulation further demonstrates a need for examination of fair trade coffee certification using the theories of social movement development and global commodity chains. Further scholarship is needed to explore fair trade coffee and the development of the fair trade movement based on the assumptions that fair trade is a social movement and that fair trade coffee can be viewed through the lens of the coffee commodity chain.

A social movement has three key strategic tasks: mobilizing supporters, neutralizing and/or transforming publics into sympathizers, and achieving change in targets.<sup>23</sup> The three strategic tasks provide a framework for analyzing fair trade as a social movement. Fair trade mobilizes supporters through a network of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transforms publics into sympathizers using strategic communications, and achieves change in targets by working with large corporations that purchase coffee beans. These three areas (engaging NGOs, executing strategic communications and cooperating with business interests in the coffee industry) form the pillars of the fair trade movement. The fair trade movement has grown rapidly in the coffee sector because of the movement's success in achieving the three key strategic tasks through the pillars. Examining the pillars provides a foundation for understanding the fair trade movement's growth and offers insight for activists seeking to make changes in the world.

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<sup>22</sup> Bartley, "Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization."

<sup>23</sup> McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements."

### CHAPTER 3

## NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAIR TRADE

NGOs played a crucial role in the development of the fair trade movement by voicing grievances, aggregating human and material resources and providing a foundation of social support for the movement's goals. Because of their preexisting networks and structures, NGOs can be powerful allies for a social movement. According to early scholars of social movements, grievances are a crucial component of the emergence of a social movement.<sup>24</sup> However, as Turner and Killian note, there is enough discontent in societies to provide grassroots support for any movement, including fair trade.<sup>25</sup> In order to channel latent discontent in society, NGOs leverage networks of supporters by mobilizing volunteers for a particular movement. The fair trade movement united the resources, supporters and structures launched by two earlier social strains: alternative trade for development and alternative trade for solidarity.<sup>26</sup> Although the strains expressed different grievances, both used trade as a mechanism for empowering producers in the Global South. Initial grievances included the lack of opportunities for development in impoverished nations and the lack of opportunities for marketing products by producers in countries politically and economically excluded by the Global North.

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<sup>24</sup> Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*; Ralph H. Turner and Lewis M. Killian, *Collective Behavior* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957); Michels, *Political Parties*.

<sup>25</sup> Turner and Killian, *Collective Behavior*.

<sup>26</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.

### *Alternative Trade For Development*

Although Fair Trade Certified™ coffee was not pioneered until the 1980s, the social movement has roots that date back to the 1940s. Church-based charities initiated the “development trade” approach in effort to create markets for products made by impoverished and displaced people.<sup>27</sup> After World War II, the Mennonite Central Committee began buying handicrafts from poor communities in the Southern U.S. to provide jobs and income. The informal efforts evolved into Ten Thousand Villages, an organization that sought to provide “vital, fair income to Third World people by marketing their handicrafts and telling their stories in North America.”<sup>28</sup> SERRV International, also a faith-based initiative, began marketing handicrafts produced by European refugees to promote social and economic progress in developing regions. The initiatives came to be known as “Alternative Trading Organizations” (ATOs) during the 1960s and 1970s. International development agencies such as Oxfam, Bread for the World and Caritas emulated this approach, finding partners in Southern nations that organized groups of producers to export their products. Development agencies launched “world shops” in cities to sell handicrafts, coffee and tea to consumers. Although the scope of the “world shops” was tiny, their rapid sales growth caught the attention of the press, increasing awareness of the goals, methods and grievances of ATOs.<sup>29</sup> Most ATOs relied on volunteer staff, enabling them to sell goods at competitive prices while still

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Michael E. Conroy, *Branded!: How the 'Certification Revolution' is Transforming Global Corporations* (New Society Publishers, 2007), 99.

<sup>29</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.



providing producers with a higher price.<sup>30</sup> ATOs fostered the emergence of activist networks that saw trade as an opportunity for promoting development in the least developed countries.

### *Alternative Trade for Solidarity*

The fair trade movement was also rooted in the “solidarity” strand of alternative trade, which was often associated with the political Left. The British ATO, Twin Trading was founded in the late 1970s to create markets for products from socialist countries. Twin Trading enabled producers to reach consumers in the Global North that they were otherwise partially or totally blocked from. Oxfam Wereldwinkels in Belgium and Stichting Ideel Import in the Netherlands emerged due to similar politically motivated grievances.<sup>31</sup> In the U.S., activists critical of President Reagan’s policies toward Central America imported coffee from Nicaragua despite an official trade embargo and sold the coffee as “Café Nica.” The entrepreneurial activists who sold “Café Nica” then formed Equal Exchange in 1986 and continued selling coffee from producer cooperatives in less developed countries. Members of these groups viewed ATOs as part of a larger critique on capitalism. The tension between proponents of the development and solidarity approaches still exists today within the fair trade movement.<sup>32</sup> Solidarity-driven ATOs provided an initial articulation of the position, feelings and desires of the incipient movement, as well as leadership and an institutional framework.

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<sup>30</sup> Conroy, *Branded!*

<sup>31</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.

<sup>32</sup> Reynolds, “Mainstreaming Fair Trade Coffee”; Peter Leigh Taylor, “In the Market But Not of It: Fair Trade Coffee and Forest Stewardship Council Certification as Market-Based Social Change,” *World Development* 33, no. 1 (January 2005): 129; Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.

In spite of different ideological underpinnings, the two strands sought to integrate social issues into economic activity. The approaches both emphasize re-embedding commodities into cultural values and social institutions, a feature that significantly impacted the nature of the fair trade movement. “By building consumer-producer solidarity, fair trade seeks to re-embed the production and marketing of exports from countries of the South in more equitable social relations.”<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on embeddedness provided a contrast with the emerging economic order dominated by neo-liberal theories and epitomized by the “Washington Consensus.” Western governments engaged in policies that sought to promote growth in the South by deregulating markets, privatizing state agencies and public services, and promoting free trade.<sup>34</sup> However, within the coffee industry, prices, production, quality, and consumption were not free but instead managed by coffee consuming and producing nations through the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), which oversaw quality standards and set quotas for coffee imports and exports. The ICA collapsed in 1989 primarily because of changing geopolitical priorities for the U.S. after the fall of the Soviet Union.<sup>35</sup> The dramatic drop in prices following the ICA collapse fueled the development of fair trade coffee by highlighting the plight of coffee farmers across the globe. In the North, public recognition of the coffee crisis in the 1990s, when coffee farmers were receiving less than the cost of inputs for their coffee crops, stimulated further support for the fair trade movement.

Galvanized by a grassroots network, nascent conceptions of embeddedness and

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<sup>33</sup> Laura T. Reynolds, “Organic and Fair Trade Movements in Global Food Networks,” in *Ethical Sourcing in the Global Food System*, ed. Stephanie Barrientos and Catherine Dolan (Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2006), 49-61.

<sup>34</sup> Goodman, “Confronting the Coffee Crisis.”

<sup>35</sup> Christopher M. Bacon et al., *Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Fair Trade, Sustainable Livelihoods and Ecosystems in Mexico and Central America* (The MIT Press, 2008), 156.

growing awareness of alternative trade as a tool for social change, the fair trade movement began to take shape in the 1980s. The creation of the first fair trade coffee label in 1988 was a defining moment for the fair trade movement.<sup>36</sup> It marked the extension of fair trade to mainstream coffee importers and retailers. Rather than working through alternative trade, the labeling approach worked through existing structures in the coffee commodity chain to benefit coffee farmers in the South. Indigenous coffee farmers in Mexico instigated the idea. UCIRI, a coffee farmers' cooperative in Oaxaca, Mexico, which was led by a Dutch priest, challenged the Dutch development agency Solidaridad to buy more coffee to make a difference in the incomes of UCIRI workers. UCIRI saw this label as an opportunity for Solidaridad to go beyond its small-scale purchase of coffee from the co-op. Solidaridad originally considered creating its own line of fair trade coffee, but then opted to create a label that would enable traditional coffee retailers and roasters to participate in the fair trade coffee system.<sup>37</sup> Solidaridad created the Max Havelaar Foundation to issue licenses for the use of the label to coffee roasters and retailers who agreed to the strict criteria of fairness in trade. The Max Havelaar label could be placed on a bag of coffee of any brand to certify that farmers received an above-market price, determined to be a "fair return." Although the label could be found on mainstream coffee, it provided an alternative to the traditional relationships between these buyers and coffee producers.<sup>38</sup> By including for-profit retailers and roasters, the fair trade movement grew rapidly and extended beyond the "world shops" into mainstream

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<sup>36</sup> Benoit Daviron and Stefano Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox: Global Markets, Commodity Trade and the Elusive Promise of Development* (Zed Books, 2006); Fairtrade Foundation, "History: Fairtrade labelling international history," *Fairtrade Foundation*, 2008, [http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/history.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/history.aspx)

<sup>37</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

grocery stores in the Netherlands and other European countries.

### *Horizontal and Vertical Institution-building within the Movement*

Although the fair trade movement emerged from two different strands, the period following the introduction of the fair trade label was marked by horizontal partnerships and the emergence of an institutional structure of certification. Social movement scholars agree that the form of a social movement organization plays a crucial role in influencing the type of action that can be pursued.<sup>39</sup> As NGOs in the fair trade movement developed alliances, they united their resources to broaden the certification initiative across Western Europe.<sup>40</sup> In the UK, Twin Trading joined three other ATOs to form Cafédirect. Five Catholic and Protestant missionary groups founded the German ATO, “Gepa,” which later became the largest fair trade company in Europe, with more than 33 million euros in annual sales.<sup>41</sup> Eleven importers and traders from nine European countries joined in 1987 to form the European Fair Trade Association. In 1989, emerging horizontal partnerships were further formalized when 40 ATOs united to form the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT). The same year, a number of handicraft initiatives in the United States rallied to form the Fair Trade Federation. In the 1990s, the Network of European World Shops (NEWS) was established. Horizontally linked, the organizations benefited from the ability to share information, strategies, and resources while promoting a

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<sup>39</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, “The Iron Cage Revisited”; Cress, “Nonprofit Incorporation among Movements of the Poor”; Wilkinson, “Fair Trade.”

<sup>40</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> Simon Wright and Diane McCrea, eds., *The Handbook of Organic and Fair Trade Food Marketing*, 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2007)

collective identity and mission.<sup>42</sup> National labeling initiatives were created to issue fair trade labels to importers and verify that fair trade standards for specific products, including coffee, are met.<sup>43</sup> The national labeling initiatives formally united their efforts in 1997 by creating Fairtrade Labelling Organization International (FLO), an umbrella certifier with headquarters in Bonn, Germany. The new global structure enhanced resource mobilization because it linked labeling initiatives in various countries and united their resources.<sup>44</sup> The four dominant fair trade organizations created FINE, using the first letter of each group's name, to coordinate their efforts in 1998. Although the movement began as a largely informal network of ATOs, the development of formal institutions such as these created a new dynamic marked by a chain of command, clearly defined roles and offices, and an increasingly organized network of resources.

Formal structures and chains of command helped create a distinction between the roles of fair trade institutions and other NGOs involved in the movement. FLO, the umbrella certifying organization assumed three key roles in the movement: setting detailed standards for what constitutes "fair trade" for each product, maintaining a producer register and monitoring producers and traders. As part of monitoring producers and traders, FLO decertifies producers or traders that fail to meet required standards.<sup>45</sup> Within FLO, the highest decision-making body is the FLO Board, a 12-member assembly of representatives from groups of producers in developing countries, representatives from

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<sup>42</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*; Wilkinson, "Fair Trade."

<sup>43</sup> Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

<sup>44</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.

<sup>45</sup> Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

national consumer countries, and two representatives of traders.<sup>46</sup> Currently, the traders represented are Green Mountain Coffee Roasters of Vermont and Oxfam Wereldwinkels of Belgium. Since its inception, the structure of FLO has evolved to respond to needs of various stakeholders, reflecting the power of these stakeholders in internal decision-making processes.

### *Roles of Nongovernmental Organizations in Fair Trade Today*

NGOs play a variety of roles within the fair trade movement. Wilkinson provides two central categories of NGO activities within fair trade: using consumer campaigns to “grow the market” and engaging in international campaigns and political advocacy to “make trade fair.”<sup>47</sup> Many fair trade groups sell fair trade products through retail avenues, including shops, catalogs, and websites.<sup>48</sup> Initially, most ATOs engaged in both activities, selling fair trade products to redefine consumer-producer relationships and engaging in political advocacy to promote the goals of the movement in international forums. However, there has been increased specialization within the movement. Oxfam, for example, withdrew from trading and focused on advocacy work.<sup>49</sup> In 2002 and 2003, Oxfam’s “Make Trade Fair” campaign capitalized on the support of Chris Martin, the lead singer of Coldplay. Martin gathered 30,000 signatures and presented over four million signatures to the head of the World Trade Organization in 2003 as part of a

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<sup>46</sup> Sasha Courville, “Organic and Social Certifications: Recent Developments from the Global Regulators,” in *Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Fair Trade, Sustainable Livelihoods and Ecosystems in Mexico and Central America*, ed. Christopher M. Bacon et al., illustrated edition. (The MIT Press, 2008), 291.

<sup>47</sup> Wilkinson, “Fair Trade.”

<sup>48</sup> Leclair, “Fighting the tide: Alternative trade organizations in the era of global free trade,” *World Development* 30 (6) (2002): 949-958.

<sup>49</sup> Wilkinson, “Fair Trade.”

petition calling for changes in the governance of international trade by reducing subsidies to agricultural industries in the North and increasing Southern producers' access to Northern markets.<sup>50</sup> Although Oxfam focuses on policy makers through its advocacy rather than consumers, the organization's efforts generate increased awareness of the fair trade movement, lend credibility to the movement, and provide visibility through campaigns oriented toward mass audiences.

Other NGOs drive fair trade's growth by engaging consumers directly and expanding the market for fair trade coffee. Rather than emphasize international political changes, these efforts emphasize the power of individual consumers. Because the fair trade commodity chain is a buyer-driven chain, NGOs conduct significant outreach to consumers.<sup>51</sup> Part of this outreach seeks to establish a distinct market presence among consumers for each ATO.<sup>52</sup> NGOs promote education among networks of consumers by explaining the fair trade label and the fair trade movement. Volunteers in NGOs drive grassroots level outreach, especially within religious organizations. Catholic Relief Services, for example, has been especially involved in the fair trade movement by providing education and discussions on social justice at local parishes. Kathryn Wolford and Lisa Bonds, two pioneers of Fair Trade coffee at Lutheran World Relief, helped engage more than 5,000 congregations in selling Fair Trade coffee, educating congregations on global trade issues, and pressuring local stores to carry Fair Trade coffee. These NGO leaders seek to address internal challenges to the movement: the participation of multinational corporations such as Nestlé and McDonald's, the need to

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<sup>50</sup> Conroy, *Branded!*

<sup>51</sup> Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*.

<sup>52</sup> Dr. Mary Ann Littrell and Dr. Marsha Ann Dickson, *Social Responsibility in the Global Market: Fair Trade of Cultural Products*, 1st ed. (Sage Publications, Inc, 1999).

help low-wage workers on large plantations, and the need for high and consistent standards for certification.<sup>53</sup> Thus, NGOs have also served as unique catalysts for change and goal reorientation within the movement. The specialization of NGOs fulfils many functions: engaging volunteers in “world shops” builds trust and a collective identity; selling fair trade coffee provides an opportunity to change the buyer-driven commodity chain; and engaging in political campaigns to provide credibility for the movement. Private foundations and NGOs also contribute to the movement by assisting producers that want to become fair trade certified cooperatives. For example, two Peruvian NGOs, “Minka” and “Integrated Centre of Peruvian Artists” provide microloans for fair trade producers. These organizations are especially effective because they can create flexible and situation-driven programs. These NGOs can establish and maintain local linkages in producer countries, another ingredient in the success of fair trade coffee.<sup>54</sup>

NGOs have reached out to new groups of stakeholders, especially college students, to create a broader base of support for fair trade. Students at universities can coordinate groups to persuade fellow students to purchase fair trade products. These groups have also convinced campus food organizations, such as Bon Appetit to purchase fair trade coffee.<sup>55</sup> Wilkinson links student activism on fair trade with student engagement in the “No Sweat” campaign and protests against NAFTA and the proliferation of free trade agreements in Latin America.<sup>56</sup> At American University, for example, students protested the introduction of a Starbucks café in favor of Pura Vida,

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<sup>53</sup> Kathryn Wolford and Lisa Bonds, “Faith in Fair Trade,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 71.

<sup>54</sup> Leclair, “Fighting the tide: Alternative trade organizations in the era of global free trade.”

<sup>55</sup> Carolyn Fisher, “Selling Coffee, or Selling Out?: Evaluating Different Ways to Analyze the Fair-Trade System,” *Culture & Agriculture* 29, no. 2 (2007): 78-88.

<sup>56</sup> Wilkinson, “Fair Trade.”



which sells only fair trade coffee. Students created a coalition to support Pura Vida Coffee, organizing rallies, creating signs and giving speeches in support of fair trade coffee.<sup>57</sup> Because of the campaign, Pura Vida secured a location in the student center and Starbucks was kept out. Student activism on behalf of fair trade has led to the introduction of fair trade coffee on 400 college campuses. Because it reflects a form of consumer activism, fair trade as a movement has been very accessible to passive stakeholders as well.<sup>58</sup> The combination of activist participants such as college students and more passive supporters provides a depth and range of human resources for the movement, providing varying degrees of participation in the push for fair trade coffee.

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Barbara, "Monday Morning," *Washington Post*, April 18, 2005, sec. E02, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A61616-2005Apr17.html>.

<sup>58</sup> Fisher, "Selling Coffee, or Selling Out?."

## CHAPTER 4

### STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TO TRANSFORM PUBLICS INTO SYMPATHIZERS

One of the key strategic tasks for a social movement is neutralizing and/or transforming mass and elite publics into sympathizers.<sup>59</sup> To reach these publics, the fair trade movement relies on strategic communications vehicles that increase public awareness of fair trade goods and the movement. Rather than seeing society as a context which to exist in, the fair trade movement has looked to specific infrastructure which it can utilize, including the media. Strategies used to promote Fair Trade Certified™ coffee include labeling, marketing and advertising, public relations, and use of social media. Communications activities are central to the Fair Trade model because they foster transparency by providing information about labor and environmental conditions of producers.<sup>60</sup> For the movement, this is crucial because it re-embeds coffee in the relationships between coffee consumers and coffee farmers. As the meaning of coffee is recognized, individuals within consumer societies are able to question the practices of the international coffee market and consider the impact of their decisions on coffee producing communities. The messages can spur behavior changes and engage new consumers and businesses in the movement.

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<sup>59</sup> McCarthy and Zald, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements."

<sup>60</sup> Kimberly Elliot, "'Fair Trade:' Market or Movement?," in *Bridging Multiple Divides* (presented at the ISA's 49th Annual Convention, Hilton, San Francisco: USA Online, 2008), [http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p\\_mla\\_apa\\_research\\_citation/2/5/3/9/1/p253916\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p_mla_apa_research_citation/2/5/3/9/1/p253916_index.html).

### *Initial Use of Fair Trade Labels and Narratives to Tell the Fair Trade Story*

Since the 1980s, the official Fair Trade label or mark has been a crucial element of communication for the movement, providing consumers with an identifiable graphic form to communicate much larger messages about the practices of production and trade. It began in 1988 with the first fair trade label. The “Max Havelaar” label gave recognized brand names a tool to communicate the shifted terms of trade with coffee consumers, but also told a deeper story of opposition to exploitation.<sup>61</sup> The name “Max Havelaar” enabled Solidaridad to communicate a larger narrative on the purpose of the label and the movement itself because it referenced the distinguished Dutch novel *Max Havelaar* written by Eduard Douwes Dekker. Perhaps the most famous novel in Dutch literature, *Max Havelaar* describes the journey of a fictional Dutch character named Max Havelaar, who opposed the exploitation of Javanese coffee pickers in Dutch colonies during the mid nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup> By relying on this frame of reference within Dutch society, the fair trade movement appropriated the Max Havelaar narrative to imbue deeper values and opposition to the coffee industry itself. The reference also reminded Dutch consumers of their nation’s role in exploiting people and resources in coffee-producing colonies like Java. In society, narratives provide the basis for “comprehending new experiences, making judgments and decisions... and developing general attitudes and beliefs concerning these referents.”<sup>63</sup> Because fair trade coffee was relatively new to mainstream consumers, it was helpful to use a narrative to foster dialogue about the deeper injustices of the coffee commodity chain. This influenced the development of European attitudes

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<sup>61</sup> Fairtrade Foundation, “History: Fairtrade labelling international history.”

<sup>62</sup> E. M. Beekman, “Dutch Colonial Literature: Romanticism in the Tropics,” *Indonesia* 34 (October 1982): 17-39.

<sup>63</sup> Rashmi Adaval and Robert S. Wyer, “The Role of Narratives in Consumer Information Processing,” *Journal of Consumer Psychology* 7, no. 3 (1998): 208.

and beliefs toward coffee and the fair trade movement.

*The Silent Salesman: Coffee Packaging that Compels Consumers*

The narrative-oriented approach to telling the story of fair trade coffee is also evident in the way roasters and retailers package Fair Trade Certified coffee. Due to lengthening commodity chains and the increasingly complex global food system, consumers have become more reliant on food packages to not only describe the contents of their food but also to convey a deeper meaning about the foods and food-like substances they buy.<sup>64</sup> Packaging designer Walter Stern writes that people spend money on psychological differences between products, because these differences function as expressions of identity and individuality.<sup>65</sup> Because packages influence consumer decision-making at the supermarket, packages have been deemed “silent salesmen.”<sup>66</sup> In addition to selling, packages are intended to contain, protect, and identify their contents.<sup>67</sup> In the case of Fair Trade coffee, the social and environmental credentials of the product serve as a unique selling point. “It is this ability of fair trade to put a face on commodities, to convey information about the social conditions under which they were produced—and about the people who produced them—that is key to the movement’s moral power.”<sup>68</sup> The fair trade movement relies on packages as its silent salesmen and the purveyors of its moral power at supermarkets.

An examination of bags of premium fair trade coffee at the supermarket reveals

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (Penguin, 2007).

<sup>65</sup> Walter Stern, *Handbook of Package Design Research* (John Wiley & Sons Inc, 1981), 81.

<sup>66</sup> Glenn Porter, “Cultural Forces and Commercial Constraints: Designing Packaging in the Twentieth-Century United States,” *Journal of Design History* 12, no. 1 (1999): 25-43.

<sup>67</sup> Jerry Jankowski, *Shelf Space: Modern Package Design 1945-1965* (Diane Pub Co, 1998).

<sup>68</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 14.

the depth and breadth of communications tactics used to market fair trade coffee.

Although the bags contain relatively similar roasted coffee beans, each brand approaches the “fair trade coffee narrative” from a different angle. Equal Exchange takes a bold approach with the phrase “awaken your consciousness” and an illustration of a coffee mug with steam billowing around the globe, printed on the front of the bag. On the sides of the Equal Exchange bag, three photos feature coffee growers with their full names, countries, and the names of their respective cooperatives. The photos literally put a face of the small farmer cooperatives in Latin America that the package describes. On the back of each bag of coffee, customers can read that Equal Exchange is committed “to pay a fair price to farmers; to trade directly with democratic cooperatives; to develop long-term trade partnerships; to offer pre-harvest credit to aid farmers throughout their growing season; to support sustainable and shade grown farm practices” in 100 percent of its purchases.<sup>69</sup> Through these words and images, Equal Exchange uses coffee packaging to foster dialogue and re-embed coffee in the context of ethics, values, and culture. By identifying the coffee growers, the package reminds consumers of the people at the beginning of the coffee commodity chain. The Equal Exchange package also is a tool for political communication, conveying the inefficacy of the coffee commodity chain that leaves small farmers at the mercy of middlemen and a distant commodity market.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast, other coffee retailers take a more subtle approach to coffee packaging, reflecting the different tangle of incentives that motivate their decisions to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee. Starbucks, for example, features the Fair Trade Certified logo prominently on the front of bags of Café Estima Blend coffee. Starbucks also uses the

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<sup>69</sup> Equal Exchange. 12 oz. bag of Hazelnut Crème coffee, as observed by the researcher April 19, 2009

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

coffee package to emphasize the quantity of Fair Trade coffee it buys and reminds consumers that Fair Trade is only one aspect of the company's commitment.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Newman's Own Organic, Allegro Coffee, and Seattle's Best Coffee highlight other corporate philanthropy initiatives on bags of their organic Fair Trade Certified coffees. Mainstream coffee brands feature photos of coffee mugs (Seattle's Best, Newman's Own), or brand owners (Newman's Own), but not real members of coffee co-ops. However, bags of Allegro Coffee's Mexican Zaragoza Select coffee list the specific cooperative of origin: the 21<sup>st</sup> of Septiembre co-op in Oaxaca, Mexico. Packages of Starbucks and Seattle's Best coffee list TransFair USA's Web site as a source for more information. Although the coffee bags prominently feature the Fair Trade Certified logo, their packages are dominated by information about the company, coffee storage and preparation, and the region of origin. In the case of Newman's Own, bags emphasize the relationship between the company owners and the co-packer Green Mountain Coffee, who "have teamed up to put the power of Fair Trade in your hands." By emphasizing this partnership, Newman's Own references the dynamic steps that coffee roasters play in the commodity chain, including storing, blending, roasting, grinding and packing coffee.<sup>72</sup> In contrast, other packages describe the two ends of the coffee commodity chain: producer communities and retailers. The bags used to package Fair Trade Certified coffee serve as silent salesmen, highlighting the use of Fair Trade beans and the attention to sustainable farming.

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<sup>71</sup> Starbucks Coffee Company. 16 oz. bag of Café Estima Blend coffee; Allegro Coffee Co. 12 oz. bag of Mexican Zaragoza Select coffee; Seattle's Best Coffee, LLC. 12 oz. bag of Organic House Blend and Newman's Own Organics. 10 oz. bag of Newman's Special Blend coffee as observed by the researcher April 19, 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, 54

### *Fair Trade Advertising, Events and Public Relations*

Although coffee packaging is essential in the final “buy-it-or-not debate,” fair trade coffee also relies on advertising and marketing efforts outside the grocery store to transform publics into sympathizers. In order to achieve social justice for small coffee farmers worldwide, fair trade uses the mechanisms of the very markets that have generated those injustices.<sup>73</sup> One of the core mechanisms used in the past hundred years of coffee roasting and retailing has been advertising. In 1959, the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia created the character Juan Valdez as the quintessential coffee farmer as part of its meta-branding efforts for Colombian coffee.<sup>74</sup> Initially, fair trade organizations avoided mass advertising techniques like those used by mainstream corporations and instead sold coffee to a committed demographic by appealing to charity and solidarity. Today, however, fair trade organizations have adopted mainstream marketing principles, including market segmentation and targeting to grow sales of fair trade coffee.<sup>75</sup> For example, TransFair USA hired an advertising agency to design a billboard about fair trade coffee. The billboard copy said, “Quality taste. Quality of life. Behind every label. Does your coffee have it?” and featured the Fair Trade symbol, a photo of a coffee farmer with two baskets, and a white coffee mug.<sup>76</sup> The slogan and three graphic elements promoted fair trade coffee as a way to improve the quality of life of coffee farmers such as the man depicted. It reminded consumers of the connection between the first step in the coffee commodity chain—growing and harvesting coffee

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<sup>73</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*.

<sup>74</sup> Gregory Dicum and Nina Luttinger, *The Coffee Book: Anatomy of an Industry from Crop to the Last Drop* (New Press, 1999).

<sup>75</sup> Will Low and Eileen Davenport, “Organizational Leadership, Ethics, and the Challenges of Marketing Fair and Ethical Trade,” *Journal of Business Ethics* (2008).

<sup>76</sup> Devine&Pearson, “Billboard,” Ad Agency, *Devine&Pearson*, <http://www.devine-pearson.com/page.cgi/1/7/1/4/109>.

cherries, with the final step in the chain—consuming coffee as a hot beverage. Including the Fair Trade Certified symbol reminded consumers to look for a label in order to connect these two disparate points.

Beyond the classic billboard, fair trade coffee roasters and retailers, such as Green Mountain Coffee (GMC), conduct extensive field marketing activities. At a fair trade coffee event, GMC distributed a T-shirt with the slogan, “Clean up your conscience! Drink Fair Trade Organic Coffee.” The shirt includes the following instructions: “Step one, buy fair trade coffee; step two, drink and enjoy the taste of a better world; step three, repeat, early and often.” The T-shirt features a provocative claim that diligent consumption of fair trade coffee can increase one’s “morality.”<sup>77</sup> GMC has been very successful in marketing fair trade coffee and relies on an in-house marketing team of 35 employees.<sup>78</sup> GMC’s marketing efforts resulted in strong catalog and online sales of fair trade coffee, sales to ExxonMobil placing Fair Trade Certified coffee in 900 gas station stores, sales to McDonald’s enabling customers to buy Fair Trade coffee at 650 McDonald’s restaurants in New England, and a contract to roast the private label coffee for Newman’s Own Organics.<sup>79</sup> Companies like GMC help expand the market for fair trade coffee via business to consumer marketing and business-to-business marketing. Their material investment in promoting fair trade underscores the opportunity for companies to become advocates of a social movement, rather than just targets.

Many of the successful marketing efforts related to fair trade coffee are the result of partnerships between multiple stakeholders within the fair trade movement. In October

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<sup>77</sup> Fisher, “Selling Coffee, or Selling Out?.”

<sup>78</sup> Emily Bryson York, “Package Goods: Green Mountain Coffee,” *Advertising Age* 79, no. 23 (June 9, 2008): S-8.

<sup>79</sup> Conroy, *Branded!*



2004, TransFair USA created a month-long celebration that included events in New York, Boston, Seattle, Portland and Milwaukee, media tours for farmers, and 900 promotional events. Fair Trade Month has since become an opportunity for coffee retailers, such as Wal-Mart, Sam's Club and Target to add to their inventories of Fair Trade Certified products. In October 2008, Starbucks promoted Fair Trade Month with brochures and packaging to highlight its Fair Trade certified Café Estima blend.<sup>80</sup> The event is a reflection of key stakeholders within America's fair trade movement: roasters, retailers, consumers, national labeling initiatives and international coffee farmers. Correspondingly, the World Fair Trade Organization, a coalition of 100% Fair Trade brands, created World Fair Trade Day as a further way to drive communication regarding Fair Trade Certified goods globally. The official website features celebrity endorsements including one from Sir Paul McCartney: "World Fair Trade Day is a great idea. Fair Trade is essential for millions of people who work and struggle for survival everyday. It's all about justice and human rights. So why don't you join me in supporting World Fair Trade Day 09."<sup>81</sup> The May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009 event will include "The World's Largest Fair Trade Coffee Break," sponsored by Oxfam America, Sierra Club, Lutheran World Relief, Catholic Relief Services, Fair Trade Federation, and TransFair USA. In the UK, the Fairtrade Foundation organized "Fairtrade Fortnight" with events at schools, universities and offices.<sup>82</sup> These events pool resources from stakeholders and move the agenda of the fair trade movement to a more prominent space in public discourse.

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<sup>80</sup> Mike Beirne, "Marketers Eye Fair Trade Certified as the New "Green"," *Brandweek*, September 23, 2008, [http://www.gourmetretailer.com/gourmetretailer/eseach/article\\_display.jsp?vnu\\_content\\_id=1000661843](http://www.gourmetretailer.com/gourmetretailer/eseach/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1000661843).

<sup>81</sup> WFTO, "World Fair Trade Day 2009," *World Fair Trade Day Official Events Cite*, 2009, <http://www.worldfairtradeday09.org/>.

<sup>82</sup> Brendan O'Neill, "How fair is Fairtrade?," *BBC*, March 7, 2003, sec. Magazine, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/uk\\_news/magazine/6426417.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/low/uk_news/magazine/6426417.stm).

TransFair USA and other Fair Trade organizations have been especially successful in using the tools and tactics of public relations. In 2007, TransFair USA hired Carmichael Lynch Spong, one of the 20 largest PR firms in America.<sup>83</sup> Two years later, *PR Week* selected Carmichael Lynch Spong's work for TransFair as a finalist for the Nonprofit Campaign of the Year award.<sup>84</sup> Within TransFair, Anthony Marek is Vice President of External Communications and serves as the key spokesman and leads the labeling initiative's public relations efforts. Marek explains the system of certification to the media, and offers an optimistic view of Fair Trade moving beyond a niche market to change the shopping habits of an entire generation of Americans.<sup>85</sup> Paul Rice, TransFair's president and chief executive, is also a key spokesman for the fair trade movement.<sup>86</sup> Rice's personal involvement in establishing a coffee cooperative in Nicaragua gives him credibility to speak for the movement.

### *Fair Trade and Web 2.0: Dialogue in the Social Media Sphere*

As public relations efforts and marketing strategies become increasingly web-oriented, the fair trade movement has also turned to online media, especially social media or Web 2.0. "As a means of facilitating the creation of cross-national 'dis-organized' networks for collective action on the basis of recognized common concerns, the Internet

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<sup>83</sup> Douglas K. Spong, "TransFair USA Selects Carmichael Lynch Spong as Agency of Record," *carmichaellynchspong.com*, October 29, 2007, <http://www.carmichaellynchspong.com/news.aspx?authorID=1&newsID=97&q=archive&page=17>.

<sup>84</sup> PRWeek, "Nonprofit Campaign of the Year 2009 - PRWeek US," *PRWeek*, March 5, 2009, <http://www.prweekus.com/Nonprofit-Campaign-of-the-Year-2009/article/123790/>.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Rowe, "Value Pacts: Dramatic Growth Seems on the Horizon for Fair-trade Products," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 16, 2008, <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/features/20080416-9999-1f16fair.html>.

<sup>86</sup> Andrew Downie, "Fair Trade in Bloom," *The New York Times*, October 2, 2007, sec. Business / World Business, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/02/business/worldbusiness/02trade.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/02/business/worldbusiness/02trade.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all).

might almost have been purpose built for social movements.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, the primary challenge for social movements in the social media sphere is linking online and offline behavior<sup>88</sup>. TransFair is equipped to connect these spheres because of the variety of opportunities for active and passive activism in the fair trade movement. One online platform designed for social movements is Change.org, a social networking Web site that facilitates the creation of networks and provides information about opportunities to engage online and offline. TransFair USA created a profile on Change.org as a channel for fundraising, testimonials, and as a place for supporters to post photographs and videos. The site provides information about opportunities for engagement in the movement. On Change.org, individuals can engage in “Take Action” steps such as buying fair trade flowers, donating to the general fund, and subscribing to an e-newsletter.<sup>89</sup> Change.org gives TransFair a way to further interact with members of the public to promote engagement and understanding of the fair trade model.

Social media is valuable to social movements like fair trade because it is inexpensive and can reduce the cost of resource mobilization. Communities within the movement, such as student coalitions and religious groups, plan events on Meetup.com and Facebook.com, post information and educate publics using blogs, and post audio and visual content on sites like Flickr and Youtube. Even organizations with vast resources and networks of supporters have become more effective and accessible through social media. Global Exchange created a Facebook page to promote fair trade certification

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<sup>87</sup> W. Van De Donk, ed., *Cyberprotest*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2004), xvii.

<sup>88</sup> Vanessa Mason, “Social movements 2.0,” *Subject to Change*, August 5, 2008, <http://vanessamason.wordpress.com/2008/08/05/social-movements-20/>

<sup>89</sup> “Change.org - TransFair USA,” *Change.org*, 2009, <http://www.change.org/transfairusa>.

among the public.<sup>90</sup> Facebook provides a platform for the movement to engage audiences, especially university students, and complements Fair Trade's presence on sites such as MySpace and YouTube. TransFair USA created a channel on YouTube in 2007 to aggregate videos that promote fair trade, including media coverage and clips from documentaries.<sup>91</sup> One video, "Why Fair Trade?" features short interviews with individuals attending the Chicago Greenfest explaining why they support Fair Trade.<sup>92</sup> "I love fair trade because... in the global South I've seen the real impact that it makes in terms of community development and the cooperative movement and really think that fair trade is an empowering alternative," said Jo Curnow, a college student involved in United Students for Fair Trade who was featured in the clip. By highlighting a variety of fair trade supporters, videos posted online can convey the diversity of opinions represented in the movement. Accessible and free video interviews like these contribute to the robust narrative that furthers consumer involvement.

By lowering traditional barriers that hinder communication with audiences, social media gives the fair trade movement opportunities to engage in dynamic dialog. Rather than rely on mass-mediated communication, organizations within the movement can e-mail, message, or even *tweet* their supporters. On Twitter, an increasingly popular social media site, proponents of fair trade created their own searchable tag, "#fairtrade." Using this tag, activists can discuss media coverage of fair trade, where to buy fair trade coffee, and events such as the Sydney, Australia's recent Fair Trade Fortnight. Organizations like

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<sup>90</sup> James Guzzi, "Fair Trade Certified | Facebook," *Facebook*, April 18, 2009, <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2416797602>.

<sup>91</sup> TransFair USA, "YouTube - FairTradeCertified's Channel," *YouTube*, September 28, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/fairtradedcertified>.

<sup>92</sup> *Why Fair Trade?*, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGpeJFcmntA>.

Oxfam, Global Exchange, and the Fairtrade Foundation have their own profiles on Twitter to engage audiences. Because the dialogue occurs in real time and users can link to other web sites, Twitter gives actors in the fair trade movement a channel to produce and develop content that is relevant and dynamic. Social media's penchant for continuous refiguring gives the fair trade movement flexibility as messages and campaigns shift.<sup>93</sup> The web provides a powerful tool for activist organizations to question the practices of the international coffee market and make the case for alternatives like fair trade.

Communication that promotes Fair Trade is also disseminated through a variety of other channels. A documentary called *Cappuccino Trail* highlights the facets of the coffee commodity chain and the efforts by UK's Cafédirect to connect with producers in Peru to purchase Fair Trade coffee and contribute to the sustainable development of coffee growing communities.<sup>94</sup> Magazines such as *Men's Health* magazine list buying fair trade coffee as one of "eight ways to save the planet."<sup>95</sup> Web sites from organizations within the movement provide historical context for Fair Trade Coffee, answer questions regarding the significance of the Fair Trade seal and provide opportunities for civic engagement beyond purchasing fair trade beans.<sup>96</sup>

### *Internet Use by Coffee Cooperatives to Reach Consumers*

Producer organizations in the South have also developed online capacities for

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<sup>93</sup> Van De Donk, *Cyberprotest*

<sup>94</sup> FFP Entertainment, GmbH, British Broadcasting Corporation, and Films for the Humanities (Firm), *Tales from the Global Economy: The Cappuccino Trail* (Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 2002).

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Kostigen, "8 Ways to Save the Planet," *Men's Health* 23, no. 1 (January 2008): 142.

<sup>96</sup> eg. Catholic Relief Services, "What's the Deal with the Seals," *Catholic Relief Services Fair Trade*, 2009, <http://www.crsfairtrade.org/coffee/certified.cfm>; WFTO, "World Fair Trade Day 2009"; Fairtrade Foundation, "History: Fairtrade labelling international history."

engaging consumers within the movement. Café Femenino, which began with a cooperative of female coffee growers in Peru, has used a Web site to highlight its Fair Trade coffee, provide links to retailers that sell Café Femenino coffee, and raise funds for the Café Femenino Foundation, which supports community initiatives such as providing resources and staff for a library in Guatemala.<sup>97</sup> In this way, the Internet becomes a tool to provide information about the working and environmental conditions of coffee growing communities. The relatively low cost of development and operation has made Web sites and social media powerful tools for this particular producer organization within the fair trade movement. However, the majority of coffee farmers operate on a very small scale without access to the Internet, much less the funding needed to build or host a Web site. Thus, the example of Café Femenino appears to be an exception to the rule.

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<sup>97</sup> Thea Lim, "A Fair Share of Fair Trade," *Utne*, no. 139 (January 2007): 16.

## CHAPTER 5

### DRINKING COFFEE WITH THE ENEMY: CORPORATE INVOLVEMENT IN FAIR TRADE COFFEE

The fair trade movement captured international attention in part because of strategic partnerships with coffee roasters and retailers. Since the Max Havelaar Foundation created the first seal in the 1980s, the Fair Trade seal has become a key tool to “make trade fair” in the coffee industry.<sup>98</sup> Recent partnerships carry on the tradition of lobbying roasters and retailers to carry Fair Trade Certified coffee. Though controversial within the movement, partnerships between certifiers and corporations emerged because they offer incentives to coffee retailer-roasters and to stakeholders in the fair trade movement. Corporate involvement has expanded quantity of fair trade coffee sold. In the U.S., Fair Trade Certified coffee imports have expanded from less than 1 million pounds in 1998 to an estimated 70 million pounds in 2006.<sup>99</sup> The U.S. now has the highest sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee, with 24,000 tons sold each year, an estimated 3% of the market.<sup>100</sup> Sales of Fair Trade coffee in the United Kingdom are also equivalent to about 3% of the coffee market, with 6,000 tons of Fair Trade Certified coffee sold each year.<sup>101</sup> Fair Trade coffee has been especially successful in the specialty coffee market.

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<sup>98</sup> Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 203.

<sup>99</sup> Conroy, *Branded!*, 108.

<sup>100</sup> Raynolds, “Mainstreaming Fair Trade Coffee.”

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

### *Market-Driven Corporations: Friend or Foe?*

Within the fair trade movement, there are three patterns of buyer engagement, as categorized by Raynolds. Mission-driven buyers purchase directly from producers and sell 100% fair trade products. Quality-driven buyers purchase a significant share of fair trade coffee, usually from alternative traders and are marked by socially responsible business models. The third category is market-driven buyers, which are conventional corporations that purchase a minimal share of their coffee as Fair Trade and purchase coffee from conventional traders.<sup>102</sup> Market-driven brands, such as Nestlé, Proctor & Gamble and Sara Lee, are the corporations most recently included in fair trade. They exert significant power in the coffee commodity chain because they control key nodes in the chain that accrue rent.<sup>103</sup> However, the global distribution of these commodity chains hinders transparency and makes corporations vulnerable to attacks on their social and environmental records. When participating in fair trade, market-driven brands adhere to minimums and criteria for annual contracts set by FLO, but usually do not prioritize partnerships with producer cooperatives. Most market-driven corporations limit their engagement in the movement. Each pattern reflects a distinct set of values and is motivated by specific incentives.

Some fair trade activists and organizations recognize the benefits of involving market-driven corporations, including expanding sales of fair trade coffee to benefit producers, engaging new audiences in the discussion on trade issues, and accumulating resources for the movement. Today, the primary challenge of fair trade coffee is its small scale. Only 20 percent of the coffee that fair trade certified cooperatives produce is sold

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*.



as fair trade coffee.<sup>104</sup> The estimated production capacity of fair trade coffee is seven times the current fair trade sales, forcing a moratorium on new additions to the FLO roster of cooperatives.<sup>105</sup> Thus, proponents of fair trade have a pragmatic interest in approaching mainstream companies to expand sales. By increasing the demand for fair trade coffee, mainstream companies provide opportunities for existing fair trade cooperatives to sell a larger percentage of their coffee as fair trade. Also, increased demand allows additional co-ops seeking access to credit, higher prices for their beans, community empowerment, and funds for local development to become fair trade certified. In addition to increasing sales of fair trade goods, brands have financial resources that can benefit the social movement. As companies become stakeholders and begin selling fair trade coffee, they may become invested in the long-term viability of the fair trade movement.<sup>106</sup> Involvement of corporations can also increase the reach of fair trade into rural communities within consumer countries.

Although these incentives for fair trade advocates to engage mainstream corporations are powerful, it is important to note that the decisions of social movement organizations are complicated decisions are often made based on external factors in addition to an internal decision-making calculus.<sup>107</sup> In the case of fair trade, the choice to involve corporations may have been determined by resource dependencies, the movement's market-based structure, and the existing corporate domination of coffee markets, rather than a careful cost-benefit analysis before the first corporation was

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<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Fox, "Lateral resistance to top-down globalization: Accommodation or transformation?" (Presentation presented at the The Politics of Global Governance Institutions, American Sociological Association, New York City, August 12, 2007).

<sup>105</sup> Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

<sup>106</sup> Raynolds, "Organic and Fair Trade Movements in Global Food Networks."

<sup>107</sup> Cress, "Nonprofit Incorporation among Movements of the Poor."

approached.

*Fair Trade as a Corporate Strategy for Appeasing Activists and  
Building Credibility*

Learning from the efforts of other activist organizations, fair trade strategically targeted corporations in order to make changes in the coffee commodity chain. NGOs in the fair trade movement, which exist within a complex network of NGOs, recognized the efficacy of tactics used by other activist organizations. Activists had waged campaigns against companies including Wal-Mart in Honduras and Bangladesh, Disney in Haiti, Mattel in China, Nike in Indonesia and De Beers in Africa. Fair trade advocates saw that “by targeting firms such as Gap Inc. or Home Depot—firms at the retail end of the supply chain with direct links to customers, NGOs are able to wield the power and vulnerability of corporate brand names to their advantage.”<sup>108</sup> . Fair trade NGOs chose coffee transnational retailers as their primary targets because roasters and retailers exert significant power in the coffee commodity chain. Just as the retailer Home Depot wields power in the forest products commodity chain, transnational coffee retailers and roasters control key nodes in the chain that accrue rent.<sup>109</sup> However, the global distribution of these commodity chains hinders transparency and makes corporations vulnerable to attacks on their social and environmental records. The campaigns capitalized on corporate vulnerabilities and fueled the adoption of voluntary certification systems in chemical, forest products, oil, mining, nuclear power and transportation sectors.<sup>110</sup>

Starbucks engaged in fair trade certification and constructed internal certification

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<sup>108</sup> Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser, “The NGO-Industrial Complex.”

<sup>109</sup> Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*

<sup>110</sup> Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser, “The NGO-Industrial Complex.”

mechanisms to preserve its credibility amid “naming and shaming” campaigns waged by activists.<sup>111</sup> Starbucks decided to sell fair trade coffee in response to a yearlong campaign launched by the non-profit Global Exchange in 1999. Campaign representatives met with Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz to urge him to begin buying Fair Trade certified coffee. Though initially dismissed by Schultz, the demands of Global Exchange gained more clout after a San Francisco TV station exposed working conditions on Guatemalan coffee plantations that sold coffee to Starbucks. The exposé described wages below Guatemala’s minimum wage and the use of child labor.<sup>112</sup> Global Exchange immediately organized a local protest after the story aired, and soon launched a letter-writing campaign, and planned demonstrations at 20 Starbucks locations. In April 2000, Starbucks agreed to carry fair trade coffee in all 2,300 of its stores.<sup>113</sup> Initially, some activists and retailers criticized TransFair USA for brokering a deal that failed to specify the percentage of fair trade coffee that Starbucks was required to buy. In response, Transfair’s CEO, Paul Rice said, “Typically we start companies out at a 5 percent minimum volume commitment, and, you know, if a company’s a super-giant, and if they say, ‘We need to dip our toe in the water, but if it works we’ll grow over time,’ then we’ll play with them on that basis...”<sup>114</sup> Rice remained patient, expecting increased consumer demand to drive Starbucks to purchase more fair trade coffee. The approach proved successful. Starbucks bought 2.1 million pounds of Fair Trade Certified coffee in 2003 and pledged to purchase

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<sup>111</sup> Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization.”

<sup>112</sup> Conroy, *Branded!*

<sup>113</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 16.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 203-204.

40 million pounds of certified coffee in 2009.<sup>115</sup> The Starbucks partnership demonstrates the importance of compromise in settlements between activists and corporate partners within the fair trade movement.

For other coffee roaster-retailers, the decision to purchase fair trade coffee was the result of a negotiated settlement that arose out of a conflict involving NGOs, consumers and stakeholders. The Sara Lee Corporation, which buys 10 percent of the total world volume of coffee, agreed to sell a small amount of Fair Trade certified coffee in 2002. Like Starbucks, Sara Lee agreed to sell Fair Trade coffee because of pressure from activist groups. Two Villanova University students organized a petition to bring Fair Trade Certified coffee to campus, gathered 600 signatures, and presented the petition to Villanova Dining Services, which had a contract with Sara Lee Corporation. Partly in order to maintain its contact with Villanova, Sara Lee introduced the Prebica line of fair trade coffee to campus eateries within six months.<sup>116</sup> Later, Catholic Healthcare West, a network of 29 hospitals, continued pressure on Sara Lee to buy fair trade.<sup>117</sup> In 2003, Procter & Gamble, which produces Folger's announced that it would sell Fair trade Certified coffee as part of one of its brands after an activist campaign waged by internal stakeholders.<sup>118</sup> Individuals from Domini Social Investments and the Catholic Center for Reflection, Education and Action (CREA) launched a shareholder campaign. Members of the two organizations collectively owned more than half a million Procter & Gamble

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<sup>115</sup> Associated Press, "Starbucks to double purchases of fair trade coffee," *The Boston Globe*, October 28, 2008, [http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2008/10/28/starbucks\\_to\\_double\\_purchases\\_of\\_fair\\_trade\\_coffee/](http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2008/10/28/starbucks_to_double_purchases_of_fair_trade_coffee/); Raynolds, "Organic and Fair Trade Movements in Global Food Networks," 160.

<sup>116</sup> Joanna Sherman, "Villanova Students Show their Social Consciousness By Bringing Fair Trade Certified coffee to Our Campus," *Villanova Magazine*, Spring 2002, [http://www.publications.villanova.edu/vumagazine/spring2002/fair\\_trade.htm](http://www.publications.villanova.edu/vumagazine/spring2002/fair_trade.htm)

<sup>117</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 205.

<sup>118</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 16.

shares and were able to pressure the company from the inside. P&G responded by selling Fair trade as part of its Millstone brand.<sup>119</sup> Thus, for Procter & Gamble, the decision to sell fair trade coffee was an outcome of a negotiated settlement that arose out of conflicts.

The introduction of fair trade coffee under such prominent brand names prompted other companies that were not subject to “naming and shaming campaigns” to introduce lines of fair trade coffee. In 2003, the Dunkin’ Donuts chain of stores began using fair trade coffee in all its espresso-based drinks. TransFair USA convinced Costco to convert its private label coffee to certified Fair Trade Certified in 2005. Sam’s Club now sells a line of fair trade coffee that is grown, roasted and packed in Brazil. The approach is unique among most coffee brands because it concentrates key stages of the coffee value chain in the producer country. TransFair collaborated with Green Mountain Coffee Roasters to convince McDonald’s to sell certified fair trade coffee. McDonald’s agreed to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee at its New England locations in 2005. Although the “tangle of incentives” for each corporation is different, many are motivated by the notion of corporate social responsibility. Companies need hard figures to back up their claims to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and can rely on fair trade as an independently verified measure that adds credibility to company CSR reports.<sup>120</sup> Fair trade certification is created, imposed, and monitored by a third party, giving it more credibility and recognition than first-party certifications (that rely on internal rules and reports) or second-party certification (that use codes of conduct and reports created by an industry or trade organization).<sup>121</sup> Engaging in fair trade, even at token levels, can enable companies

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>120</sup> Courville, “Confronting the Coffee Crisis,” 298.

<sup>121</sup> Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser, “The NGO-Industrial Complex.”

to demonstrate CSR and minimize the risk of an activist campaign.

However, advocates of fair trade are wary of corporations that use their purchase of fair trade coffee as a strategy for greenwashing business practices or other products. The term *greenwashing* was coined in the 1970s to refer to corporations that advertised specific eco-friendly practices to mask or deflect overall poor environmental records.<sup>122</sup> Fair trade can enable companies to exaggerate the credentials of their products and practices. Although Starbucks buys less than 6 percent of its total coffee as certified fair trade, some consumers believe that Starbucks pioneered the fair trade model.<sup>123</sup> Activists argue that the company co-opted fair trade principles with only token changes in the type of coffee beans it purchases. However, advocates of fair trade understand this and recognize the long-term benefits to the movement. “In reality, I think it’s true that in the beginning, when we are working with commercial partners, we are used by these commercial partners for their image. But in the end, they are increasing the sales of coffee, in the case of Starbucks and other big organizations, and this means that the producer can sell much more at fair-trade conditions,”<sup>124</sup> explained Paola Ghillani, former president of FLO. Even if they lead to greenwashing in the short run, such partnerships can foster long-term steps toward sustainability.

### *Fair Trade as a Strategy to Reach Conscious Consumers*

For some companies, business interests in fair trade provide an additional incentive to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee. Fair Trade certification provides a point of

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<sup>122</sup> Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*.

<sup>123</sup> Taylor Clark, *Starbucked: A Double Tall Tale of Caffeine, Commerce, and Culture*, Reprint. (Back Bay Books, 2008).

<sup>124</sup> qtd. in Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 204.

differentiation to increase profits within the highly competitive food and beverage market. As coffee has been de-commoditized in the global North, coffee sales have become increasingly dependent on symbolic quality, which is based on reputation, and embedded in the trademarks, geographies of origin and sustainability labels.<sup>125</sup> Fair trade labeling adds another layer of symbolic quality that can enable companies, whether market-driven, quality-driven, or mission-driven, to capture rents in the coffee commodity chain.<sup>126</sup> Fair trade offers a strategy for brands increasingly concerned with their brand image and reputation.<sup>127</sup> Coffee retailers often rely on three key strategies to achieve market share in the market: offering the lowest price, offering a differentiated product, and focusing on meeting the needs of specific target demographics.<sup>128</sup> Fair trade labeling contributes to product differentiation and can help a brand focus marketing toward an emerging demographic.

Amid a proliferation of café chains, single origin coffees, and certified coffees, the Fair Trade label gives roasters and retailers another “value-add,” especially appealing to a certain demographic of consumers.<sup>129</sup> The market for fair trade coffee developed in part because of the increased politicization of everyday consumer choices and the emergence of “political consumers.”<sup>130</sup> For these consumers, Fair Trade coffee provides a tangible way to advocate for development and social change. Coffee effectively

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<sup>125</sup> Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Fisher, “Selling Coffee, or Selling Out?”

<sup>128</sup> Littrell and Dickson, *Social Responsibility in the Global Market*.

<sup>129</sup> Ponte, “The ‘Latte Revolution’?,” 1111.

<sup>130</sup> Wilkinson, “Fair Trade.”

translates shopping habits into the promotion of human rights in the global South.<sup>131</sup> In addition to concern for human rights and altering the terms of trade, consumers are motivated to buy fair trade coffee because of a variety of factors, such as guilt about purchasing expensive lattes,<sup>132</sup> desire to define social membership in a particular group,<sup>133</sup> or even a sense of national guilt about colonialism and its impact on the South.<sup>134</sup> While corporations may not recognize or examine the motivations, they recognize the presence of consumers seeking fair trade products.

For market-driven buyers, fair trade is a way to reach these consumers and add value to coffee in order to generate higher profit margins. The value added is often much greater than the cost to the company. In June 2004, the British grocery chain Tesco was charging consumers an additional \$3.46 per pound for Fair Trade coffee although growers were only receiving \$0.44 above global coffee prices.<sup>135</sup> For companies like Tesco, primary concerns include price, profit and shareholder return—not the livelihoods of coffee farmers.<sup>136</sup> Because of these concerns, both marketing to consumers and relationships with producers are altered. In contrast to the ATO strategy which involved regular visits of Northern consumers to Southern co-ops, market-driven coffee buyers rely on a depersonalized niche marketing approach.<sup>137</sup> The mainstream marketing approach has impacted the nature of ATO's interaction with consumers, by underscoring

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<sup>131</sup> Sarah Lyon, "Fair Trade Coffee and Human Rights in Guatemala," *Journal of Consumer Policy* 30, no. 3 (September 2007): 241.

<sup>132</sup> Clark, *Starbucked*.

<sup>133</sup> Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

<sup>134</sup> NPR 2009

<sup>135</sup> Clark, *Starbucked*, 192.

<sup>136</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 25.

<sup>137</sup> Taylor, "In the Market But Not of It."



the importance of competitive marketing and the bottom line.<sup>138</sup> Although the social movement is based on traditional values of redistributive justice, these market-oriented actors have become allies of organizations in the fair trade movement such as TransFair. According to TransFair, the movement of large companies and institutions toward fair trade has built momentum and “the impact in terms of volume and the impact in terms of the farmers and their families is quite dramatic.”<sup>139</sup> A primary factor for the success of fair trade coffee in the United States has been the corporate structure of TransFair USA, which follows a classic business model to expand sales of certified products. Conroy explains, TransFair has a “sophisticated business-oriented service structure to meet the needs of companies purchasing, processing, and selling Fair Trade products and licensed to use the Fair Trade seal.”<sup>140</sup>

However, TransFair’s emphasis on corporate participation in the movement has sparked internal debates over the role of large retailers and roasters. In some instances, mainstreaming has led to significant internal divisions in the fair trade movement. When the UK Labelling Initiative decided to license Nestlé, Italy’s largest alternative trade association, Ctm altromercato issued an open letter calling for a campaign against the decision.<sup>141</sup> The issue of “mainstreaming” fair trade coffee has emerged as a central tension within the movement.<sup>142</sup> In social movement analysis, it is important to pay attention to conflict, not just consensus.<sup>143</sup> Conflicts, such as the disagreements over

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<sup>138</sup> Littrell and Dickson, *Social Responsibility in the Global Market*.

<sup>139</sup> Downie, “Fair Trade in Bloom.”

<sup>140</sup> Conroy, *Branded!*, 111.

<sup>141</sup> Wilkinson, “Fair Trade.”

<sup>142</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*; Laura Raynolds, Douglas Murray, and John Wilkinson, *Fair Trade: The Challenges of Transforming Globalization*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2007); Bacon, “Confronting the Coffee Crisis.”

<sup>143</sup> Zald and Ash, “Social Movement Organizations”; Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization.”

mainstreaming, provide insight into the variety of incentives and values that explain various stakeholders' involvement in fair trade. Although involvement of market-driven corporations has expanded the quantity of fair trade coffee sold, some critics argue that partnering with trading companies will drain fair trade of its "oppositional ethos," by watering down standards.<sup>144</sup> At present, the certification system does not distinguish between mission-driven roasters like Equal Exchange and publicly traded behemoths like Procter & Gamble. "Consumers can see no difference—at the level of the fair-trade seal—between a regional, 100 percent fair-trade roaster with two decades of collaborative relationships and a transnational roaster seeking to burnish its corporate image with 1 percent fair trade purchases," according to Jaffee (2007). Permitting token purchases by transnational corporations undercuts the work of small businesses like Massachusetts roaster, Dean's Beans.<sup>145</sup> Thus, mainstreaming has fuelled important internal dialogue on the nature and purpose of fair trade.

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<sup>144</sup> Goodman, "Confronting the Coffee Crisis."

<sup>145</sup> Dean Cycon, *Javatrekker: Dispatches From the World of Fair Trade Coffee* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007).

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

In the analysis of fair trade as a social movement, McCarthy and Zald's resource mobilization theory provides a valuable framework for linking the three strategic tasks of a social movement organization to the three pillars in the fair trade movement. Before the first fair trade label was introduced, NGOs created a foundational structure and network for the movement during the development of alternative trade organizations oriented toward development and solidarity. As fair trade grew, formal institutions such as FLO and FINE were created to develop a chain of command, defined roles and offices, and an organized network of resources. Although the formal structure emerged, the movement remained fluid as FLO modified its structure to meet the changing needs of various internal stakeholders. The structures enabled an integration of human and material resources. Within fair trade, NGOs have been unique catalysts for structural evolution and goal orientation.

One of the key strategic tasks for fair trade has been to transform mass and elite publics into sympathizers. Because it relies in part on consumer activism, fair trade has been very accessible to passive supporters both online and offline. By combining activist participants such as university students with more passive supporters, the movement has gained access to a variety of human and material resources. Although initially disinterested in advertising, ATOs and certifiers have used public relations and marketing

tactics to re-embed coffee in the context of relationships between coffee farmers and consumers. Just as the first Max Havelaar label communicated a deeper narrative about opposition to colonialism and economic injustice, a review of current coffee packaging reveals careful attention to narratives and messages. Messages differ based on the coffee retailer's reasons for engagement in the movement. Recently, online communications via web sites and social media outlets such as Change.org and Twitter have enabled the movement to foster dialogue and reach larger audiences. The use of social media by social movements seems a natural fit, providing lo-cost resource mobilization. Fair trade stakeholders have used social media to communicate narratives about fair trade consumers, inform supporters about specific steps to engage in the movement, foster dialogue about the movement and educate consumers directly.

Companies like Green Mountain Coffee provide financial resources to promote fair trade, demonstrating the opportunity for companies to become advocates of a social movement, rather than just targets. Fair trade advocates decided to engage corporate roasters and retailers to expand sales of fair trade coffee, involve companies in discussions of trade issues and accumulate resources for the movement. However, as Cress notes, social movements often make decisions for a variety of external reasons rather than a cost-benefit analysis.<sup>146</sup> Beyond the benefits to the fair trade movement, “mainstreaming” was bolstered by a variety of incentives for corporations. While some companies such as Starbucks and Sara Lee began purchasing fair trade after “naming and shaming” campaigns, others launched lines of Fair Trade Certified coffee to meet business objectives, such as targeting the “conscious consumer” demographic. The

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<sup>146</sup> Cress, “Nonprofit Incorporation among Movements of the Poor.”

inclusion of corporate actors that dominate the coffee commodity chain creates a challenging paradox for the fair trade movement and has even led to internal divides. As Bartley notes, conflict and consensus must be examined in order to understand social movements.<sup>147</sup>

Fair trade also faces competition among emerging certification schemes for legitimacy among consumers and NGOs and for adoption by corporations. Industry concerns relating to corporate social responsibility and fears of activists campaigns benefited fair trade but have also led to the creation of a variety of certifications, including Rainforest Alliance, Utz Kapeh, and bird-friendly. With the emergence of alternative certification schemes, fair trade must compete for legitimacy among consumers and NGOs and for adoption by multinational roasters and retailers. Individual corporate certification initiatives by large companies including Starbucks, Neumann coffee group and high-end roasters such as Intelligentsia Coffee, Rogers Family Coffee Co., and Counter Culture Coffee, present a confusing array of certifications for consumers to choose among. Labeling initiatives such as TransFair USA address these alternative certifications and position fair trade as the “gold standard” in the coffee industry. Yet, even internally, this claim is challenged because of a limited capacity to impact change within producer communities. Jaffee writes that many villages and families producing Fair Trade coffee have not broken out of the cycle of poverty, despite the premium paid for development.<sup>148</sup> While Fair Trade prices reduce farmers’ exposure to the volatile international coffee market, these prices do not enable small farmers to

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<sup>147</sup> Bartley, “Institutional Emergence in an Era of Globalization.”

<sup>148</sup> Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, 237.

significantly improve their standards of living.<sup>149</sup> Wolford and Bonds explain that because Fair Trade prices are paid to the cooperative, the co-op receives a fair price for coffee but may not pay individual workers a fair wage.<sup>150</sup> Thus, even the “gold standard” of certification has limitations.

Fair trade provides a case study in the importance of resource mobilization, demonstrates the value of reaching audiences by communicating narratives through a variety of medium, and highlights the complexity of incorporating targets in a social movement. As an economically oriented social movement, fair trade differs from political social movements that target the State. However, the movement’s goals of incorporating justice into a system of trade built on injustice and exploitation and re-embedding coffee in the relationships between producers and consumers are relevant as transnational corporations expand their economic power. By challenging the power structures within the coffee commodity chain, fair trade has introduced an alternative perspective on “value added” by emphasizing the need to add value to the lives of coffee producers. However, because it relies on the coffee commodity chain and large multinational corporations, the movement has become a feature of existing economic relations which hinders its identity as an alternative movement and its ability to confront ongoing injustices.

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<sup>149</sup> Karla Utting-Chamorro, “Does Fair Trade Make a Difference? The Case of Small Coffee Producers in Nicaragua,” *Development in Practice* 15, no. 3/4 (June 2005): 584-599.

<sup>150</sup> Wolford and Bonds, “Faith in Fair Trade.”

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