INTRODUCTION

Shaping Postcolonial Globalization from Below

As summer made a cautious appearance in the streets of Amsterdam, shoppers were invited into a new clothing store. It boldly advertised inexpensive clothes and alluring special offers. Picking items from the stacks, an eager customer wandered into the back of the store to try them on. Instead of finding a fitting room, she found herself in a cramped, hot, windowless chamber where women were sewing the kind of clothes she had just selected for herself. This was 'The Mad Rush', an initiative of the Clean Clothes Campaign in 2016 to draw attention to the abominable working conditions of women in the clothing industry.[1]

Such attempts to locally confront people with the injustices of global commodity chains have been a staple of a certain brand of activism which emerged during the 1950s. This 'fair trade' activism encompasses a range of civic initiatives which aimed to achieve more equitable economic relations between the South and the North. Since the 1950s, a global network of individuals, groups, and organizations has evolved around the issue of fair trade. They have publicized the need for a transformation of global trade and have put alternatives into practice.

The movement promoting fair trade has arguably been one of the most enduring movements to come out of the postwar years. Fifty years after the first campaigns were launched, more than two million farmers and workers in seventy different countries were growing and manufacturing fair trade-certified products, which had become available in 143 countries.[2] The network of fair trade activists had grown remarkably over these same years, with the World

Figure 0.1 Women sewing in a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, March 2010. Clean Clothes Campaign.

Fair Trade Organization connecting 359 trading organizations, 25 support organizations, and 26 fair trade networks across the globe.[3] Similarly, the Clean Clothes Campaign has established a global network of more than 230 organizations which work towards better working conditions for workers in the garment and sportswear industries.[4] The fair trade movement has been pivotal in the broad acceptance of 'corporate social responsibility'. It has also fuelled recent debates about legislation on the responsibility of companies to uphold workers' rights and to account for their own environmental impact in commodity chains.

The historical relevance of the fair trade movement, however, goes beyond its immediate and sustained impact. Charting the history of people working towards a more equitable world brings into view a social history of globalization after the Second World War. The process of global integration we have come to label 'globalization' has not unfolded self-evidently. The unprecedented wave of global integration which occurred after 1945 reinforced existing inequalities and created new imbalances as many countries gained their independence from the late 1940s through the 1970s. The

emerging interconnected world and its discontents were not just a matter for politicians in meeting halls and managers in boardrooms. The daily lives of people across the globe were also significantly affected. Producing and consuming, trading and boycotting, negotiating and protesting, these individuals, too, helped shape this world. If we focus on humanitarian initiatives which challenged the prevailing shape of postcolonial globalization, we can recover the views held by people across the world concerning fair global relations and their efforts to promote these views, and we can grasp the networks they created and the limitations of their endeavours. Peering through the looking glass of fair trade activism, this book thus delineates an era of postcolonial globalization and charts how humanitarianism evolved during this period.

A Social History of Postcolonial Globalization

Historians currently espouse two versions of the history of globalization.[5] The first presents globalization as a novel phenomenon, which emerged during the twentieth century as the world became smaller due to new means of transportation and communication. This technological development was mirrored by the rise of global political institutions such as the United Nations and the development of a 'global consciousness' among people all over the world.[6] The second conception of globalization places the current global integration within a much longer history of global interaction and thinking about the world as a single unit. In this vein, historians point out how people in the nineteenth century understood their societies within a global framework or even trace the roots of 'global consciousness' all the way back to ancient civilizations.[7]

The history of the fair trade movement shifts the perspective on globalization from intellectual discourses and structures to the ways that ordinary people have attempted to change the global market. From this vantage, thinking globally (and acting accordingly) evolved out of missionary activities, humanitarian campaigns, and acts of international solidarity. But it is also evident that globalization has not proceeded continuously. Three important transformations stand out. The first is the impact of decolonization. The fair trade movement emerged during a period that saw the political decolonization of countries in the Global South

challenging prevailing relations on global politics and the world market.[8] Traditional views on what was a just division of wealth and resources were critiqued by politicians and intellectuals from the South and their supporters in the North. Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, fair trade activists called into question the persistence of colonial relations and mindsets.

The fair trade movement's history thus highlights how ideas about the world and about transnational relations entered a new era, the era of postcolonial globalization. Recent historical scholarship has drawn attention to the importance of decolonization on the way the world was ordered after the Second World War.[9] The alliance of so-called non-aligned countries and the constant back and forth amongst people in the Global South, the Soviet Union, the United States, and European countries were crucial to the way postwar international politics took shape.[10] Decolonization was also negotiated in societies in the Global South and North, where its consequences became visible through migration and new political projects such as African and European cooperation.[11] Decolonization, it turns out, affected people's everyday lives across the globe, prompting them to attempt to shape an emerging postcolonial world.

A second transformation characterizing postwar globalization was the increasing importance of long-distance economic relations. This development was not just reflected in the establishment of global economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and the expansion of multinational corporations. It also changed how people across the world interacted. In the North, the notion that citizens held power *as consumers* became a commonly held belief. Through marketing, companies had asserted that the customer was king. Governments in the United States and Western Europe, for their part, came to regard 'buying power' to be an essential indicator of their performance.[12] Citizens themselves had learned to exert their power as consumers in numerous campaigns, which applied pressure to companies and governments by deliberately buying or neglecting to buy certain products – boycotting and buycotting became staples of civic activism.[13]

Since the 1950s, the promise of prosperity and the corresponding ability of individual consumers to make deliberate choices

about what to buy became inseparable from the way people in the West regarded their 'consumer societies'. The emphasis in the North on consumers' power of choice collided with the process of decolonization. Although people everywhere could identify as consumers and organize accordingly, consumer activists in the South often had to advocate for access to consumption rather than focusing on matters of choice.[14] The history of the fair trade movement demonstrates that this tension was reinforced by the fact that the power to choose held by consumers in the North was often mirrored by the economic dependency of producers in the South.

Whereas decolonization and global economic integration were important preconditions for the emergence of the fair trade movement, a third striking transformation in the history of globalization is observable over the course of its history. The advent of digital communications, creating new opportunities for establishing transnational networks around issues of fair trade, significantly changed the dynamics within the movement. The advent of widespread internet use made it possible to involve actors from across the world in campaigns for fair trade. More people could establish direct lines of communications, and the potential visibility of local circumstances to people all over the world was heightened. The internet also provided novel ways to generate publicity, address relevant actors, and mobilize support. The efforts to create equal relations between North and South within the movement were fostered by these new opportunities. There was a particular emphasis on directly involving actors in the South in the planning and conducting of activist campaigns. At the same time, the structural inequalities created by the prevailing global division of resources and labour were not eliminated by the new structure of global communications.

These three phenomena – decolonization, global economic integration, and the advent of digital communications – have exerted a crucial impact on the shape of globalization since the 1950s. An investigation of this novel epoch in the history of globalization reveals the crucial role that middle-class groups and moderate approaches to achieving change have played in postwar history. Whilst the fair trade movement's primary base in the South was amongst marginalized producers, in the North it has predominantly been a middle-class phenomenon. Historians have traditionally

paid scant attention to middle-class groups and their initiatives. These groups lack the romantic steadfastness and ideological purity of more radical activists. Compared to the grand gestures of revolutionary movements, their activities often come across as pedestrian. Even as historians shifted their view from high politics and intellectuals towards common people, the exceptional remained their primary concern. In assessing postwar transformations, it is student activism and the Beatles, rather than consumer associations and the blockbuster movie *The Sound of Music*, that have taken centre stage, even though the latter arguably impacted people's everyday lives in the 1960s just as much.[15] A broad range of moderate views and small gestures is largely missing from the study of postwar history, even though many of the most consequential changes can be traced back to them.

Approaching globalization from the perspective of social history entails a reappraisal of the locus of its politics. A history of the fair trade movement, as I will present in what follows, reinforces and refines the historiographical trend of looking beyond institutional politics to understand how people within a society debate one another and attempt to shape their world. In this history, civic initiatives emerge as crucial activities for defining and addressing societal issues. In recent years, historians have highlighted how decolonization spurred a new group of humanitarian organizations to come to the fore. Oxfam, War on Want, CARE, and Save the Children, as well as many smaller outlets, became important links between the Global North and South. Besides providing support to people in the South, these organizations and their officials also established themselves as experts on international cooperation and development in national and international politics alike.[16]

This book expands on this historiography by including the connections of everyday life with postcolonial globalization. It incorporates the small-scale actions of groups throughout the world in a history which ranges from international trade negotiations to Mexican coffee farmers reacting to the 1980s debt crisis. Alongside international and national development organizations, a host of local and often more haphazard initiatives addressed issues of justice and development. These latter efforts often wanted to raise awareness in their own communities. Sometimes they attempted to address institutional politics at national and international levels,

too. These minute initiatives were crucial to the functioning of the field of civic initiatives around fair trade. Some of these endeavours turned out to be precursors of larger operations. Many were staged in partnership with transnational campaigns and challenged prevailing practices of humanitarian action. Moreover, the interconnections between themes like development and the environment are much more readily apparent on the level of local activism than on that of professional organizations focused on a specific policy area. The evolution of global relations since the 1950s can thus be seen to have produced new ideas and practices not just in the sphere of national and international civic organizations but also amongst people who felt urged to address the same issues in their own environment.

This broader history of civic initiative in the wake of decolonization is similarly instructive in light of the history of the global market. The history of markets has been a central theme in social history since the field's inception, with its traditional focus on economic relations, social inequality, and the history of the working class. The fair trade movement provides more recent examples of civic initiatives which aim to transform the market. Whilst thus continuing the tradition of taking inequality and social movements as points of departure, this book proposes to take a transnational perspective as its starting point in thinking about inequality and social movements and to acknowledge the agency of a wider range of social groups.

The history of the economy was closely related to social history as the latter emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. Across the world, extensive reports on the living conditions of the poor urban working class and colonized peoples were influential in generating a more comprehensive perspective of societies and prompting state interventions. Detailed analysis of economic conditions was the foundation of the 'scientific' strand of socialism which had emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. These approaches gave rise to a new generation of historians who aimed to write social history as a 'history of society' and spurred calls for the incorporation of insights from economics and other disciplines into historical research. The current of social history which was closely tied to workers' movements, also looked to economic history to understand its current position and to substantiate its claims. As

social and economic historians developed an increasing appetite for quantitative methods during the 1960s and 1970s, many scholars turned to approaches which were better able to provide history with a human face.

The last twenty years have witnessed a renewed interest in the history of the market amongst historians. This rediscovery treated markets less as collections of abstract numbers possessing a fixed logic and more as constructions which, through adaptation and contestation, have evolved over time.[17] Just as economists discovered institutions and path dependency, historians now present differentiated views of markets as social spaces. In this vein, this book contends that markets are not amoral spaces governed by a fixed logic. Markets are constituted through social interactions marked by inherent moral assumptions. Rather than regarding the 'moralization of markets' as an intervention by an external moral framework into a morally empty sphere, the history of fair trade highlights how expectations structuring markets are constantly contested amongst producers, regulators, vendors, buyers, and civic organizations.

Conceptualizing the History of Fair Trade

Ever since the fair trade movement emerged during the 1950s, it has attracted scholarly attention. Its history has been part of the historiography of the Third World movement, consumer activism, and humanitarianism. Although each of these areas reflects an important aspect of fair trade, the partition has caused a fragmentation in research. Its fissures were cemented by a preference for individual initiatives which fit the mould of solidarity with the so-called Third World, activities aimed at mobilizing consumers, or campaigns directed at relief. A further cause of compartmentalization has been a focus on fair trade activism in individual national cases, despite the obvious importance of unequal relations between the Global North and South and the emergence of a network of activists throughout the world. Nonetheless, the abundance of work on fair trade initiatives by activists and scholars, as well as the perspectives provided as a result of the different conceptualizations, contributes invaluable insights into the transnational history of fair trade.[18]

This study conceptualizes the fair trade movement as a transnational humanitarian movement which has evolved, since its origin in the establishment of alternative trading organizations in the 1950s, in close relation to the decolonization of the Global South. Social-scientific scholarship had primarily understood fair trade as an attempt to introduce social justice into economic relations.[19] Recently, scholars in this field have presented it as a broader movement engaged in trade and certification as well as campaigning and advocacy.[20] The present approach to fair trade as a transnational humanitarian movement advocating socio-economic justice similarly integrates campaigning, trading, and advocacy, asking how citizens have mobilized to shape the global market. It connects the historiography on social movements, consumer activism, and humanitarianism. It draws on social movement research to consider (1) the goals which activists pursued, (2) the repertoire of action they employed, (3) the networks they developed to achieve their goals, and (4) the conditions which drove the evolution of activism.[21] The recent attention to the ways that social movements have shifted between local, national, and transnational scales is crucial to this history.[22] In turn, it demonstrates that we should discern these scales as nodes of government, arenas for actions connected to perceived audiences, and levels of organization and of spatial imagination. The history of the fair trade movement reinforces the observation that these scales are not mutually exclusive but rather coexist with shifting relative weight to one another.[23]

Three strands of scholarship have addressed the history of fair trade activism, each highlighting a distinct feature of the movement. A first wave of scholarship on fair trade connected it to the history of what became known as the Third World movement.[24] This body of work, intimately tied to social movement research, proposed regarding fair trade campaigns as part of a larger movement concerned with transnational solidarity rather than departing from specific organizations or individual campaigns.[25] Historical development and historiography went hand in hand: the fair trade movement indeed evolved alongside transnational solidarity initiatives aimed at individual countries such as Angola, South Africa, Chile, Cuba, and Nicaragua, all of which became prominent between the 1960s and 1980s. Campaigns focused on these countries provided concrete examples and related products which fair

trade activism could build on. In the 1970s, an activist could engage in a boycott against products from colonized Angola, take part in a demonstration directed at the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development, and then attend a lecture on the role of women in development projects without a sense of having divided loyalties.

Approaching fair trade from the angle of Third World activism foregrounds crucial aspects of its history. First, this vantage acknowledges the postcolonial framework within which the movement has to be understood.[26] The recent insight that the Cold War divide between East and West was interlaced with relations between South and North is particularly fruitful for understanding the contestation of the global market since the 1950s.[27] This interconnection pertains not only to the roots in radical activism, which resulted from leftwing solidarity with the Global South, but also to the direct influence exerted by actors from the Global South in circulating ideas and initiating actions in the North.[28] Whereas fair trade has traditionally been supported by a coalition ranging from radical leftwing activists to politically moderate churchgoers, the former has faded into the background as the historiographical focus has shifted towards understanding fair trade predominantly as a certification initiative. Regarding fair trade as part of a broader Third World movement, on the contrary, emphasizes its radical elements, whilst also calling attention to the broader repertoire it has employed. Selling products from the Global South has been pivotal, but picketing, boycotts, rallies, education, and lobbying have been just as influential.

Echoing the claims to novelty voiced by activists, scholars of social movements such as the Third World movement have insisted on treating them as different from earlier social movements.[29] This notion of 'new social movements', however important to the self-fashioning of activists at the time such claims were made, risks neglecting the continuities in the people, practices, and ideas shaping them. The fair trade movement did not break off from the traditions of leftwing solidarity and missionary concern with people in the Global South. Similar caution is warranted when using the label 'Third World movement', because it readily dismisses differences between those campaigning for the Global South and those acting in solidarity with specific countries. Although these aims could overlap, they have not always simply coincided. Moreover, the