

With Reference to Key Theories and Literature Examined in This Module, Discuss the Different Ways in Which Fair Trade Discourses and Representations Matter for the Well-being of Food Growers in the Global South

Ruiheng Li

University of Leicester, Leicester, UK

Abstract: Fair trade can be seen as a means of counteracting unequal trade and as a channel for products from the South to reach markets in the North, and although unequal trade is evident, fair trade has genuinely benefited producers of products from the South. Externally, it supports Southern food-growing countries economically, while internally, it gives Southern food-producing countries the psychological value of self-identification. Fair trade activities also continue to evolve, making the relationship between consumers in the North and producers in the South purer and more direct.

Keywords: Fair trade, Consumer countries in the North, Producer countries in the South, Economic support.

1. Introduction

Fair trade is seen as an important part of the process of confronting inequality. And most scholars nowadays, naturally, base their discussion of fair trade on a model of trade subjects with Southern producers and Northern consumers. According to Naylor, fair trade can be seen as a critique of historically entrenched unequal international trade and a tool to address inequality in the global economy [1]. The origins of fair trade can be traced back to the aftermath of the Second World War, in order to help southern artisanal manufacturers, open up northern markets and thus replace traditional trading activities [2]. After more than half a century of development, Fairtrade certified products have gained a growing market share [1]. It is also necessary to mention the definition of fair trade in question, as it sets out the most basic position of fair trade. According to Wright's summary, one of the very widely quoted definitions comes from FINE, an international organisation that is a coalition of four fair trade organisations [2]. FINE defined fair trade as a trade relationship based on transparency, communication and mutual respect, with the aim of improving the fairness of international trade. It ensures the rights of marginalised producers and people, especially in the South, by providing them with better trading conditions. Furthermore, FLO is further explained by focusing on the farmers and people employed in the South and the fact that they are identified as being in a disadvantaged situation, while at the same time, they enter into a better trading environment in order to overcome the limitations of development, which means to promote development.

Purely in terms of the concept of fair trade, this is undoubtedly a measure that can contribute to the well-being of the countries of the South by promoting poverty alleviation and development in disadvantaged regions, especially in most developing countries of the global South. For the countries of the South, the progress and development they have always craved as third countries emerging from colonial rule, fair trade could be an opportunity for the producers and products

of the South that could contribute to development. Because fair trade offers better terms of trade, it can be considered as a minimum income guarantee. It may be that through the means of fair trade, the consumer countries of the North provide the producer countries of the South with the support that will allow them to progress. This paper focuses on how fair trade has brought well-being to producers of Southern products. The content of the discourse on fair trade is first introduced through the birth of the discourse and, in addition, the link between fair trade and the well-being of people in the South in the context of fair trade is discussed in terms of the external improvement in living standards due to economic development and the internal self-identification due to psychological satisfaction.

2. Discussion

Understanding fair trade as a discourse and exploring its diffusion can capture the heart of fair-trade activity from a practical perspective [3], because discourse is an ensemble of social practices [4]. mentioned that the spread of fair trade is based on discourse because discourse engages an image of southern labourers, yet this image is not necessarily entirely positive. According to McEwan, colonialism and imperialism created serious inequalities between the First World and the Third World, and with the end of colonial rule, a discourse was born, which initially sought to reconceptualise the Third World and may have included a vision of the people of the Third World wanting to escape their disadvantages [4]. In reality, however, the discourse is more like another kind of colonial rule, because in the discourse, Western European countries represent development, advancement and development, while non-European countries, especially African countries, represent crisis, backwardness and barbarism, and these discourses were initially put forward by the West, while the countries of the Third World did not have a voice, and fair trade was one of them. McEwan also mentioned the fact that the Western countries imposed their own definition of development on the countries of the Third

World and did not allow the governments and people of the Third World to implement alternatives [4]. Yet even under these conditions, the description of fair trade creates images, such as the image of the farmer, the certified product, and it is officially through these images that the consumer can see the change that fair trade brings and can bring [3], although this change may not be as great as the consumer thinks and defines the producer as the worker in need, but it does achieve redistribution of value between consumers and producers [2]. However, the discursive representations of fair trade are also changing, the supply chain of fair trade is becoming more regulated, which means an increase in quality, and the image of the farmer in question is also changing, although not necessarily actively, possibly through the tourist landscape and the celebrities who support fair trade [3]. This may have provided a way to promote the image of the southern producers. Also, some scholars now support this change, Wright wanted to put producers at the heart of fair trade [2], and Touri advocated further interpretation of fair trade through the voices of producers [5], aiming to reduce the commodification of producers and provide more opportunities for producers to have a voice and tell stories that are not known. In terms of practical developments, because the traditional discourse can be wrong in its portrayal of the people of the South and can easily lead to misunderstandings among consumers in northern countries. So, with the change in the description of fair trade is an opportunity for southern producers to change their image, not only to change the misconceptions of northern consumers, but also to create a correct self-image and, more importantly, possibly to reduce the excessive gap between producers and consumers.

First and most obviously, from an external point of view, fair trade activities can economically support food-growing countries in the South, either directly or indirectly. According to El-Ghannam, for people in the Third World, their foremost need is to improve the living standards of the poor, not necessarily through consumer goods, but more likely to build human capital and ultimately lay the foundations for economic growth [6]. Another need is the export of products from third world countries to the global market, of which agricultural products account for a proportion. Fair trade activities, therefore, reflect the well-being of the Third World countries of the South in the most immediate demand. For fair trade activities, the usual subject is a trade activity that takes place through the flow between goods and money, as consumers receive products from the South and, for producers, money from the North. Although both sides get what they want, one of the key points is that fair trade promotes the idea that producers receive a fair price for goods, a fair price for goods that is not necessarily the market price, that is to say, in a fair trade environment, the price received by producers of goods in the South is, the guaranteed minimum market price plus a trade requirement premium, probably because the South and North This may be due to the extremely significant economic disparities that exist between countries in the South and North [2]. In addition, in practical terms, the existence of fair-trade premium extends a portion of the moral imperative. Consumers who are offered a higher price definitely want a better-quality product, or one that is more versatile. This may require the product manufacturer to pay more attention to the variety of products or the quality of the products. According to the example that Dolan provided, Kenya's tea would not have been able to join the Fairtrade commodity chain [7], but because of the extremely high quality of its tea offering and

the flexibility of its multiple tea blends, Kenya eventually became a Fairtrade product supplier and received Fairtrade premium support. It is not only Kenya that benefits, of course, as consumers have more flexibility in their choice of products due to the diversity of products offered by Kenya. In addition, according to Wright, producers also choose schools, clinics, transport and other institutions for training to improve the quality and quality control of their products [2]. It seems that in addition to the economic gains, the producers in the South have also improved the construction of the industry for the products they offer. Fair trade undoubtedly brings well-being, both from an economic point of view and from an infrastructural point of view, through the trade premium it promotes, which firstly brings higher economic support to the producing countries of the South and, in addition, higher economic support in return for greater attention to their products by the producing countries of the South. This in turn provides the consuming countries of the North with better quality products.

Secondly, from an internal point of view, in the fair-trade environment, the northern consumer countries can endow the Southern food producing countries with psychological resources of self-identity. For Southern producers, the fact that Northern consumers buy their products makes them feel that their products are psychologically recognised by Northern consumers and, by being in fair trade environment, also makes Southern producers feel that they are being supported by Northern consumers in return for feeding themselves. Kleine mentions that for well-being, whether individual or social, well-being may depend on social relations and the environment in which one lives, rather than on economic growth [8]. This would seem to suggest that material things are not necessarily the best expression of well-being, but rather that inner experience, or psychological recognition, is the best expression. There is no doubt that fair trade can also bring such recognition to the productive countries of the South. According to Alsop and Heinsohn, when a person or a group is empowered, they are empowered to make effective choices and to translate such choices into beneficial actions and outcomes [9]. As described earlier, under the representation of public discourse, the image of the Southern producer is bound to a fixed range, the image of a poor and needy worker, and there is no way for them to change this image. This is where the emergence of Fairtrade can be seen as empowering Southern producers, giving them a choice to opt in or out of Fairtrade activities, that is, whether or not to have their products certified as Fairtrade. This situation has not been radically changed, that is to say, under the communicative conditions of Fairtrade, Southern producers have been taught that they are poor people, living in poor areas and in need of help from Western countries. As a result, they had no choice but to join the Fairtrade campaign and apply for Fairtrade certification for their products. Likewise, having received the most basic economic support, Southern producers began to believe in the fact that they were poor people in need of help from the West, and with that came a sense of satisfaction. As Adams and Raisborough mentioned, the positive, optimistic, hard-working, diligent farmer who chooses to become a producer in fair trade activities himself to demonstrate single-minded devotion to his product, his environment, his family and his willingness to bring well-being to the society in which he lives [10]. This is a positive self-satisfaction, self-reliance through one's own labour and not relying on others for one's own well-being. This self-

satisfied attitude may also contribute to a change in the image inherent in Fairtrade of southern producers. From the image of the poor, needy farmer, to that of the hardworking, committed producer.

3. Conclusion

As a whole, fair-trade activities promote the use of trade as a means of connecting Southern producers and Northern consumers for the benefit of national development in the South. This paper provides a discursive perspective on the context in which the fair-trade discourse emerged and the encouragement of a renewed and positive image of southern workers through their voices in the context of fair trade. It also analyses the potential well-being of southern food producers through fair trade from an external economic perspective and an internal psychological satisfaction perspective. First of all, there is no doubt that fair trade will definitely bring well-being to the producing countries of the South. From an economic point of view, the premium agreed upon by fair trade undoubtedly brings higher incomes to the producing countries of the South, and at the same time, because of the moral considerations of receiving more than the market price, the producing countries of the South will offer better quality and more flexible products, which indirectly increases the countries the size of the industry producing the corresponding products, while from a well-being point of view, the people of the South, because they believed in the image of the West for them and the opportunity given to join fair trade activities, could be a shortcut to improve the poverty of the country for third world countries emerging from colonial domination, and therefore the ability to purchase their own products, which was certainly a "recognition", although this may have been manipulated behind the scenes by Western countries for the purpose of Western modernisation.

Also, there are still some realities at a time when fair trade activities are becoming more and more recognised. Firstly, there may be misconceptions about the image of southern producers on the part of northern consumers, for which some scholars have also suggested that the traditional image of southern producers can be changed through producer-centredness or through voice. Secondly, when Northern consumer countries believe that they are helping Southern producers through their fair-trade activities, they may need to consider whether this help is what Southern producers really need, as although geographical colonial domination has now been eliminated, imperialism through culture still exists, and perhaps for the countries of the South, what they need may be spiritual freedom and independence, rather than being a buffer

zone in the competition between powerful countries.

In any case, Fairtrade activities continue, and an incomplete understanding of tradition is changing. Scholars, as well as fair trade organisations, are also actively promoting the idea that the producing countries of the South can actually benefit from fair trade activities. With the spread of digital technology, it is also possible for fair trade activities to ride on the coattails of the internet, making the relationship between consumers in the North and producers in the South more transparent and straightforward. Perhaps this ease, which offers Southern producers more opportunities to sell their products, also presents a challenge for Southern producers, who will inevitably need to have better quality and more flexible products if they are to take advantage of such opportunities. Hopefully, the Fairtrade campaign will, in the future, be able to truly break down inequalities and bring the benefits they hope for to the producing countries of the South.

References

- [1] Naylor, L., 2014. "Some are more fair than others": fair trade certification, development, and North-South subjects. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 31(2), pp.273-284.
- [2] Wright, C., 2009. *Fairtrade food: connecting producers and consumers*. The globalization of food. Oxford: Berg.
- [3] Goodman, D., DuPuis, E.M. and Goodman, M.K., 2012. *Alternative food networks: Knowledge, practice, and politics*.
- [4] McEwan, C., 2018. *Postcolonialism, decoloniality and development*. Routledge.
- [5] Touri, M., 2020. Representation, voice and producer-consumer communication in fair trade movements: Toward new empirical directions. *Geoforum*, 117, pp.103-113.
- [6] El-Ghannam, A.R., 2002. The determinants of social well-being, economic development, and development index in the third world countries. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 1(1), pp.51-69.
- [7] Dolan, C.S., 2008. In the mists of development: Fairtrade in Kenyan tea fields. *Globalizations*, 5(2), pp.305-318.
- [8] Kleine, D., 2013. *Technologies of choice?: ICTs, development, and the capabilities approach*. MIT Press.
- [9] Alsop, R. and Heinsohn, N., 2005. *Measuring empowerment in practice: Structuring analysis and framing indicators*. The World Bank.
- [10] Adams, M. and Raisborough, J., 2011. Encountering the fairtrade farmer: Solidarity, stereotypes and the self-control ethos. *Papers on social representations*, 20(1), pp.8-1.