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# **ETHICAL TRADE COMMUNICATION AS MORAL EDUCATION**

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MEDIATION IN  
CONTEXT

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

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# ABSTRACT

At its broadest, this dissertation asks how ethical trade is communicated in Poland and Finland. Ethical trade encases a wide set of initiatives concerned with terms of exchange and conditions of production, but also with other issues surrounding global trade, such as tax justice and environmental sustainability. To clip these diverse projects together, ethical trade is theorised here as a communication problem in that its success hinges on constructing among consumers a moral disposition that recognises distant producers and their predicament as being worthy of attention, emotion and action. This disposition is constructed through mediation, that is, an ethically charged process of communication in which social reality is constructed, negotiated and circulated.

This study distinguishes between two modes of mediation. The first mode, mediated familiarity, establishes a representation-anchored cognitive connection between consumers and producers on the basis of factual knowledge and a degree of affinity. The second mode, moral education, is geared towards constructing consumers who independently consider the impact of their everyday consumption choices on faraway producers and workers. Theorised in this way, moral education is then operationalised through three analytical concepts: (1) solidarity, understood as a morality of cooperation; (2) care, approached as a dialectic between care for oneself and close ones, and care for Southern producers as distant strangers; and (3) responsibility, conceptualised as a collective moral and political obligation to alter the unjust structures of global trade.

Methodologically, this study employed the approach to discourse analysis inspired by the work of Foucault. Within this framework, ethical trade communication was a discourse generated by specific ethical trade organisations through retrieving elements from a global discursive repertoire of ethical trade and adjusting them to the circumstances of local consumers. As such, ethical trade communication aimed to furnish for its recipients a desired subject position.

Empirically, the research zoomed in on two cases: (1) Pizca del Mundo, the first fair trade brand in Poland, and (2) Eetti (Pro Ethical Trade Finland), the main non-governmental organisation dealing with ethical trade in Finland. The two organisations were investigated in separate case studies with divergent research designs. The case study of Pizca del Mundo relied primarily on the analysis of Facebook content, whereas the case study of Eetti was based on a yearlong ethnographic-style fieldwork.

The empirical analysis revealed that Pizca del Mundo's communication focused on establishing mediated familiarity between consumers and producers. At the same time, the moral dispositions of solidarity and care characterised the relationship between producers and the firm themselves,

relegating the public to their role as rational consumers. Meanwhile, Eetti were engaged in moral education geared towards activating individuals as responsible citizen-consumers, that is, independent agents entitled to demand change, capable of moral reflection and decision-making, and ready to participate in collective political action.

Keeping in mind the interplay between global discourses and local conditions, this dissertation anchors the communication approaches of Pizca del Mundo and Eetti in the material conditions of consumers and the local discourses that give meaning to these conditions. The discussion on local histories of consumption, situated economies and discursive geographies in Poland and Finland reveals a disjuncture between the unproblematised and universalistic moral discourses that permeate the scholarly literature on ethical trade, and the situated moralities that the localised consumers draw on in making moral decisions, such as consumption choices. Thus, this study argues for the importance of studying communication and mediation in context.

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# CONTENTS

Abstract.....	3
Acknowledgements.....	5
Contents.....	8
Preface .....	13
1 Introduction.....	15
1.1 Carving a niche.....	18
1.2 Research questions and research approach .....	22
1.3 Empirical cases .....	25
Pizca del Mundo.....	27
Eetti (Pro Ethical Trade Finland).....	31
1.4 Organisation of the dissertation .....	34
2 Global trade governance and ethical trade’s discursive openings ..	37
2.1 Political economy of global trade.....	37
Colonial roots of global trade .....	39
A metageography of global trade.....	42
2.2 Ethical trade as a communicative reworking of market economy .....	43
Cosmopolitan foundations of ethical trade .....	45
Defetishising commodities and disenchanting the almighty market .....	47
2.3 Global fair trade system .....	49
Moral economy of fair trade .....	51
Criticism of fair trade.....	55
2.4 Fair trade in Poland .....	57
2.5 Ethical trade in Finland .....	61



3	Ethical trade communication as moral education .....	67
3.1	Mediation as moral education .....	68
3.2	Ethical trade communication as mediation .....	70
3.3	Mediated familiarity .....	73
	Proper distance.....	74
	Fair trade representations of Southern producers: Coloniality and commodification.....	76
3.4	Moral education.....	79
	Global solidarity in ethical trade .....	81
	The dialectics of care in ethical trade.....	83
	Responsibility in ethical trade.....	84
	From individualised responsibility to social connection model .....	85
	Citizen-consumers: Responsible subjects of consumption...	89
	Consumer activism in Poland and Finland .....	92
3.5	Communication repertoire of ethical trade.....	94
	Communicating with consumers .....	95
	Communicating with institutional stakeholders .....	97
	Potential of social media in moral education of ethical consumers .....	99
	Social media as a tool of organisational communication.....	99
	Social media activism .....	101
	Social media as a site of moral education.....	103
4	Methodology: Foundations and contemplations .....	106
4.1	Post-structuralist discourse analysis .....	107
4.2	Ethics of subjectivity.....	110
4.3	Writing the ‘promiscuous’ inquiry.....	113
4.4	Data: Interrupted.....	117

4.5	Case studies.....	118
	Pizca del Mundo.....	119
	Empirical material .....	119
	‘Narratological’ excursion into Facebook .....	120
	Discourse analysis of Facebook content .....	122
	Discourse-theoretical interview analysis.....	123
	Eetti.....	124
	Ethnographic-style participant observation.....	124
	Empirical material .....	126
	A discourse analysis .....	128
5	Pizca del Mundo.....	130
5.1	Social media in Pizca del Mundo’s repertoire of communication .....	130
5.2	Agency and proper distance in Facebook representations ..	133
	The agency of producers in Facebook representations.....	136
	The problematics of proper distance in Facebook representations .....	141
	Conclusion .....	142
5.3	Branded solidarity on Facebook .....	144
	Articulations of solidarity .....	145
	Solidarity as legitimation .....	145
	Solidarity as affinity .....	146
	Solidarity as lifestyle .....	148
	Branded solidarity and fair trade market-making in Poland .....	149
	Conclusion .....	151
5.4	Dialectics of care in conceptualisations of communication .	152
	Teetering between quality and care.....	153
	Charting oppositions and alliances .....	155

Conclusion .....	157
5.5 The fair trade landscape in Pizca del Mundo's communication .....	158
6 Eetti (Pro Ethical Trade Finland).....	163
6.1 Relocating responsibility .....	164
Morality beyond the responsibility of the market.....	165
Nexus of shared responsibility .....	168
Consumers .....	168
National governments and intergovernmental organisations .....	169
Multinational corporations and brand companies .....	170
Notion of responsibility in Eetti's communication .....	171
6.2 Constituting the citizen-consumer .....	172
Not-yet citizen-consumers .....	173
Social media as A playing field for citizen-consumers.....	177
Priming a new generation of citizen-consumers through global education .....	182
(Mis)recognising citizen-consumers in offline communication... ..	185
6.3 Two portraits of citizen-consumers.....	189
Rosa: A knowledge-based moral commitment .....	190
Melissa: An intellectual project for A sustainable future .....	198
Agency in becoming a citizen-consumer.....	203
6.4 Landscape of global trade in Eetti's communication .....	204
7 Universalistic discourses, situated moralities: Ethical trade communication in context .....	208
7.1 Communicational disjunctures .....	209
Moral economies in Pizca del Mundo's and Eetti's communication .....	211
Metageographical inadequacy.....	214

7.2	Situated moralities .....	215
	Situated histories of consumption.....	218
	Situated economies.....	220
	Situated discursive metageographies .....	224
7.3	Moral education and situated moralities .....	229
8	Concluding remarks.....	232
	Theoretical reconceptualisation .....	232
	Empirical contribution .....	233
	Theoretical contribution.....	234
	Practical contribution .....	236
	Untying the knot .....	236
	References .....	238

## PREFACE

Let me start this dissertation, perhaps not too originally, with an introspection. In turning the gaze back on myself, however, I will try to be as unegotistic as humanly possible. Instead, I will foreshadow what impact the type of moral education investigated in this study can have if it meets fertile ground. In addition, I will prime the reader for my personal investments that pepper the research narrative to come.

This project started as an intellectual endeavour, a puzzle to be solved in order to both satiate my curiosity and, of course, obtain an academic qualification. In 2014, I was decidedly not an ethical consumer. I was price-conscious and environmentally concerned, but did not know much about the social consequences of consumption. When I was living in Poland, consumption was never problematised. Rather, during my formative years consumption figured as nothing more than a means to an end: buy food not to be hungry, a new coat not to be cold, a book to become more knowledgeable. I guess that was the very specificity of the ‘transition’ period: in the 1990s and early 2000s the range of products available on the market was still somewhat limited, a sizeable portion thereof produced locally or within the country, marketing and advertising were nascent, and – of course – the population was significantly less affluent. Then the situation rapidly began to change. Let us fast-forward to 2010, though.

This was when I first heard about fair trade as well as other *quirks* such as freeganism. I was a first-year student of ethnology and cultural anthropology then, partaking in the bachelors’ seminar on market and consumption. At the University of Warsaw, the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology hosted some of the most free-spirited students. One of them was presenting her idea for empirical research that would involve studying fair trade consumers. At the time, the concept just went in one ear and out the other, but it must have nevertheless stuck in my memory somehow. Some three years on, I retrieved it as I was drafting a proposal for doctoral research.

In a sense, I was already a different person in a very different context. Having lived in Finland for two years, I was surrounded by people who voluntarily and consciously altered their consumption habits. The primary context was my then workplace, HELCOM (the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission), housing a group of colleagues preoccupied with environmental protection and sustainability. Impressionable as I was, I quickly started to factor in the environmental costs of my lifestyle. My doctoral project also sprang from the interest in more environmentally sustainable consumption and initially followed that path. As time passed, however, the more I read and the more I knew, the more the focus of my research gravitated towards social consequences of consumption.

A year and a half into the study, my knowledge about fair trade and some of the problems that it attempted to solve had increased considerably, although without any practical consequences for my life. In other words, I had no idea how to weave all this information into the fabric of everyday life. Certainly, I could buy Fairtrade-certified products, but my grocer's did not stock many. And what about the profusion of goods that I knew were ethically problematic, especially clothes and electronics, but for which there were no certification standards? How and where would I find alternatives? It was only when I started to volunteer at Eetti (Pro Ethical Trade Finland) that the theoretical problems with consumption found some tentative and practicable answers. However, as Eetti employees are quick to point out, there are many ethical issues in global trade, but not nearly as many solid solutions. I have seen that for many consumers the cursory guidance offered by Eetti is not enough: in their fast-paced lives they still long for quicker, sharper and more precise guidelines on what to buy and what to do. For me, however, with my vast time resources, Eetti's directions have been invaluable in working my not-so-guilt-ridden way through the messy maze of globally sourced goods.

Currently, as my research is coming to an end, I am *becoming* an ethical consumer. I have knowledge and information that I gladly share with other people, especially those close to me, who are not always happy with yet another moralising rant, though. I know what to buy so as not to contribute to the misery of people, animals or the environment, and I know where to get it. Most importantly, I understand when *not* to buy and I abstain increasingly more often.

This, of course, opens yet another cluster of problems. If I opt for clothes made in Poland, I might be driving a Bangladeshi sewer out of work. If I buy Finnish tomatoes, those that were shipped from Spain at a cost of many carbon miles might equally well go to waste. If I do not buy a new computer, a Chinese assembly line worker might not get their wage. If I buy a new phone, though, I may support the warlords in Congo who benefit from the extraction of conflict minerals. I might also signal approval of the human rights violations at the Southern factories subcontracted by transnational corporations in the electronics sector. If I buy my groceries at a foreign chain store, more money will remain in my pocket, but it will not be mobilised to address the lack of transparency in its supply chain.

The ethical dilemmas multiply ad infinitum, paralysing many people and impeding their ability to choose. Personally, I accept the fact that with increased knowledge comes the awareness of the inability to make fully ethical and informed decisions. Thus, while influencing consumption choices is a key function of ethical trade communication, from my perspective, it is not the most essential one. Moral education is. Ethical trade communication as moral education can produce individuals who are more cognisant of their place in the world, and who are capable of, and willing to make, ethical choices in their everyday lives. At the very least, this is what it has done for me.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

In July 2009, an employee of a Taiwanese-owned electronics manufacturer, Foxconn Technology Group leapt from an apartment building. *The New York Times* linked the young man's suicide to the harassment that he suffered after an iPhone prototype had gone missing at the factory in Shenzhen, China, two weeks beforehand<sup>1</sup>. A string of suicides ensued in 2010, drawing a considerable amount of public attention to the violations of labour rights and the unduly harsh treatment of workers at the company plants<sup>2</sup>. In the following years, several groups of desperate workers took to the roofs and threatened to commit suicide in an attempt to bargain for more humane working conditions or payment of withheld wages. The efficacy of solutions implemented by Foxconn in response to the ensuing public pressure remains questionable<sup>3</sup>. Next to the 'soft' measures, such as more leisure options and employee counselling offered at the 'campus', the firm also responded in more nefarious ways. The setting up of nets intended to catch people jumping from the roofs was, perhaps, the most notorious attempt at preventing suicides. Likewise, the response of some foreign companies that sourced from Foxconn raised eyebrows: Steve Jobs, the idolised CEO of Apple, voiced the truthful, but callous and denigrating, claim that the suicide rate at the Foxconn 'campuses' was 'well below' the national average for China<sup>4</sup>. Foxconn

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<sup>1</sup> Barboza D (2009) 'iPhone Maker in China Is Under Fire After a Suicide'. *The New York Times*, 26 July. Available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/27/technology/companies/27apple.html?\\_r=2&scp=1&sq=foxconn&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/27/technology/companies/27apple.html?_r=2&scp=1&sq=foxconn&st=cse) (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>2</sup> 'Foxconn suicides: Workers feel quite lonely'. *BBC News*, 28 May 2010. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/10182824> (accessed 26 July 2017).

Huang M and Suk M (2010) 'Worker Death Tally Rises at Foxconn China'. *ABC News*, 21 July. Available at <http://abcnews.go.com/International/death-tally-rises-foxconn-china/story?id=11213400> (accessed 26 July 2017).

Moore M (2012) "'Mass suicide' protest at Apple manufacturer Foxconn factory'. *The Telegraph*, 11 January. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/9006988/Mass-suicide-protest-at-Apple-manufacturer-Foxconn-factory.html> (accessed 26 July 2017).

Mozur P (2012) 'Life Inside Foxconn's Facility in Shenzhen'. *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 December. Available at <https://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2012/12/19/life-inside-foxconns-facility-in-shenzhen/> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Merchant B (2017) 'Life and death in Apple's forbidden city'. *The Guardian*, 18 June. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/18/foxconn-life-death-forbidden-city-longhua-suicide-apple-iphone-brian-merchant-one-device-extract> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Elmer-DeWitt P (2010) 'Steve Jobs on Foxconn suicides'. *Fortune*, 1 June. Available at <http://fortune.com/2010/06/01/steve-jobs-on-foxconn-suicides/> (accessed 2 August 2017).

Technologies assemble, or used to assemble, devices for Apple, Acer, Dell, Nokia and Sony, among others.

On 24 April 2013, the Rana Plaza garment factory building collapsed in Dhaka District, Bangladesh. While the bank and shops located in the building had been closed the day before upon the discovery of wall cracks, the garment workers were ordered to return to work in the morning. The tired structure crumbled during the morning rush hour, killing over 1,100 workers and leaving some 2,500 injured<sup>5</sup>. International media widely reported on the event and authorities – for example, Pope Francis<sup>6</sup> – condemned sweatshops as modern-day slavery. Poor working conditions and disregard for workers' safety seemed to be on everyone's lips. The international brand companies, both those that sourced from the factories based in Rana Plaza – including, but not limited to, Primark (UK) and Benetton<sup>7</sup> (Italy) as well as Inditex (Spain), Mango (Spain), LPP (Poland) and Walmart (US)<sup>8</sup> – and those not linked to the collapse but known to have had a sweatshop record, such as H&M and GAP, caved in to the public outcry. They vowed immediate financial compensation and the long-term monitoring of, and improvements in, the safety conditions at the factories run by their Bangladeshi suppliers<sup>9</sup>. Every year, around the anniversary of the Rana Plaza tragedy, the media echo the labour activist groups in reporting how surprisingly little has been done to deliver on that promise<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign (2013) Rana Plaza: a man-made disaster that shook the world. Available at <https://cleanclothes.org/ua/2013/rana-plaza> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>6</sup> 'Pope Francis Condemns "Slave Labor" In Bangladesh: "Goes Against God"' (2013) *The Huffington Post*, 1 May. Available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/01/pope-francis-slave-labor\\_n\\_3191288.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/01/pope-francis-slave-labor_n_3191288.html) (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>7</sup> 'Bangladesh Building Collapse: Factory "Supplied High Street Fashion Retailers"' (2013) *The Huffington Post UK*, 24 April. Available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/24/bangladesh-building-collapse\\_n\\_3147634.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/04/24/bangladesh-building-collapse_n_3147634.html) (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>8</sup> Clean Clothes Campaign (2013) Who paid up and who failed to take responsibility? Available at <https://cleanclothes.org/safety/ranaplaza/who-needs-to-pay-up> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Manik JA, Greenhouse S and Yardley J (2013) Western Firms Feel Pressure as Toll Rises in Bangladesh. *The New York Times*, 25 April. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/26/world/asia/bangladeshi-collapse-kills-many-garment-workers.html> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Alam J (2014) 'Rana Plaza collapse: What's changed, one year later?' *CTV News*, 24 April. Available at <http://www.ctvnews.ca/world/rana-plaza-collapse-what-s-changed-one-year-later-1.1790036> (accessed 26 July 2017).

Aulakh R (2015) 'Two years after Rana Plaza collapse big problems remain'. *The Star*, 22 April. Available at <https://www.thestar.com/news/world/2015/04/22/two-years-after-rana-plaza-collapse-big-problems-remain.html> (accessed 26 July 2017).

Chandran R (2016) 'Three years after Rana Plaza disaster, has anything changed?' *Reuters*, 22 April. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-bangladesh-garments-lessons-analysis-idUSKCN0XJo2G> (accessed 26 July 2017).



In addition to very dramatic and seemingly singular events, such as the Foxconn suicides or the collapse of Rana Plaza, the media occasionally offer poignant, sometimes individualised, stories to illustrate more systemic and recurring phenomena. In early May 2017, for example, a story broke, also in the sensational press, of an American shopper who found a chilling note in a handbag purchased at Walmart<sup>11</sup>. The note, written by an inmate, described the deplorable conditions of forced labour at a Chinese labour camp. In June 2017, in turn, the media were baffled by the discovery that Ivanka Trump-labelled clothes were produced in what was effectively an Indonesian sweatshop<sup>12</sup>. This controversy added an extra flavour to the protectionist trade doctrine promoted by her father, the president of the US, Donald J Trump, whom she served as an advisor. Furthermore, on a regular basis, the media raise the issue of child labour in cocoa production that centres around the uncomfortable dissonance between the sweet taste of chocolate and the bitter suffering that goes into its production, giving an unexpected twist to the stock phrase ‘guilty pleasure’<sup>13</sup>.

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Westerman A (2017) ‘4 Years After Rana Plaza Tragedy, What’s Changed For Bangladeshi Garment Workers?’ *NPR*, 30 April 2017. Available at <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/04/30/525858799/4-years-after-rana-plaza-tragedy-whats-changed-for-bangladeshi-garment-workers> (accessed 26 July 2017).

White GB (2017) ‘What’s Changed Since More Than 1,110 People Died in Bangladesh’s Factory Collapse?’ *The Atlantic*, 3 May. Available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/05/rana-plaza-four-years-later/525252/> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Connor N (2017) ‘US shopper claims she found note written by Chinese “prisoner” in new handbag’. *The Telegraph*, 3 May 2017. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/03/us-shopper-claims-found-note-written-chinese-prisoner-new-handbag/> (accessed 26 July 2017).

Golgowski N (2017) ‘Note Hidden In Walmart Purse Describes Inhumane Conditions In Chinese Prison’. *The Huffington Post*, 1 May 2017. Available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/note-walmart-chinese-prison\\_us\\_590725b5e4b0bb2d086f932b](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/note-walmart-chinese-prison_us_590725b5e4b0bb2d086f932b) (accessed 26 July 2017).

Michael T (2017) ‘“I’M A PRISONER” Woman finds shocking note from Chinese slave begging for help inside Walmart purse’. *The Sun*, 3 May. Available at <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3453755/note-chinese-prisoner-slave-inside-walmart-purse/> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Varagur K (2017) ‘Revealed: reality of life working in an Ivanka Trump clothing factory’. *The Guardian*, 13 June. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jun/13/revealed-reality-of-a-life-working-in-an-ivanka-trump-clothing-factory> (accessed 26 July 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Gregory A (2013) ‘Chocolate and Child Slavery: Say No to Human Trafficking this Holiday Season’. *The Huffington Post*, 31 October. Available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amanda-gregory/chocolate-and-child-slave\\_b\\_4181089.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/amanda-gregory/chocolate-and-child-slave_b_4181089.html) (accessed 26 July 2017).

In these brief moments of flimsy media exposure consumers are confronted with the harsh realities that lurk behind their seemingly innocent everyday products (see Hughes et al., 2008). To be sure, consumers' reactions – or lack thereof – to these revelations vary and cannot be taken for granted. Yet, at the very least, the public is made aware of the social provenance and conditions of production of goods available at their local grocer's and high-street shopping centre. The abstract faraway producers of the very tangible merchandise become, if only temporarily, a part of consumers' moral universe.

But what happens when the media spotlight inevitably turns elsewhere, and the previously vivid and graphic plight of distant producers again fades into the background as a tacit fact of life? After all, we are bound to continue consuming in order to satisfy our basic and higher-order needs. In doing so, we make daily purchasing decisions whose consequences go beyond the utmost tragic events that lay bare the usually invisible suffering of producers and workers in the Global South. How can the interest in global trade be sustained once the media sexy story fades away? How can consumers be sensitised to the predicament of distant producers to which they contribute by participating in the global marketplace? How can they be mobilised to act towards a more just and equitable global trade in their daily lives? These are some of the challenges that ethical trade organisations face in their everyday communication practices. These are also the questions that frame my research problem.

There are four parts to the remainder of this introduction. The first part sketches the field of research on ethical and fair trade, and locates my study within that field. The second part presents the research questions, outlines the theoretical frame and methodological premises, and formulates the major objectives of this project. The third part consists of ethnographic introductions to the empirical cases under investigation. The fourth part lays out the structure of this dissertation.

## 1.1 CARVING A NICHE

I would like to begin by stating openly that, for me, the main function of communication is to bring people closer together (see Orgad, 2012: 8). This is as true for face-to-face and mediated personal communication as it is for what Thompson (1995: 84) calls 'mediated quasi-interaction', that is, the 'social relations established by the media of mass communication'. In other words, communication ought to connect people either as embodied individuals at arm's length or as a symbolic human community at a distance. The objective of bringing distant people closer together is especially crucial for actors whose aim is to shape the attitudes and behaviours of the public. Their success hinges

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O'Keefe B (2016) 'Inside Big Chocolate's Child Labor Problem'. *Fortune*, 1 March. Available at <http://fortune.com/big-chocolate-child-labor/> (accessed 26 July 2017).

precisely on the ability to construct symbolic cognitive and moral proximity between people otherwise separated by geographical, social and cultural distance.

Here, it is worth noting that my understanding of communication is firmly embedded in Carey's (2008: 19) view of communication as a 'symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed'<sup>14</sup> (see also Silverstone, 2005). In this view, communication is not about mere transmission of information and messages via technology. Rather, communication is performative: it creates a specific vision of the world and – through negotiation rather than transmission – calls into being subjects willing to inhabit this world (see Orgad, 2012). Consequently, according to Carey (2008: 24), a study of communication is an examination of 'the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used'. With this starting point in mind, this dissertation launches a discourse-analytical investigation of ethical trade communication in Poland and Finland as moral education. In what follows, I will try to carve a niche that my study seeks to occupy within the extant body of research on ethical trade.

Ethical trade encases a wide set of initiatives that are aimed at reconstructing global trade as a web of more just and equitable relationships (Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Raynolds and Bennett, 2015). Most obviously, these initiatives have to do with terms of exchange and conditions of production (including, but not limited to, fair trade; extraction of rare 'conflict minerals' necessary for many electronic devices and obtainable only in conflict-ridden countries such as Congo; international trade agreements; and labour rights in the garment and footwear industries). But they also deal with other issues surrounding global trade, such as tax justice and environmental sustainability. Roughly speaking, then, ethical trade is an (attempt at) ethical intervention in the global trade governance.

To clip this diverse set of concerns together, academics often approach ethical trade through the prism of its formal goals and features, such as the desire to improve the livelihoods of poor working people around the globe (Freidberg, 2003), enhance the conditions of production (Barrientos and Dolan, 2006: 5; Clarke et al., 2007b: 584) and reverse pathological trading practices (Blowfield, 1999). Understood that way, ethical trade is often located in the purview of transnational corporations, which, effectively, control the terms of production and exchange (Barrientos and Dolan, 2006; Barrientos and Smith, 2007a; Blowfield, 1999; Nicholls, 2002). Tallontire and colleagues (2001: 5) rely on a more overarching definition of ethical trade as 'any form of trade that consciously seeks to be socially and environmentally, as well as economically, responsible'. Thus formulated, ethical trade stretches to actors

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<sup>14</sup> Carey (2008) terms his proposition a 'cultural approach to communication'. I am, however, wary of the catch-all concept of culture, which might not lend itself easily to the Foucauldian discourse analysis (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). Instead, I try to focus on a narrower notion of moral education, which is the construing of subjects equipped with a particular world view.

beyond corporations, such as consumers and political institutions. As a nexus of formal codes, solutions, practices and organisations geared towards achieving certain broadly economic changes, ethical trade has been analysed through the lenses of, among others, corporate social responsibility (Barrientos and Smith, 2007a; Blowfield, 1999; Smith and Barrientos, 2005), development studies (Barrientos and Dolan, 2006; Barrientos and Smith, 2007b), social and cultural geography (Freidberg, 2003) and anthropology (Smith and Dolan, 2006).

The extant research has also explored in some depth the individual practices of ethical consumption. In the same vein, Barnett and colleagues (2005a: 29) define ethical consumption as ‘any practice of consumption in which explicitly registering commitment to distant or absent others is an important dimension of the meaning of activity of the actors involved’ (see also De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). As such, ethical consumption is an individualised flip side of ethical trade. Studies on ethical consumption have been undertaken in disciplines such as consumer studies (Low and Davenport, 2007; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004), sociology (Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Lewis, 2008; Varul, 2009, 2011), anthropology (Dombos, 2008, 2012; Orlando, 2012; Vramo, 2012), geography (Barnett et al., 2005a; Carrier, 2010, 2012), political science (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti and Stolle, 2007; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013) and economy (Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Koszewska, 2011). Finally, fair trade – which I understand here as the best-known and most formalised incarnation of ethical trade, concerned specifically with the provision of ethical products – has been widely studied from the perspectives of sociology (Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Reynolds, 2002, 2006; Renard, 2003; Wheeler, 2012b), development studies (Arce, 2009; Dolan, 2007, 2008; Tallontire, 2000, 2009; Valkila, 2009, 2014), political science (Archer and Fritsch, 2010; Brown, 2007; Clarke et al., 2007a, b; Fridell, 2006), anthropology (Berlan, 2008; Luetchford, 2008; Lyon, 2006; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Robbins, 2013), geography (Goodman, 2004, 2010; Popke, 2006) and business studies (Doherty et al., 2012; Gendron et al., 2009; Huybrechts and Reed, 2010; Nicholls, 2010; Nicholls and Opal, 2005).

The research on ethical trade, ethical consumption and fair trade conducted by media and communication scholars is, to the best of my knowledge, scant, scattered and, in general, not very recent (Banaji and Buckingham, 2009; Lekakis, 2013; Littler, 2008; Ramamurthy, 2012; Touri, 2016; Ward and de Vreese, 2011). Of these studies, Littler’s (2008) is primarily a theorising account of various incarnations of ‘radical consumption’, including fair trade, ethical consumption and downshifting. Through a wide range of examples, Littler discusses and contextualises the moralities, possibilities and limitations of consumption as a way to bring about social change. Ward and de Vreese (2011), in turn, study the online behaviours of young ‘political consumers’ in the UK. Through a quantitative survey research, they demonstrate that young people routinely engage in ‘socially conscious consumption’, which also has modest tentative potential for encouraging

certain forms of political participation, both online and off (Ward and de Vreese, 2011: 409). From a somewhat reverse perspective, Banaji and Buckingham (2009) look at websites promoting ethical consumption as a case study for exploring the potential of the Internet for promoting civic engagement and participation among young people. Indeed, they find that the online content produced by ethical trade organisations offers new ways of addressing young people as both citizens and consumers (Banaji and Buckingham, 2009: 1220). In contrast, Ramamurthy's (2012) investigation of content produced by ethical trade organisations, this time fair trade advertising, is very critical of representations of producers used therein. I engage with her postcolonial critique in more detail in Section 3.3. Lekakis's (2013) book, in turn, comprehensively studies 'coffee activism', which she defines as spanning the fair trade movement as well as the actors outside the official network. In doing so, she analyses the digital content, production side and the audience aspect of coffee activism's communication. Finally, Touri's (2016) most recent contribution grapples with the communication between producer communities in India and their commercial buyers from Europe and North America. Looking through the prism of development communication, she explores different paths to empowerment offered to Southern producers by commercial partnerships. At the same time, she identifies the gap in communication between producers and consumers that commercial buyers slowly begin to bridge (Touri, 2016).

The research on ethical trade communication carried out outside media and communication studies is mainly concerned with marketing and advertising. In particular, it revels in critical readings of representations deployed in not very recent fair trade campaigns. Such analyses have been conducted by anthropologists (Berlan, 2008; M'Closkey, 2010), geographers (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman, 2004), development scholars (Wright, 2004), sociologists (Adams and Raisborough, 2008, 2011; Scrase, 2011; Varul, 2008) and business researchers (Low and Davenport, 2005a). Valuable as these critical studies are, they very often focus on representations and narratives, and generally ignore the context in which they are produced and received. Indeed, the investigations of content producers – that is, ethical trade organisations (Balsiger, 2010; Dolan, 2005, 2007; McDonagh, 2002; Nicholls, 2002; Wright and Heaton, 2006) – and of audiences (Wheeler, 2012b; Wright and Heaton, 2006) are rare.

This study hopes to fill a void in research on ethical trade communication by contributing an analysis of recent practices in contexts beyond the usually studied UK and US. It turns the spotlight on organisations as key actors in ethical trade and focuses on their role as mediators between producers and consumers; the role that Touri (2016) sees as only emerging. To that end, I approach communication from the perspective of mediation theory (see Silverstone, 2005) and zoom in on the moment of 'production' in the circulation of meaning (Ong, 2014). To situate and analyse this moment, the study follows various threads and enters different modes. It probes, albeit only

secondarily, the moment of ‘text’ in mediation, that is, its content (Ong, 2014). It also reconstructs subject positions submerged in this communication, and tries to locate this communication in the social context in which it is produced and received (see Ong, 2014; Orgad, 2012; Silverstone, 2005). Given the paucity of relevant scholarship in the field of media and communication studies, I cull from various disciplines in formulating the theoretical and methodological framework of this dissertation. I also try to bring these disparate elements into dialogue with the theory of mediation contained mainly in humanitarian communication.

## 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH APPROACH

Theoretically, this dissertation sets out to occupy the niche in media and communication studies on ethical trade by situating ethical trade in the framework of mediation. In a nutshell, I rely on the approach to mediation charted by Silverstone (1999, 2002, 2007). In this light, mediation emerges as an ethically charged communication process where social values and meanings are negotiated and circulated. Ethical trade communication, then, has two levels: a quintessential level of *everyday communication practices* and their content, and a *symbolic layer of mediation*. This analytical distinction underpins the vocabulary of this dissertation.

Combining my normative approach to communication with the Silverstonian notion of mediation, I conceptualise ethical trade as a mediated relationship between human actors – specifically, producers in the ‘Global South’ and consumers in the ‘Global North’ – in which economic exchange is explicitly governed by moral principles (see Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Goodman, 2004; McEwan et al., 2017). Thus formulated, ethical trade ceases to be merely a set of formal goals, production-oriented guidelines and consumption-related practices. Instead, it becomes a communication problem: its viability relies not on an orientation intrinsic to some people and not to others, but on a moral disposition that must be constructed by ethical trade organisations through mediation<sup>15</sup>. Hence, the exploratory research question asks simply:

**RQ 1:** *How do ethical trade organisations mediate between producers and consumers?*

To downsize this voluminous research question to a manageable proportion, I am particularly interested in this study in how ethical trade communication as mediation operates to enable Northern consumers to morally encounter Southern producers (see Noddings, 1984). I propose that this is achieved via two modes of mediation. The first mode seeks to establish

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<sup>15</sup> For the theorisation of solidarity as a communication problem that inspired my approach see Chouliaraki (2013b: 2).

*mediated familiarity*, that is, a representation-anchored cognitive connection based on factual knowledge and a degree of affinity between consumers and producers (see Chouliaraki, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999). The second mode, moral education, serves to instill in consumers the moral disposition that enables them to act on the plight of producers (see Goodman, 2004). I select ‘solidarity’, ‘care’ and ‘responsibility’ as more concrete moral attitudes<sup>16</sup> in which the disposition promoted by ethical trade can be anchored. While this selection is, in the end, arbitrary, it is also firmly grounded in both literature and empirical material. To obtain analytical concepts, I theorise solidarity as a ‘morality of cooperation’ (Fenton, 2008: 49); care as the dialectics between, on the one hand, care for oneself and close ones, and, on the other hand, care for Southern producers as distant strangers (see Miller, 2001a); and responsibility, following Iris Marion Young (2003, 2004, 2006), as a moral and political obligation shared by a constellation of actors to alter the unjust structures of global trade<sup>17</sup>.

While solidarity, care and responsibility are often evoked in research concerned with ethical and fair trade, they are rarely used analytically and problematised. That is, scholars either take them for granted as the always already present features of ethical trade or lament their loss and dissolution in the movement’s present moment (e.g., Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Goodman, 2004; Low and Davenport, 2007). In ‘suspending’ solidarity, care and responsibility and adopting them as analytical concepts, I take another approach and ask how the disposition predicated on these moral attitudes might be construed in ethical trade communication. Consequently, the baseline empirical question about mediation gains its subquestions:

**RQ 1a:** *How is solidarity articulated in ethical trade communication?*

**RQ 1b:** *How is care articulated in ethical trade communication?*

**RQ 1c:** *How is responsibility articulated in ethical trade communication?*

The theoretical outlook on communication as a process of reality construction (Carey, 2008) adopted in this research as well as its empirical interest naturally lend themselves to discourse-analytical approaches, of which the ‘Foucauldian’ discourse analysis is my preferred option. The suitability of this approach is evident, among other things, in the ethical trade’s

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<sup>16</sup> I term solidarity, care and responsibility *moral*, rather than *ethical*, attitudes to retain their clear connection with moral education. The division between morality and ethics in ethical trade is a convoluted one, but in this study morality pertains to individuals’ subjectivities and actions, and ethics is concerned with governance.

<sup>17</sup> From Young (2006: 112), I also borrow the sociological understanding of structures as ‘historical givens in relation to which individuals act, and which are relatively stable over time. Social structures serve as background conditions for individual actions by presenting actors with options; they provide “channels” that both enable action and constrain it’.

foundational premise that the global economy with its trade regime is not established once and for all. Rather, it is contingent and continuously constructed through discursive and ideologically loaded policies and, thus, open to reworking and change (see Archer and Fritsch, 2010). This assertion is in accord with Foucauldian ontology, which presumes that discourses – like communication – have performative properties: more than ‘words’ used to describe ‘things’, discourses are simultaneously descriptive and productive of social reality (Foucault, 1972: 48; 1982b: 781; Orgad, 2012). In parallel with objects, a discourse also constructs its subjects. That is, each discourse presupposes a desired subject position that its recipients are inclined, but not bound, to adopt. With that in mind, this study asks a second, methodologically motivated, research question:

**RQ 2:** *What subject positions does ethical trade communication construct for its recipients?*

The Foucault-inspired discourse-analytical framework departs from the strictly linguistic approach to discourse in that it takes a keen interest in systemic material circumstances and non-discursive practices. Vitaly, discourse in Foucauldian understanding is anchored in, and accountable to, the material – historical, social, cultural and political – conditions in which it is produced and received (Orgad, 2012: 29). Thus, according to Foucauldian ontology, discourses interact and interplay with the material ‘reality’. To address this ‘materialist’ interest (Olssen, 2003), the study poses a research question with a more theorising ambition:

**RQ 3:** *Why is ethical trade mediated the way it is in Poland and Finland?*

Within this frame, ethical trade communication qua moral education can be methodologically approached as a discourse geared towards constructing consumers who consider the impact on faraway producers and workers in making their everyday buying decisions (e.g., Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Barnett et al., 2005a; Massey, 2006). Inside that discourse, solidarity, care and responsibility operate as nodal points, that is, essential signifiers (Howarth, 1998; Torfing, 1999). Tying this elementary methodological framework back to the research questions, this study proceeds in three concurrent and circular moves. Firstly, it looks at how ethical trade organisations mediate between producers and consumers through inquiring into the specific articulations of solidarity, care and responsibility. In doing so, I lean on Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985: 105) understanding of articulation as ‘any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice’. In the second move, I attempt to gauge what these moral education discourses try to accomplish, particularly in terms of constructing positions for the recipients as moral subjects. Finally, I tentatively probe why these discourses are arranged the way they are through exploring the materiality to which moral education as a discourse may attach itself.



Consequently, the objectives of this study are both theoretical and empirical. On the theoretical level, I pursue ethical trade from the thus far underemployed perspective of communication studies. In doing so, I aim to offer a reading of ethical trade as a communication problem that provides an alternative to the conventional understanding of ethical trade as a predefined set of practices prescribed to address the inequalities of global trade (see Adams and Raisborough, 2010). The theoretical objective is, thus, twofold and two-directional: by reconceptualising ethical trade I seek to contribute to the interdisciplinary body of research on the phenomenon, and by applying the framework of mediation in a new setting I hope to enrich the conceptual texture and strengthen the empirical footing of this theory. Empirically, I focus on two understudied settings: Poland and Finland have not been thoroughly dissected in the context of ethical trade. This brings us to the final objective that emerged at a later stage of my doctoral research. While learning about offbeat setting has merits of its own, it also ushers in a more theoretically inclined argument. Namely, I attempt to disrupt the understandings of ethical trade produced in the Anglosphere and peculiar to that context, but circulating within academia as universally applicable and taken for granted.

### **1.3 EMPIRICAL CASES**

As previously mentioned, this study looks at ethical trade communication qua moral education in the empirical contexts of Poland and Finland. Even though I concentrate on two geographically bounded societies – although both have a rich history of emigration – I am mindful of the traps of methodological nationalism (Sassen, 2010). Thus, I neither view them as pre-given and stable units of analysis, nor try to confine the global phenomenon of ethical trade to nation state containers. Rather, I am curious about how the global discourses and practices of ethical trade pan out in the very particular, although by no means entirely unique, local settings. This is important, because for moral and ethical questions the ‘national’ community, constructed in relation to the cultural and social context, is still the primary reference point (see Belk et al., 2005; Cherrier, 2007). In other words, ‘our’ response to distant others is negotiated in relation to who ‘we’ think we are and what ‘our’ place is in the global processes and structures that connect ‘us’ to distant others (see Orgad, 2012). This local dimension is largely absent from the ethical trade scholarship with its universalising tendencies.

The selection of Poland and Finland as research settings in the context of ethical trade is an unorthodox one, particularly given the smallness of both markets. In Poland, a rather sizeable European country, ethical trade has not yet taken off, rendering the sales of ethical products negligible. This nascent phase, however, offers a unique setting for operations of ethical trade organisations as mediators, which makes their task to educate consumers especially urgent. Finland’s small size – a nation of a mere 5.5 million –

naturally limits the quantitative expansion of ethical trade as a market niche. Yet, these growth restrictions might invite more ambitious approaches to ethical trade that transcend the usual concerns over sales and consumption. Finland's consistent record as a socially progressive country seems to testify to this potential. Thus, both Poland and Finland provide promising communicative contexts for studying ethical trade communication as moral education.

Empirically, this project zooms in on two organisations: Pizca del Mundo, the first fair trade firm in Poland, and Eetti (Pro Ethical Trade Finland), the main Finnish NGO working in the area of equitable global trade, sustainable production and responsible consumption. Selecting a commercial entity on a par with a non-profit organisation reflects the increasingly hazy division of labour in moral education (Lekakis, 2013; Vestergaard, 2008). A growing preoccupation on the part of companies with ethical conduct stems from the acknowledgement of their prominent role in determining the values of society (Lury, 2011). This is evident in, for example, the popularity of cause-related marketing in which businesses align with non-profit organisations (see Aronczyk, 2013; Lekakis, 2013). Most crucially, as will be discussed in more detail below, both Pizca del Mundo and Eetti have played a pivotal role in developing the ethical trade market and movement in their respective countries. And, as we will see in the empirical analysis, they typify two distinct approaches to ethical trade communication: while Pizca del Mundo's communication centres on representations of producers and the firm itself, Eetti concentrates on the structures and processes of global trade and the role of consumers therein.

With that in mind, it is crucial to stress here that I do not intend to compare the two organisations. The glaring differences between them, as well as between the local contexts in which they operate, defy comparison. Moreover, there are significant dissimilarities in the research design of the two case studies. Although they both ask the same main research questions (RQ 1, RQ 2 and RQ 3), they arrive at the answers through different means. While the case study of Pizca del Mundo employs a mosaic of analytical concepts including proper distance, solidarity and care, the investigation of Eetti centres on the notion of responsibility. While Pizca del Mundo's communication is approached primarily through the content of their Facebook page, the case study of Eetti plunges into direct and interpersonal communication accessed through participant observation.

There were two primary reasons for the disparate designs of the two case studies. Firstly, the accessibility of Eetti, which, in contrast to Pizca del Mundo, operated in the same city in which I am permanently based, allowed for more intense and prolonged engagement. Secondly, I became acquainted with Eetti further down the line of my doctoral project, when the research focus was already crystallising. That is, the research questions that this dissertation grapples with were firstly roughly formulated during the study of Pizca del Mundo's communication, and later guided my inductive investigation of Eetti.

## PIZCA DEL MUNDO

The first empirical case in this dissertation is Pizca del Mundo, a Polish fair trade brand. I can recall that my first ‘encounter’ with Pizca del Mundo in summer 2013 was rather random and mediated by an Internet search engine. At that point, I was planning to study the use of social media by fair trade brands in Poland, none of which I knew. On the Facebook page, they were presented as the ‘first’ Polish fair trade brand, established in 2012. Even though I came to qualify this claim during my research<sup>18</sup>, the relevance of Pizca del Mundo on the Polish fair trade market is indisputable. By importing fair trade ingredients directly from the certified Southern producers, the brand can offer more accessible prices for their products, which is important for Polish consumers, who are described as, by and large, price-sensitive and unaware of fair trade (Bołtromiuk, 2009; Radziukiewicz, 2013; Szubska-Włodarczyk and Paszko, 2012). In addition to providing affordable products, Pizca del Mundo’s continuous engagement with a variety of educational and awareness-raising projects renders the firm a case well worth studying.

The Pizca del Mundo brand is owned by Szczypta Świata (‘A Pinch of the World’ in English, ‘Pizca del Mundo’ in Spanish), a small family firm located in a town of 9,000 inhabitants in the region of Greater Poland<sup>19</sup>. The founder of the company described it to me as primarily an online wholesaler, catering to cafés and stores, with an offline store as a minimal addition to all other operations. In December 2015, Pizca del Mundo formally employed three people.

The firm was set up in 2005 by a couple of then recent geography graduates, Aga and Borys. Aga wears dreadlocks, likes colourful clothes and sports ethnic jewellery, the combination of which makes her look rather extravagant in a small Polish town. As a student, she travelled extensively in South America. Travelling as she did on a shoestring budget, she mingled with the locals more than she would have if she had stayed in luxury hotels and isolated tourist resorts. These encounters sparked her interest in local handicrafts and prompted the idea of selling them in Poland. Subsequently, Aga has been a primary force behind the company, keeping in close touch with Southern producers through frequent meetings at trade fairs as well as regular visits to the cooperatives that supply Pizca del Mundo. Meanwhile, Borys had continued studying to obtain a doctoral degree and later went on to conduct part-time academic research on the impact of fair trade on producer communities in different countries across three continents. Based on a three-

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<sup>18</sup> The key qualifications include the fact that not all of Pizca del Mundo’s products are formally certified; that running their own brand is but a small portion of the operations of Pizca del Mundo’s parent company; and while they were indeed at that time the only fair trade *brand*, of course there were also other Polish fair trade firms that operated in the food sector and otherwise as national distributors of foreign products.

<sup>19</sup> For reasons of clarity, I will be consistently referring to both the firm and the brand as ‘Pizca del Mundo’ as they are, in fact, a single business entity.

year project that included fieldwork in Ghana, Peru and India, he produced a report addressed to the general public and published by the Polish Fair Trade Association. In addition, the findings resulted in Pizca del Mundo terminating their contract with one of the Fairtrade-certified cooperatives, which was found not to conform to the ethical standards that Aga and Borys strive to pursue in their work. Despite his intensive involvement in the workings of the company, Borys is not formally employed there.

The picture of Pizca del Mundo that emerges from this brief introduction is of knowledgeable and well-travelled people dedicated to the welfare of producers in the Global South, with some of whom they have close personal ties. While committed to fair trade as a way of moving towards the goal of systemically improving the livelihoods of Southern producers, Aga and Borys nevertheless remain constructively critical of the system. In fact, Aga has said that for Pizca del Mundo fair trade had emerged as an intuitive business ethos, not as an already defined concept tied to a concrete organisational scheme:

[W]e started [our engagement with fair trade] organically, from the roots. We were doing something that was fair trade, but we didn't know that it was called that, that it was formalised, and that somebody was certifying it. Maybe that's actually the key. We have an inner conviction that this is how [trade] should be. Even if we see that some formal aspects [do not work], that Fairtrade has flaws, what we do goes much deeper, therefore we do not reject Fairtrade. (Interview with Aga, 18 December 2015) <sup>20</sup>

Regardless of over ten years of existence and a massive effort invested into Pizca del Mundo, the business is still to attain financial stability. This unpredictability, and even precariousness, is at times problematic for the owners, especially because of the need to provide for two home-schooled sons. Thus, the couple's commitment to remain in the fair trade business might have limits that have not yet been reached or even charted:

Honestly speaking, I am quite impressed with ourselves that we are still motivated. That we are still working. If, besides the inner satisfaction and motivation and some kind of prestige that we are the first Polish [fair trade] brand, we do something great, we also had financial security,

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<sup>20</sup> In a short video that Fairtrade Polska produced about Pizca del Mundo as an example of a good business practice for a pan-European project on solidarity economy, Aga restated this point: 'What we care about is how a certain producer benefits from their involvement in the Fair Trade system. We try to learn as much as we can about that. This is also why direct contact is so important to us, because we want to see it for ourselves. We are not fair trade bigots. We really try to assess everything critically, also the ideal of Fair Trade, which is very important to us. But we see errors, we see imperfections and we want to check by ourselves how it actually works in reality. And these producers whom we are able to visit, their situation gives no reason for doubts. And it gives us satisfaction that we don't cover up anything we don't like.' The video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZaUi8f2VKo> (accessed 22 February 2017). I mostly use the English translation embedded in the video with small adjustments for accuracy.

maybe then things would be different... We are aware that if the business is poor next month, we will derail. This situation is not particularly comfortable or conducive to development. (Interview with Aga, 18 December 2015)

Their ambition for the future, once their financial standing is secure, is to open an educational centre where one could learn about the production chains of coffee and chocolate. This aspiration aptly illustrates Pizca del Mundo's inclination to educate consumers about global trade and the Global South.

On the Facebook page, Pizca del Mundo spell out their mission in terms of 'providing Polish consumers with the opportunity to purchase high-quality ethical products... striv[ing] to contact the primary producers and shorten the supply chain, while maintaining the fair partnership standards which are the best guarantee of stable and sustainable development'. As I mentioned earlier, by importing fair trade ingredients directly from certified Southern producers, the firm is able to offer more accessible prices for the fair trade products sold under their own brand than for imported ready-made fair trade products of similar quality. Nevertheless, although affordable in comparison to other fair trade goods, Pizca del Mundo's products are more expensive than regular non-fair trade alternatives. Aga explained that the price difference was a consequence of Pizca del Mundo's products being of much higher quality. Furthermore, she forcefully argued that the minimum price and development premium paid to producers had a negligible impact on the consumer price.

Pizca del Mundo offer their own coffee (beans, ground and instant), hot cocoa drinks, cocoa beans and yerba mate. Coffee beans are the apple of the firm's eye. Thus, the coffee supply chain is the shortest and the most closely scrutinised. The Fairtrade-certified coffee is sourced mainly from Peruvian cooperatives with which Pizca del Mundo are continuously in close contact, and whom they try to visit annually<sup>21</sup>. Such tight relations were established despite Pizca del Mundo being a small customer with a low purchasing rate. After the coffee beans have been delivered from Peru by sea (usually to Hamburg), they are transported to a small Fairtrade-certified speciality roaster in Warsaw. However, the coffee loses its certificate as it reaches the shelves in the Pizca del Mundo shop: the firm cooperates with Fairtrade International (FLO) under the licensee agreement, because their revenues are too small for them to go through the process of full certification. Instant coffees and hot cocoa drinks, on the other hand, carry the Fairtrade labels as they are fully processed and packed by Pizca del Mundo's certified subcontractor in

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<sup>21</sup> Although Pizca del Mundo also source from Honduras and Ethiopia, the relationships with the cooperatives in those countries are not close and personal, but mediated through Austrian and Slovak intermediaries. In these cases, they use the Fairtrade system – rather than personal experience – as a guarantee of adherence to the Fairtrade standards. (Interview with Aga, 18 December 2015)

Austria. The last product, yerba mate<sup>22</sup>, is manufactured almost entirely in Latin America and certified with the 'Fair for Life' label issued by the Swiss Institute for Marketecology. Yerba mate leaves are blended with spices and herbs, and packed in the backroom of Pizca del Mundo's store. In addition, the firm is continuously looking for ways to expand their shipments from the direct suppliers by, for example, placing collective orders with other Polish companies, some of whom were previously uninterested in fair trade. Here, again, the role of Pizca del Mundo as a fair trade advocate is evident: they seek to convert to fair trade not only consumers, but also their business 'competitors' with whom they readily cooperate for the benefit of producers.

As the above description shows, Pizca del Mundo is a small firm, often operating on a shoestring budget. This has obvious consequences for their communication practices, especially so in combination with a limited demand for, and interest in, ethical products in Polish society, which will be discussed in detail in Section 2.4. Firstly, Pizca del Mundo's marketing efforts are minimal. Unlike many other fair trade brands, Pizca del Mundo do not use product packaging as a platform for sharing information about producers. Instead, their products are designed to be aesthetically pleasing, adorned with fairy-tale-style graphics by a local artist. As already mentioned, Pizca del Mundo have a Facebook page<sup>23</sup>, which is the only channel of mediated communication managed, though not overly diligently, by the firm, and which will be the object of much of the empirical investigation reported in Chapter 5. In sum, rather than investing in advertising campaigns, the firm puts its trust in spontaneous 'word of mouth': personal recommendations of satisfied customers (individual as well as 'corporate'), blog posts and online reviews.

Secondly, the firm has almost no media visibility. Most of the few media items retrieved through a Google search for the company's name were produced by niche, food industry portals of limited interest to the general public<sup>24</sup>. The voice of Borys as an individual expert on topics to do with fair

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<sup>22</sup> Raw and roasted cocoa beans – new products certified by the Swiss Institute for Marketecology – were introduced to the product catalogue after my fieldwork, thus I am not familiar with their supply chain.

<sup>23</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/PizcaDelMundo/> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Kodłubański T (2017) 'Fairtrade – bardziej uczciwe rolnictwo i handel' [Fairtrade: A more just agriculture and trade]. *Agrofakt*, 22 October. Available at <https://www.agrofakt.pl/fairtrade-uczciwe-rolnictwo-i-handel/> (accessed 22 January 2018).

'Pierwsza polska marka Fair Trade już na rynku' [The first Polish fair trade brand enters the market]. *Biokurier*, 30 August 2012. Available at <http://biokurier.pl/jedzenie/pierwsza-polska-marka-fair-trade-juz-na-rynku/> (accessed 22 January 2018).

trade, tourism and global justice was, in turn, slightly more present: primarily in thematic and alternative<sup>25</sup>, but also in mainstream, media<sup>26</sup>.

Borys's activity as an author of media items, rather than only a journalists' interviewee, testifies to Pizca del Mundo's position as vocal advocates of fair trade and active communicators. Indeed, a lot of their work revolves around communication, although the crux of it is personal and unmediated. Major promotional efforts of fair trade as well as the brand itself happen through invited participation in various organised events: fairs, festivals, open-air markets, workshops, lectures, panel discussions and debates.

### **EETTI (PRO ETHICAL TRADE FINLAND)**

The second empirical case is a Finnish non-governmental organisation, Eetti (Pro Ethical Trade Finland), which promotes equitable global trade, sustainable production and responsible consumption. The organisation was established in 2000 by a group of activists as Pro Fair Trade Finland (Repu). In a report on the state of fair trade across Europe in 2007, Krier (2008: 70) described the goal of Pro Fair Trade Finland as assisting Fairtrade Finland in the education of consumers and in the promotion of the fair trade model. In addition to fair trade, Eetti have, since the organisation's inception, been interested in structural and political issues surrounding global trade. Early on, these wider issues included, for example, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, whose aim was to establish a free trade area. Yet, Fairtrade remained the core focus of Eetti until the certificate became entrenched in the Finnish market and achieved a satisfactory level of recognition. Subsequently, the organisation's name changed in 2011 to Pro Ethical Trade Finland in order to more explicitly encompass a wider scope of the organisation's interests and activities in which it was involved.

In more detail, among the themes with which Eetti worked during my fieldwork were issues to do with fair trade, labour rights in the garment and shoe industries, tax havens and tax justice, sustainability and solidarity in the economy, conflict minerals and ethical electronics. The issues at hand were

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<sup>25</sup> Bińkowski B (2012) 'Sprawiedliwy Handel' [Fair trade]. *Filizanka Smaków* 6(34).

Bińkowski B (2014) 'Sprawiedliwy Handel. Jak to działa?' [Fair trade. How does it work?]. *Biokurier*, 9 May. Available at <http://biokurier.pl/jedzenie/sprawiedliwy-handel-jak-to-dziala/> (accessed 22 January 2018).

<sup>26</sup> Bińkowski B (2013) 'Podróżnik – to tylko brzmi dumnie' [A traveller – it only has a nice ring to it]. *Gazeta Wyborcza—Magazyn Świąteczny*, 16 August. Available at [http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,14449987,Podroznik\\_\\_\\_to\\_tylko\\_brzmi\\_dumnie.html](http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,14449987,Podroznik___to_tylko_brzmi_dumnie.html) (accessed 22 January 2018).

Stodolak S (2012) 'Czy portfel może być etyczny? Moralność w cennie' [Can a wallet be ethical?]. *Newsweek*, 19 November. Available at <http://www.newsweek.pl/biznes/wiadomosci-biznesowe/czy-portfel-moze-byc-etyczny--moralnosc-w-cenie,98672,1,1.html> (accessed 22 January 2018).

described as more problematic and less straightforward than Fairtrade, which tends to position itself as ‘the’ solution to the trade inequalities faced by the smallholder farmers in the Global South. Against that background, Eetti considered themselves to be concerned with problems that did not yet have an obvious solution.

As they are a grass-roots organisation through and through, Eetti rely considerably on volunteers and activists to promote their causes (see Krier, 2008: 70 for a very brief overview of the early Eetti activism). According to the often-repeated motto, Eetti not only want to educate consumers, but to ‘activate citizens’ who would pressurise brands as well as politicians into improving the situation of the underprivileged workers in the Global South. In June 2015, the number of paid memberships totalled some 700. The number of active volunteers, in turn, was estimated at approximately 200, half of whom were expected to take part in one event per year. The remaining 100 were thought to be more active, with about 50 participating in events quite regularly and the rest being involved in the actual organisation of the events. The most active Eetti volunteers organise themselves into local activist groups scattered around the country and, with the support of the office staff, arrange events aimed at raising awareness of ethical trade in their localities. The membership varies from group to group and, predictably, the level of activity of each group fluctuates over time, depending on the time resources of the volunteers.

To achieve their goals, Eetti cooperate with other organisations dealing with similar themes. Importantly, the cooperation is not limited to other Finnish organisations and Eetti’s counterparts in other Northern countries, but includes, for example, an Indian organisation, Cividep, which works towards ensuring labour rights and corporate accountability. Eetti is also involved in international networks gathered around themes to do with ethical trade: the Tax Justice Network, the Good Electronics Network geared towards human rights and sustainability in the global electronics supply chain, and the Clean Clothes Campaign, which focuses on improving working conditions and empowering workers in the global garment and sportswear industry. Importantly for this research, as a part of the Clean Clothes Campaign, Eetti is affiliated with, among others, the Buy Responsibly Foundation<sup>27</sup> – one of the member organisations of Fairtrade Polska – which coordinates the Campaign in Poland. Similarly, both organisations participate in the Good Electronics Network. Apart from international networks, Eetti has been and still is a partner to several EU-funded European projects and campaigns. In the past, the Make Chocolate Fair! campaign teamed Eetti up with the Buy Responsibly Foundation and the Fairtrade Coalition (the predecessor of Fairtrade Polska) in an effort to mobilise consumers to act towards a more just cocoa commodity chain. Finally, the ongoing project ‘Sustainable and Solidarity Economy’

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<sup>27</sup> The landscapes of the fair trade market in Poland and ethical trade movement in Finland will be discussed in much more detail in Sections 2.4 and 2.5, respectively.



(SUSY), whose goal is to identify and promote local and international initiatives and good practices in solidarity economy, has once again brought together Eetti and Fairtrade Polska. Interestingly, Fairtrade Polska nominated Pizca del Mundo as one of the solidarity business initiatives in Poland, establishing an indirect connection between Eetti and Pizca del Mundo.

Similarly to Pizca del Mundo and other organisations active in the field of ethical trade, Eetti strive to minimise the precariousness in the lives of Southern producers and workers, while their own operations are very much marked by uncertainty. The organisation, like many other small NGOs, largely depends on public funding – both European and national – with membership fees and fund-raising events as a relatively modest addition. The fickleness of fortune demonstrated itself clearly after the completion of my fieldwork, when at the turn of 2017 Eetti lost the funding from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs that had previously constituted the financial backbone of the global education projects. As a result, school visits were temporarily moved under the umbrella of Kepa, the national NGO platform for civil society organisations working around the issues of global development. The long-term future of global education workshops was haunted by the spectre of suspension starting in autumn 2017.

Under the conditions of limited and uncertain funding, Eetti is managed by the executive director and two to three part-time employees whose salaries are funded by the ongoing projects, all of whom seem to accept the precariousness of their own professional lives. The employees are supported by one or two salaried trainees at any given moment. The organisation is overseen by the board, which is composed of volunteers. Interestingly, but rather predictably, Eetti is a predominantly female environment. Over the course of my fieldwork, the administrative responsibilities changed hands once: from the executive director, who temporarily moved to Brussels to work at another organisation, to the previous global education coordinator, who became an acting executive director. This was followed by two further handovers after the fieldwork was completed: from the acting executive director, who moved on to a more stable position at another organisation, to one of the project workers, and then on to the original executive director after her return from abroad and subsequent maternity leave.

Their position as the main Finnish organisation dealing with ethical trade grants Eetti a certain aura of expertise and offers some access to mainstream media, especially in relation to sensitive and controversial topics to do with the performance of Finnish firms in the Global South. Eetti's representatives were invited to discuss the reports they published on the supply chains and sourcing policies of Finnish fashion brands<sup>28</sup>, and to contribute expert comments to

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<sup>28</sup> Paldanius J (2014) 'Nämä suomalaiset vaatemerkit pärjäävät huonosti eettisyysvertailussa' [These Finnish brands do badly in the ethical comparison]. *Ylex*, 15 October. Available at [https://yle.fi/ylex/ uutiset/nama\\_suomalaiset\\_vaatemerkit\\_parjaavat\\_huonosti\\_eettisyysvertailussa/3-7546046](https://yle.fi/ylex/ uutiset/nama_suomalaiset_vaatemerkit_parjaavat_huonosti_eettisyysvertailussa/3-7546046) (accessed 14 February 2018).

journalistic investigations<sup>29</sup>. Moreover, the organisation's long-time chairman of the board over the years penned several opinion pieces for the biggest daily, *Helsingin Sanomat*<sup>30</sup>. Eetti appreciate the role of mainstream media exposure and try to obtain their interest whenever possible, yet are mindful of the media's relatively short attention span. Thus, they continuously try to communicate with their supporters as well as the general public using their own channels. In doing so, they rely on social media platforms – most notably Facebook<sup>31</sup>, but also Twitter<sup>32</sup>, YouTube<sup>33</sup> and Instagram<sup>34</sup> – but primarily on personal communication. Like Pizca del Mundo, they participate in discussions and debates, but also organise workshops and training sessions of their own and arrange outreach events in cooperation with other similarly profiled organisations. Such events, given their overwhelmingly communicative character and function, will be the key object of the empirical analysis presented in Chapter 6.

## 1.4 ORGANISATION OF THE DISSERTATION

There are eight chapters to this dissertation. This chapter, together with Chapters 2 and 3, seeks to define ethical trade in general, and ethical trade qua mediation as moral education in particular. Chapter 4, in turn, constructs a philosophical and methodological approach to tackling ethical trade communication empirically. Chapters 5 and 6 attempt to decipher the actual articulations of moral education in Pizca del Mundo and Eetti's

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<sup>29</sup> 'Vaatefirmat rankattiin – Stockmann vastuullisin' [Clothing brands ranked – Stockmann the most responsible]. *Taloussanomat*, 15 October 2014. Available at <https://www.is.fi/taloussanomat/art-200001853174.html> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>29</sup> 'Kuningaskuluttaja julkistaa S-ryhmän ja Keskon omien vaatemerkkien valmistustehtaat' [Kuningaskuluttaja reveals S-chain and Kesko's own-brand clothes factories]. *Yle*, 19 February 2015. Available at <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2015/02/19/kuningaskuluttaja-julkistaa-s-ryhman-ja-keskon-omien-vaatemerkkien> [accessed 14 February 2018].

<sup>30</sup> Kylänpää A (2011) 'Reilun kaupan järjestelmä takaa monen toimeentulon' [Fair trade system guarantees income for many]. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 14 February. Available at <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000004787834.html> (accessed 14 February 2018).

Kylänpää A (2013) 'Sokerin alkuperästä ei tarjota tarpeeksi tietoa' [Not enough information is offered about the origins of sugar]. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 11 October. Available at <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000002680195.html> (accessed 14 February 2018).

Kylänpää A (2014) 'Sertifiointijärjestelmissä on eroja' [There are differences between certification systems]. *Helsingin Sanomat*, 18 October. Available at <https://www.hs.fi/mielipide/art-2000002770175.html> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/eetti/> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Available at [https://twitter.com/eetti\\_ry](https://twitter.com/eetti_ry) (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>33</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/EettiRy> (accessed 14 February 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Available at [https://www.instagram.com/eetti\\_ry/](https://www.instagram.com/eetti_ry/) (accessed 14 February 2018).

communication, respectively. Chapter 7 tries to anchor the ‘abstract’ discourses of moral education in the widely conceived everyday materiality. Finally, Chapter 8 speculates on how the study might enrich the texture of relevant academic discussions.

In more detail, Chapter 2 provides a theoretical basis for reconceptualising ethical trade as a moral relationship mediated by ethical trade organisations. It starts off by sketching the historical trajectory and the current political economy of global trade in the broadly understood Marxian spirit, with particular reliance on the world-systems theory. At the same time, the narrative remains conscious that the current material, political-economic, arrangements of global trade are produced and reinforced discursively and ideologically, and thus – by extension – communicatively. In this spirit, the chapter subsequently discusses two ways in which ethical trade systematically and discursively reworks the market economy: its cosmopolitan foundations, and the efforts to defetishise commodities and dismantle the myth of the almighty market. Following the theoretical considerations, the best-known and most formalised embodiment of ethical trade – that is, fair trade – is introduced both as a global system and on a national level in Poland. The final section of Chapter 2 presents an overview of ethical trade in Finland.

Chapter 3 builds a theoretical scaffolding for the empirical analysis of ethical trade communication. It opens with an elaboration of the framework of ethical trade communication qua mediation as moral education. In doing so, it primarily draws on the scholarship in the fields of ethics of communication and humanitarian communication. Next, it zooms in on the components of ethical trade communication as mediation: (1) representation as a carrier of mediated familiarity; and (2) moral education anchored in the dispositions of solidarity, care and responsibility. In conceptualising the elusive signifiers of solidarity, care and responsibility, I rely on media and communication scholarship, but also on the work of social and cultural anthropologists, geographers, political scientists and postcolonial theorists. Lastly, culling mainly from activist and organisational communication, the chapter provides an overview of the ethical trade communication repertoire, with a particular focus on the potential of social media for ethical trade communication.

Chapter 4 elucidates the philosophical foundations of the study and contemplates the methodological choices I made during the research process. It begins by outlining the post-structuralist paradigm, its ontology and its epistemology. Subsequently, it situates the study and its methodological approach within the post-structuralist discourse analysis, inspired primarily by Foucault, and secondarily by Laclau and Mouffe. Then, the chapter attempts to problematise the components of qualitative research that are usually taken for granted, such as objectivity, academic writing and data. Finally, the divergent designs of the two case studies are elaborated.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical analysis of Pizca del Mundo’s communication. It sets the scene with an ethnographic observation that

soberly situates social media in the everyday operations of Pizca del Mundo. Next, the chapter proceeds to the analysis of the representations of Southern producers deployed on Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page from the perspective of 'proper distance' (Silverstone, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008). Then, it moves on to examining the articulations of (branded) solidarity in Facebook content, followed by the investigation of articulations of care in Pizca del Mundo's conceptualisation of their communication as mediation between producers and consumers. Lastly, the chapter weaves all these disparate elements into a fair trade landscape projected in the firm's communication and briefly connects this landscape to the context in which it is received.

Chapter 6 reports on the empirical analysis of Eetti's communication as moral education through the prism of responsibility. It uses three entry points in order to do so. Firstly, the articulation of shared responsibility nexus is examined. Secondly, the chapter turns to the ways in which the subject position of citizen-consumers is construed in Eetti's communication as moral education. Thirdly, it looks at how Eetti volunteers become ensconced in the position of citizen-consumer furnished for them. The chapter concludes by bringing these three perspectives on responsibility together in a recharted landscape of global trade.

Chapter 7 seeks to synthesise the previously dissected articulations back into the discourses of moral education in Pizca del Mundo and Eetti's communication, and, subsequently, to anchor these reconstructed discourses in the material conditions of the societies in which the organisations operate. The chapter begins with the argument that the supposed universal morality of ethical trade is a utopia that does not find reflection in the moral economies proposed by the two organisations examined in this study. As such, it cannot be neatly superimposed on the 'situated moralities' of consumers. The chapter subsequently outlines how these situated moralities are shaped by historical, political, economic and cultural conditions. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on the consequences that the notion of situated moralities has for the concept of moral education.

Lastly, Chapter 8 attempts to tease out the specific theoretical and empirical contributions that this project hopes to make. Even though the bold ambition of developing practical guidelines is far beyond the modest scope of this study, the chapter nevertheless begins to reflect on how the knowledge gained in the course of this project can potentially be helpful to practitioners of ethical trade communication. Finally, while aiming to tie all the loose ends together, the chapter inevitably unties other knots that could open vistas for future explorations of ethical trade communication as moral education.

## **2 GLOBAL TRADE GOVERNANCE AND ETHICAL TRADE'S DISCURSIVE OPENINGS**

The material design of global trade is predicated on the ideological fantasy of a free market (Dean, 2009; Wallerstein, 2004). The liberal free market is imagined as an autonomous entity guided by a series of dehumanised mechanisms (Giesler and Veresiu, 2014). The blind ideological faith in self-regulatory market forces has led not only to the hegemony of neo-liberal/late-capitalist economic thinking (Dean, 2009), but also to the further augmentation of 'coloniality' in the relationships between the Global North and the Global South (Grosfoguel, 2007; see also Brown, 2007; Smith, 2016). Against this backdrop, ethical trade positions itself as an alternative to the conventional global trade.

Having said that, it is crucial to remember that both 'materiality' of global trade and discourses of ethical trade are products of ideologically suffused communication viewed as a process of social construction of reality (see Carey, 2008). In this constellation, ethical trade communication responds to both materially articulated structures and processes of global trade, and latent ideological discourses through which global trade was communicatively established and is continuously reproduced. Thus, the intention of this broad chapter is to bring the material arrangements of global trade into dialogue with their discursive understanding and reworking offered by ethical trade. In a sense, then, the account of global trade and foundations of ethical trade presented in the following can be treated as strategic communicative choices made by ethical trade in a bid to morally educate consumers.

With this in mind, there are five parts to this chapter. The first part presents one of the possible readings of the political economy of global trade: the reading that significantly resembles the accounts advanced by ethical trade organisations. The second part looks at ethical trade as a partial reworking of market economy. In the third part, the global fair trade system is introduced as the most popular institutionalised and formalised incarnation of ethical trade. The fourth and fifth parts zoom in on the fair trade market in Poland and ethical trade movement in Finland, respectively.

### **2.1 POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBAL TRADE**

In the context of current global trade, producers and consumers alike are enmeshed in extensive networks of trading relations that involve dozens of individuals, factories and firms (Hughes et al., 2008). This trade network stretches across the globe to establish the ties of 'planetary interdependence' (Polanyi, 2001: 190). Broadly speaking, the South depends on the North for

capital and technologies (see Porter, 1990; Prebisch, 1959; Sowa, 2011), and the North needs the South for primary commodities and industrial capacities (Braudel, 1977: 92; see also Calhoun, 2002). According to the late-capitalist myth of a 'win-win' trade, interdependence should ensure that the wealth generated through free market trade 'trickles down' to each trading party (Dean, 2009: 55; Dicken, 2002: 51; Prebisch, 1959; Sowa, 2011: 157). Flying in the face of this myth, ethical trade hinges on the implicit understanding that the constitution of free trade within the global market has reproduced the 'colonial' relationships and exacerbated the inequalities in wealth and living standards between North and South (Johnston et al., 2002: 25; Prebisch, 1959).

The adverse effects of global trade are evident in the predicament of Southern producers of primary commodities and sweatshop workers, which is part and parcel of global commodity chains (see Allen, 2008; Smith, 2016). In the case of Southern farmers, they are entangled in a complex network of local and international middlemen who take advantage of their low education and frequent illiteracy, coupled with extremely low bargaining power (Brown, 2007). The concentration of power in the global supply chains of primary commodities, such as cocoa and coffee, in the hands of an ever-shrinking pool of giant transnational corporations allows intermediaries to effectively manipulate prices and production rates (Brown, 2007: 270). As for sweatshops, their operations are usually commissioned by the Northern brands, primarily from the garment, footwear and electronic industries. The outsourcing, or externalisation, of production to Asian factories operates through contracts that specify in advance the tasks to be carried out, the required quality and delivery deadlines. Sweatshop production is propelled not only by their greedy local owners, but also by brand corporations that seek to satisfy their own thirst for continuous financial gain as well as consumers' perceived wish to buy products at the lowest possible price (see Miller, 2003).

In what follows, I will briefly outline how global trade produced and continuously reproduces inequity and dependency (Grosfoguel, 2007; Johnston et al., 2002; Prebisch, 1959). This condensed account will rely primarily on an amalgam of Marxian and Marxist approaches to political economy, most notably the world-systems perspective. Importantly, I opt for this approach even though I am mindful of its deterministic and reductionist tendencies (e.g., Pieterse, 1988; Robinson, 2011). My decision is guided by the fact that I do not intend to use the world-systems approach as an analytic device; after all, my study is not concerned with ethical trade as an economic phenomenon. Instead, I only engage in the economic aspect of the theory, divorcing it from its deterministic spillover into other domains, such as society and culture. Furthermore, the world-systems perspective serves me as a comprehensive background story – admittedly one of the many available stories – that might explain the current inequitable global trade relations. In that respect, as we shall see later, there is a significant convergence between the world-systems perspective and the stories of global trade told by Pizca del

Mundo and, especially, Eetti. Lastly, I intend to use the world-systems approach as a metageography whose vocabulary will be helpful in the theorising discussion presented in Chapter 7. In broad strokes, 'metageography' describes here the quasi-geographical imaginations through which one organises one's knowledge of the world (see Lewis and Wigen, 1997: ix).

## **COLONIAL ROOTS OF GLOBAL TRADE**

Trade, understood simply as an exchange of products and services between producers and consumers, has emerged as a way of satisfying the material needs of individuals and communities following their early specialisation in the production of different goods (Dicken, 2002: 43–44). For centuries, trade was a rather local phenomenon transpiring between neighbouring states, with the exception of luxury goods and rare raw materials that were transported over long distances to satisfy the longings of the wealthiest societal segments (Dicken, 2002). The 'intercontinental' trade started to intensify in the era of the European, more specifically British, imperialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (see Prebisch, 1959). Arguably, the whole imperial project unravelled due to a pursuit of new markets for European consumers and capital goods (see Brown, 1960). As such, it involved the destruction of already existing local industries, most particularly in India and China (Mandel, 1972).

In line with the protectionist mercantilist doctrine, European empires invested in cultivating their own industries while draining colonies as sources of wealth to the metropolis and colonisers (Gopal, 2006). Consequently, the international trade in the period of European imperialism was structured around the core-periphery division: the Western capitalist countries extracted raw materials from their dependencies, processed them within the metropolis and finally sold the manufactured products abroad, including back to the colonies, retaining the added value in the metropolis (Brown, 2007; Dicken, 2002; Gopal, 2006; Mandel, 1972; Prebisch, 1959; Sowa, 2011). To sustain this cycle, as dictated by the theory of 'comparative advantage', the colonies were urged to specialise in the production of several primary commodities whose higher-level processing was then carried out in the industrialised countries of North-West Europe and North America (Brown, 1960, 2007; Dicken, 2002; Wallerstein, 2004).

Predictably, the position of colonies in this arrangement was highly problematic. To state the obvious, the overseas dependencies served to externalise non-profitable economic activities and modes of production (Sowa, 2011). Not only were they exploited as a source of cheap on-site labour, but they were also abused through slave trade, a barbaric but inseparable element of global trade relations in the colonial period (Gopal, 2006: 86). Given the prolonged unidirectional extraction of value and the rare flows of capital and investment from metropolis to colonies (Brown, 1960), colonies became dependent on the 'centre' not only for manufactured goods, but also

for the resources necessary for the development of their own local industries (Brown, 2007: 268; see also Mandel, 1972; Smith, 2016; Sowa, 2011). Consequently, the colonies were excluded from reaping the early benefits of producing and trading on the nascent global market.

The turn of the twentieth century saw an unprecedented increase in the global flow of goods due to the growing demand generated by industrialisation and the advancement in transport and communication technologies (Dicken, 2002). In the longer run, this development coincided with the demise of 'colonialism' understood as an official administrative presence of the coloniser (Grosfoguel, 2007). Within this set-up, the former empires have continued on the trajectory of economic growth and wealth accumulation, periodically disturbed by self-inflicted financial meltdowns (Brown, 2015; Fairclough, 2012; Robinson, 2011). Meanwhile, the relative financial situation in many of the former colonies has only worsened (Prebisch, 1959; Sowa, 2011). This, according to Grosfoguel (2007: 220), proves that despite the political and administrative decolonisation, 'coloniality' remains: among other forms of subjugation, it preserves intact the 'economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racialized/ethnic groups with or without the existence of colonial administrations'. In the context of global trade, coloniality was preserved in the 'free' trade policies whose proliferation in the period following decolonisation forced the countries in the Global South to concentrate their economic efforts on increasing exports (Brown, 2007; Gopal, 2006; Grosfoguel, 2007; Prebisch, 1959). This move was imposed regardless of the growth in trade between developed industrial countries, which significantly thwarted the demand for products from the former colonies (Brown, 1960).

In more detail, the production of primary commodities and the unprofitable low-level processing were – and continue to be – externalised to the Global South, while the lucrative and sophisticated goods are produced and designed in the North. This disequilibrium is amplified by the contemporary 'knowledge economy' paradigm, whereby advanced market economies are to become industrially 'weightless' and focus on knowledge, research and development (Hardy, 2007: 762). The onus for primary production is, therefore, placed on the 'developing' countries. In what follows, I present an overview of three distinctive trajectories that elucidate how the introduction of free trade policies contributed to the actualisation of the neocolonial dependencies, rather than to the establishing of a universally beneficial global free market (see Brown, 1960; Dean, 2009; Gopal, 2006; Grosfoguel, 2007; Prebisch, 1959; Smith, 2016; Sowa, 2011).

The first path, identifiable in sub-Saharan Africa, involved the intensified exports of primary commodities (Brown, 2007; Chang, 2010). Free trade policies were introduced across Africa in the aftermath of the decline in prices of primary commodities (Brown, 2007; Chang, 2010; Dicken, 2002). Brown (2007: 269) enumerates several causes of the fall in commodity prices, such as the Northern populations redirecting their 'extra income' from goods to



services; the substitution of 'natural' materials in manufacturing by artificial counterparts; and the entry onto global markets of heavily subsidised competition from North America and Europe. African countries sought to compensate for the losses incurred in the export of raw materials with loans from international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The loans were granted on the condition that the local markets be developed and 'opened up' through the removal of import tariffs and price control. In practice, taking such a loan amounted to the acceptance of inferior trade conditions (Dean, 2009: 54; see also Chang, 2010). According to Chang (2010: 118), the imposition of free trade policies reversed the favourable development pattern in Africa (see also Johnston et al., 2002: 24). Prematurely subjected to international competition, the emerging local producers were driven out of business, and the vulnerable industrial sectors virtually dismantled. To repay the escalating debt and accumulating interest, African countries slid into soaring exports of primary commodities, such as cocoa and coffee. As a result, they entombed themselves in the monocultural production that fed the vicious circle of growing surplus and falling prices (Brown, 2007; Chang, 2010; Sowa, 2011: 191). From this originates the financial dependence of a large proportion of Southern agricultural producers, and especially smallholder farmers, on the volatile and capricious consumer demand in the Global North. The grave irony of this development is that cocoa and coffee cannot be cultivated in the climates of the Northern hemisphere, thereby rendering Northern consumers materially dependent on the South for the provision of their favourite delicacies.

The second trajectory, peculiar to certain countries of South, East and South-East Asia, involved the transition to the low-skill manufacturing performed by legions of super-exploitable and continuously replaceable workers (Smith, 2016; Young, 2006). For many Asian countries, relatively poor in natural resources, export-oriented industrialisation was the only viable option to jump on the capitalist bandwagon (Smith, 2016: 51). Using cheap labour as their main competitive advantage, Asian countries received a lot of labour-intensive, but basic and low-paid, manufacturing, such as sewing in the garment industry and assembly in consumer electronics (Allen, 2008). Most of this work is carried out in sweatshops that champion flexible production and employment. Sweatshops are hotbeds of human and labour rights violations, including wages below the subsistence level, long working hours in an unhealthy and dangerous environment, forced overtime and frequent intimidation (Allen, 2008; Smith, 2016). In practice, the workers are forced to accept these working conditions as the accelerating pace of urbanisation is not matched by the rate of job creation (Smith, 2016). Thus, in the overpopulated cities the choice all too often appears to be between sweatshops and hunger-inducing unemployment.

The third trajectory, encountered in Latin America, does not fit squarely into the trajectory of imperialist legacy. Unlike Africa and most of Asia, the lion's share of Latin America has been independent for nearly two centuries.

Moreover, the Latin American countries bear a much stronger cultural resemblance to Europe than do their African and Asian counterparts (see Wallerstein, 2011: 5). An illuminating insight into the Latin American condition is provided by dependency theory, which originated from the region. In his seminal article, Prebisch (1959) describes some conventional approaches to industrialisation practised in the countries traditionally specialised in the production of agricultural and primary commodities to elucidate how they contribute to the transferring of a portion of the benefits generated locally to the centres of global trade. More specifically, he attributes the underdevelopment in Latin America not to the political domination of foreign powers, but to too strong an economic reliance on trade with the dominant centre, the US at the time, and the simultaneous neglect of intracontinental trade (Prebisch, 1959: 267–268).

### **A METAGEOGRAPHY OF GLOBAL TRADE**

The key contribution of dependency theory was the understanding of underdevelopment not as a pre-given, original stage of the Global South, but as an outcome of market capitalism, and the consequent debunking of the myth of equality in global trade (Prebisch, 1959; Wallerstein, 2004: 12). To articulate this inequity, dependency theory resuscitated the core-periphery metageography in the context of the global economy. The core-periphery division of dependency theory, in turn, inspired the tripartite metageography of the world-systems approach.

The world-systems theory imagines the world as split into three successive zones that do not necessarily overlap with national borders: core, semi-periphery and periphery. Core and periphery are defined primarily in terms of the ownership of production processes: peripheral production processes are subjected to the rules of free trade and market, whereas core-like production processes are quasi-monopolised (Wallerstein, 2004: 18; see also Mandel, 1972: 49). In the metageography of the world-system this dyadic core-periphery model is complemented by the category of 'semi-periphery', that is, a geographical entity whose production processes are a near equilibrium of core-like and peripheral processes (Wallerstein, 1984: 7, 2004: 29). Alternatively, semi-peripheries can be described as intermediate states, a 'buffer' between core and periphery that combines some features of both (Zarycki, 2014: 5).

This division frames the unlevel playing field of global trade. While the sophisticated and technologically advanced quasi-monopolised processes are very difficult to relocate from the core, the peripheries and semi-peripheries are pitted against each other in a bid to host as much of the lower-grade production as possible. In this context, Sowa (2011: 194) writes about the 'irreplaceability' of the core as the most important trading partner for the periphery, and the easiness of switching between peripheral partners from the core's point of view. As expected, quasi-monopolised products and processes

– in the current economy, mostly those involving a high-skilled workforce and expensive technologies – are much more profitable than those with multiple, unqualified producers. Through this mechanism of unequal exchange, the core countries continue to strengthen their economic dominance, while simultaneously exacerbating competition among producers in the semi-periphery and periphery (see Prebisch, 1959; Sowa, 2011; Wallerstein, 2004).

According to the world-system metageography, the relationships among the three zones are structured by the nesting economic oppression (see Braudel, 1977: 82). In this configuration, the periphery is universally exploited through, for example, the ‘non-capitalist’ modes of production, such as modern slavery. The position of semi-peripheries is ambiguous: while oppressed by the core, they simultaneously capitalise on the weakness of the periphery. Meanwhile, the core countries are the ‘universal oppressors’ for whom participation in the global market has been unambiguously beneficial: they possess the largest economic capital and can impose the terms of exchange (see Sowa, 2011; Zarycki, 2014). Hence, the core’s interests and policies, which effectively steer global trade, can communicatively masquerade as the supposedly neutral and equitable – but in truth thoroughly constructed – mechanisms of the economic game of global trade (see Dean, 2009).

In short, the fantasy of ‘free’ trade nourishes the myth of the ‘win-win’ game. It obliterates the fact that the global free market creates both winners and losers, especially through the unevenly distributed protectionist measures such as subsidies for certain Northern industries and simultaneous tariffs for Southern importers (Dean, 2009: 56; see also Dicken, 2002; Smith, 2016). Some radical theorists argue that not only is a truly free trade a myth, but its materialisation would be an aberration in the trajectory of the actually existing capitalist system, shaped as it was by historical mercantilism and the continuous bending and circumventing of market rules and mechanisms (see Braudel, 1977; Sowa, 2011: 103). By communicatively exposing the deep-seated inequality of global trade, the ethical trade movement attempts to sensitise consumers to the lot of Southern producers and integrate an ethical dimension into what has become essentialised and dehumanised as a strictly economic exchange.

## **2.2 ETHICAL TRADE AS A COMMUNICATIVE REWORKING OF MARKET ECONOMY**

As Ryszard Kapuściński (2005: 8) reminds us, trade has been for centuries one of the most organic and essential arenas of encountering others (see also Trentmann, 2007). The role of trade has become even more profound in latecapitalism, where market exchange constitutes an ethical blueprint for human actions and interactions (Dean, 2009: 51; Romaniszyn, 2011; Sayer, 2000). Simultaneously, the conditions of trade encounters have changed dramatically. Local, small-scale exchanges still occasionally take place in the

physical or technologically mediated presence (e.g., on the phone or via email) of identifiable producers and consumers, or – at the very least – their representatives (Dean, 2009; Dicken, 2002). In the context of global trade, however, production and consumption have been ‘radically separated’ by the ever-growing physical, economic and moral distance (Archer and Fritsch, 2010: 111; see also Szczepański et al., 2011). In effect, consumers all too often have no way of knowing where and under what circumstances their goods come into being (Fridell, 2006). Thus, the anonymous and heavily mediated global trade seems to have dissolved any obligations that traditionally bound the two ends of a commodity chain. In a world where everyday commodities travel more than an average consumer, these objects are the most tangible tokens of interconnection and interdependence between people in the Global North and in the Global South (see Ahmed, 2000; Micheletti, 2008; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Yet, rampant consumerism and the continuous flood of commodities compel us to ignore the materiality of such tokens so deeply ingrained in the humdrum of everyday life. Ethical trade attempts to bring commodities back into the spotlight by communicatively revealing how they came into being and how they made their way into the Northern shops.

I understand ‘ethical trade’ as a concept rooted in the critique of the injustices of contemporary global trade, and founded on the belief that appropriate governance can make trade more equal (see Reynolds and Bennett, 2015: 3 for a similar outlining of ‘fair trade’ as a concept). Likewise, Hudson and Hudson (2003: 420) define what they call ‘alternative trade’ as an effort to radically alter the practices of production and exchange. In a similar vein, Freidberg (2003: 30) posits that the objective of ethical trade is ‘to make substantial improvements to the lives of poor working people around the world’. With respect to alleviating the predicament of impoverished Southern producers and workers, Blowfield (1999: 754) identifies two primary areas of concern for ethical trade: (1) the altering of unfair trading practices; and (2) improving the social, environmental and financial conditions under which goods are produced. This is echoed by Barrientos and Dolan (2006: 5) for whom ethical trade covers the amelioration of the ‘employment conditions of workers’ (see also Clarke et al., 2007b: 584).

Leaning on, but also departing from, the definitions of ethical trade as an intervention in global trade governance, I approach ethical trade as a trade that recognises itself as a mediated relationship between people, and, as such, is an economic exchange governed by moral principles that usually apply to human relations (see Goodman, 2004; Herman, 2010; McEwan et al., 2017). By adopting such a broad notion of ethical trade, I embrace a wide range of issues that ethical trade organisations deal with. Their concerns have to do with the terms of exchange and conditions of production (including fair trade, ethical electronics, international trade agreements, and labour rights in the garment and shoe industry), but also with other issues surrounding global trade such as tax justice and environmental sustainability (see Blowfield,

1999). At the end of the day, all these initiatives are aimed at reconstructing global trade as a web of more just, solidary, caring and responsible relationships built around long-lasting economic partnerships. In addition, by accentuating ethics, I seek to circumvent the equation of ethical trade with the easily dismissible, and sometimes cynical, applications of corporate social responsibility (Blowfield, 1999; cf. Freidberg, 2003).

## **COSMOPOLITAN FOUNDATIONS OF ETHICAL TRADE**

Ethical trade communication seeks to recast consumption as a moral issue, rather than an antithesis of morality (see Romaniszyn, 2011). In that regard, ethical trade has its roots in a long record of historically changing but always already moral landscapes of consumption (Miller, 2001b; Trentmann, 2007: 1097; see also Micheletti, 2003). Thus, as Trentmann (2007: 1098) urges, ethical trade is not ‘a new moral beginning’, but a result of the historical trajectory that included such diverse phenomena as anti-slavery, the cooperative movement, the campaigns favouring empire trade in Britain of the first half of the twentieth century and the original conception of free trade as the international concomitant of the welfare state. Morality and market, therefore, are not necessarily a binary opposition – their relationship might be simply obscured by the dominant political rationalities and discourses of the day (Trentmann, 2007).

Placed within the moral frame, consumption is permeated with ‘ordinary ethics’, loosely connected to the Foucauldian understanding of ethics as an active negotiation of personal conduct (see Zylinska, 2013), which reads the concerns for value, price and quality as acquired ethical competencies (Barnett et al., 2005a: 28). Besides self-oriented ethical values, consumption also entails mundane acts of taking a stand on the issues of justice and environmental protection through choosing among a variety of products or withdrawing choice altogether. As such, consumption embodies everyday moral negotiations between one’s own interest and the collective good as well as between immediate and delayed gratification (Wilk, 2001; see also Dolan, 2007: 243; Linklater, 2007: 44; Miller, 2001a). In bringing forward the intrinsic connection between morality and consumption in the context of global trade and commodity chains, ethical trade relies on consumers’ cosmopolitan disposition and sensibility.

Although it is possible to discern cosmopolitan attitudes that are oriented towards the self (Ong, 2009), the cosmopolitanism that I am concerned with here consists of the relationship with a stranger. On the most fundamental level, cosmopolitanism is defined as ‘a willingness to engage with the Other’ (Hannerz, 1990: 239)<sup>35</sup>. As an ideal-type ‘moral identity’, cosmopolitanism is an attitude towards the world characterised by radical openness (Ong, 2009:

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<sup>35</sup> Hannerz’s vision of cosmopolitanism is sometimes criticised, and often rightfully so, as exclusive and elitist. For a discussion on why it nevertheless remains useful see Jansson (2011).

425; see also Jansson, 2011). It is also an 'ethical disposition' that establishes the bonds of solidarity, care and responsibility between and among individuals, and extends them beyond immediate communities of belonging and past national borders to include people who are geographically distant and otherwise different from us (Tomlinson, 1999: 185; see also Chouliaraki, 2008a: 379; Keane, 2003; Linklater, 2007; Spasić, 2011). Ideally, cosmopolitanism reduces the distance in a globalised world: it posits that whether remote or proximate, human plight demands a response (Linklater, 2007; see also Boltanski, 1999). As such, cosmopolitanism is at odds with the supposedly 'modern' condition of detachment from, and indifference to, strangers for which market economy is to blame (Bowles, 1991; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Linklater, 2007). Although cosmopolitanism is oriented towards distant others as our equals, I acknowledge that it nevertheless rests on and articulates 'Eurocentric' power and privilege, such as access to formal education and to 'cultural learning' through travelling, whose financial restrictions reproduce social inequalities (see Jansson, 2011: 244; Massey, 1991).

To find a way out of this conundrum, it is helpful not to try to define cosmopolitanism in universal terms, but to think of it as situated practices of meaning construction, located in space and time, and revolving around a very specific set of issues (see Hull and Stornaiuolo, 2014; Robertson, 2010: 142). Thus conceived, cosmopolitanism is neither an innate personality trait that one either has or does not have nor a function of certain material conditions, but an ethical disposition that needs to be constructed and nourished (Rantanen, 2004). Along the same lines, in this dissertation I use cosmopolitanism as a descriptor of moral disposition, rather than as a heuristic device.

Ethical trade communicatively encourages cosmopolitan disposition through unmasking complex global trade relations and production chains, revealing the plight of producers in the Global South and linking it to the consumer choices made in the North, and re-establishing the connection between producers and consumers. In this light, consumption of ethically produced goods from the Global South might be viewed as a vernacular manifestation of cosmopolitan disposition (Nava, 2002; Robertson, 2010: 79). As a concept, ethical trade is grounded in the recognition of interconnectedness between the Global North and South (see Raghuram et al., 2009). It also acknowledges the need for partnerships between diverse groups to jointly mitigate the adverse effects of economic globalisation (see Mouffe, 2005). Pragmatically, ethical trade might be viewed as a niche realisation of 'economic cosmopolitanism' – 'a global free market where all humans are equal potential trade partners' (Kleingeld, 1999: 506) – because it assumes that global justice can be advanced through the everyday economic acts of choosing what to buy (both as a company choosing its suppliers and as an end consumer). On the ideological plane, ethical trade embodies moral cosmopolitanism in its belief that all people belong to a single community

whereby moral obligations of solidarity, care and responsibility extend to every human being (Kleingeld, 1999: 507). Significantly, cosmopolitanism advocated by ethical trade is a political project (see Kaldor, 2000). That is to say, by tapping into cosmopolitan attitudes of consumers, ethical trade is aimed at altering the structures and politics of global trade.

## **DEFETISHISING COMMODITIES AND DISENCHANTING THE ALMIGHTY MARKET**

The vision of trade as a mediated moral relationship between Northern consumers and Southern producers demands that certain questions be asked about the cornerstones of the neo-liberal market economy. As Barnett and colleagues (2005a) observe, consumption as a moral social practice poses normative questions about the relationship between individual desires and lifestyles, and the organisation of society. The reality of global trade, whereby commodity chains staple together the opposite corners of the world and link groups of people that might otherwise be unaware of each other's existence, challenges the discursive limits of individual autonomy, sovereignty and freedom of choice (see Ahmed, 2000; Barnett et al., 2005a; Micheletti, 2008; Wilk, 2001). Thus, in the late-capitalist frame of reference, the moral propositions put forward by ethical trade might be regarded as an assault on fundamental consumer liberties. Indeed, the ultimate objective of ethical trade is to reduce the range of goods produced under exploitative conditions, whose current availability symbolises the moral crisis of the global market (Littler, 2008). The existence of such commodities is a consequence of the subordination of the relationships of production to the issues of consumption (Fenton, 2007; Slater, 1997), and of the 'commodity fetishism' that this subordination engenders.

In the Marxist political economy commodities are simultaneously objects and relations (Castree, 2001: 1522). The social relationships between producers and consumers embedded in commodities and enacted through exchange are, however, casually misrecognised as 'fantastic' relationships between objects, typically goods and money (Marx, 2005). In this context, 'commodity fetishism' refers to a 'mystical aura' of commodities that obscures their social provenance (Marx, 2005). Commodity fetishism operates through the concealment of human labour, which is the source of the intrinsic value of goods, and the simultaneous projection onto them of exchange value determined in relation to other commodities on the market (Slater, 1997). Ultimately, commodities, on a par with money (Marx, 2005: 4), obscure a social connection that binds together different human actors who participate in the marketplace. Arguably, commodities produced in the capitalistic setting are always already fetishes, imbued with intrinsic values, meanings and properties (Slater, 1997).

Exchanges at a distance necessitated by global trade are mediated not only by money (Marx, 2005), but also by an ever-growing number of intermediaries

in commodity chains. Consequently, consumers purchasing cellophane-wrapped goods at their local supermarkets are detached from, and ignorant of, the conditions under which these products came into being in another corner of the world (Ahmed, 2000: 168; Archer and Fritsch, 2010; Micheletti, 2008; Smith, 1998). To accommodate this development, I follow Carrier (2010: 674) in stretching the original Marxist notion of commodity fetishism beyond the realm of production to indicate the obliteration of all people and all processes involved in bringing a given product to the market. Thus, commodity fetishism tends to obscure the fact that commodities are tokens of 'ever more complex encounters between ever more people over ever greater distances' (Castree, 2001: 1522; see also Ahmed, 2000; Nicholls, 2010).

To counter this inclination, ethical trade strives to re-establish trade as a conscious moral encounter with distant others. This is done through 'defetishising' efforts to communicatively reconnect commodities with the stories and circumstances of their production (see Ahmed, 2000: 168; Fridell, 2006: 86; Reynolds, 2006: 51; Wright, 2004: 669). As they undergo defetishisation, commodities cease to exist as sacred objects with inherent properties that can be transferred to a consumer through financially regulated ownership, and reappear as products of the 'organic relations' of human doing and interpersonal exchange (Slater, 1997: 112). In ethical trade, defetishisation is usually connected to communicating stories of physical labour influenced by poverty, exploitation, struggle and conflict in the Global South (see Hudson and Hudson, 2003). Defetishisation, however, is not a smooth and straightforward procedure. In the context of the mainstreaming of fair trade in particular, as we shall see later, skin-deep defetishisation might just wind up being commodity fetishism in a different guise. In other words, standardised imagery, simplified slogans and the fetishised standards themselves might act as hollow communicative substitutes for genuine knowledge and connection (e.g., Freidberg, 2003; Herman, 2010).

Defetishisation of commodities is not the only challenge that ethical trade poses to the late-capitalist incarnation of trade. Rather, defetishisation goes hand in hand with an attempt to discursively dismantle the myth of the 'almighty' market. To disenchant the market, ethical trade emphasises its culturally and politically constructed dimensions, which remain unnoticed in the conventional representation of the free market as a natural(ised), objective, self-governing and strictly economic 'entity' (Bowles, 1991; James and Patomäki, 2006). Bowles (1991: 11) argues that these cultural and political underpinnings render the market capable neither of fair distribution of income and wealth, nor of fostering democratic attitudes, precisely because it promotes 'greed, opportunism, political passivity, and indifference towards others'. Ethical trade operates on the presumption that the 'free' market is a crippled mechanism for guiding and regulating global trade relations. Thus, ethical trade rejects the trickle-down theory-inspired readings of sweatshops and unprofitable small-scale coffee production as a supposedly necessary first step in escaping poverty (Allen, 2008: 12). Instead, such developments are



communicated to consumers as violations of human rights and as exploitation that perpetuates the poverty in the Global South. Obviously, the more radical rethinking of the market is tempered by ethical trade's continuous, and perhaps necessary, involvement with the marketplace (see Fridell, 2006: 88).

## 2.3 GLOBAL FAIR TRADE SYSTEM

As already mentioned, ethical trade is a concept that encapsulates a nebulous set of activities and initiatives geared towards transforming global trade relations into a nexus of more just, equal and moral partnerships (see Low and Davenport, 2007). Within that amorphous collection, 'fair trade' stands out as a particularly organised, formalised and structured fraction, concerned with the provision of products within a reworked governance framework<sup>36</sup>. Fair trade also most explicitly stresses the potential of global trade in facilitating the development of the Global South, plugging into the 'trade, not aid' byword (Blowfield, 1999; Doherty et al., 2012; Levi and Linton, 2003; Low and Davenport, 2005b; Vramo, 2012; Wilkinson, 2007). Thus, this section will take a closer look at fair trade in order to anchor my somewhat abstract and morally charged understanding of ethical trade in a practical and practicable framework.

The broad definition provided by Reynolds and Bennett (2015: 3) is helpful in grasping the character of fair trade as a system: '[Fair trade] is increasingly linked to a set of concrete initiatives that challenge global inequalities and create more egalitarian commodity networks, linking marginalized producers in the global South with progressive consumers in the global North' (see also Robbins, 2013: 244). In a nutshell, fair trade works through providing consumers with ethically produced and equitably traded products in a bid to better the situation of underprivileged Southern producers. Wilkinson (2007: 222) lists three components that constitute the current fair trade system: (1) a network of alternative trading organisations (ATOs) directly involved in buying and selling products from underprivileged producers; (2) a grid of organisations that are not directly involved in trade, but instead coordinate the partnerships between producer cooperatives, companies and retailers licensed within the certification schemes, and market the goods traded within those partnerships; and (3) the awareness-raising campaigns and advocacy efforts aimed at individual consumers as well as institutional buyers, especially within the public sector (see also Bennett et al., 2011). While the meanders of the

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<sup>36</sup> Smith and Barrientos (2005: 191) offer a different distinction between ethical trade and fair trade, originating from the UK. According to them, ethical trade 'is focused on ensuring that working conditions in the global value chain meet minimum international standards', while fair trade is more concerned with 'the terms of trade between buyers and producers'. For the purposes of my research this division is, however, too rigid and does not capture the flexible and amorphous issues with which the organisations analysed here deal – the observation shared by the authors themselves, albeit on different grounds.

history of fair trade have been retraced in some detail elsewhere (e.g., Gendron et al., 2009; Low and Davenport, 2005b, 2007; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Renard, 2003; Tallontire, 2000, 2006), it is worth noting here that for the past few decades, approximately since the 1980s, the fair trade trajectory has been taking it from alternative, direct and small-scale trading, primarily in handicrafts, to mediated, large-scale and mainstream availability of increasingly more processed goods whose fair trade provenance is warranted by the labelling scheme. Now, I would like to briefly introduce three major fair trade governance organisations – the second type mentioned by Wilkinson (2007) – whose modes of operation reflect the successive stages in the development of fair trade.

The **World Fair Trade Organization** (WFTO) was established in 1989 under the name International Federation of Alternative Trade. It originated from the efforts of alternative trading organisations (ATOs) to streamline their standards and practices (Raynolds and Greenfield, 2015). The WFTO brings Southern producer groups and the mission-driven importers and retailers who trade exclusively in fair trade products under the shared political agenda of altering the structures and processes of global trade (Renard, 2003). The organisation's imagined route to a more equal global trade is through an integrated supply chain, therefore they remain faithful to direct trade with smallholder producers and alternative distribution channels<sup>37</sup> (see Doherty et al., 2012; Renard, 2003; Tallontire, 2006). The adherence to the traditional fair trade model, however, makes it difficult for WFTO members to retain economic viability and expand sales (Doherty et al., 2012; Raynolds and Greenfield, 2015).

**Fairtrade International**, formerly known as Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International, was established in 1997 to standardise worldwide certifications, the first of which – Max Havelaar – emerged in the Netherlands in 1988<sup>38</sup>. Currently, the local use of the Fairtrade label is coordinated by National Fairtrade Organisations in 22 countries, and by Fairtrade Marketing Organisations in a further nine countries. Although it is not itself involved in trading, Fairtrade International, as the labelling organisation that coordinates a certification scheme often conflated with the whole fair trade concept, epitomises the effort to bring fair trade products to mainstream markets (see Renard, 2003). The Fairtrade model, based on conventional market values and measures, was devised to enable mainstream companies to source, and retailers to sell, fair trade products without necessarily transforming their business model (Raynolds and Greenfield, 2015; Tallontire, 2006). The admittance of transnational corporations, such as Starbucks and Nestlé, into the ranks of fair trade importers and the arrival of Fairtrade-certified products in the supermarkets triggered a surge in sales and commercial success (see

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<sup>37</sup> WFTO, *About WFTO*: <http://www.wfto.com/about-us/about-wfto> (accessed 29 June 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Fairtrade International, *History of Fairtrade*: <https://www.fairtrade.net/about-fairtrade/history-of-fairtrade.html> (accessed 30 June 2017).

Doherty et al., 2012; Levi and Linton, 2003). According to Gendron et al. (2009: 69; italics in original), the shift from alternative trading channels to mainstream distribution signals the move of fair trade from an alternative to the market to ‘an option *within* the market’ (see also Renard, 2003). Consequently, this pragmatic move tempered the political message of alternative trade (Renard, 2003). While Fairtrade International concentrates on boosting the recognisability of the Fairtrade mark and on increasing the sales and availability of Fairtrade products, the organisation still caters to small-scale producers in the Global South. In 2014, 64 per cent of farmers and workers in the Fairtrade system were located in Africa and the Middle East (collecting 22 per cent of the global Fairtrade premium), 26 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean (68 per cent of the premium) and the remaining 10 per cent in Asia and the Pacific (10 per cent of the premium) (Fairtrade International, 2016).

**Fair Trade USA** is an independent fair trade labelling organisation in the US whose approach to mainstreaming is the most aggressive and business-oriented (Bennett et al., 2011; Linton et al., 2004). In 2011, it controversially resigned its membership of Fairtrade International on the grounds of incompatible visions of future operations, especially concerning mainstreaming (see Wilson and Curnow, 2013). The sticking point was the disagreement on who should be eligible for fair trade certification. In their market-oriented strategy of increasing supply and amplifying sales, Fair Trade USA plan on certifying more large plantations as well as some Northern producers (see Reynolds and Greenfield, 2015). This move has been criticised by the WFTO and Fairtrade International as harmful to smallholder producers and running a risk of unduly increasing market competition among fair trade producers.

## MORAL ECONOMY OF FAIR TRADE

In 2001, an informal FINE<sup>39</sup> coalition adopted a common definition of fair trade as

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

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<sup>39</sup> FINE is an acronym of the four associated fair trade networks: Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (currently, Fairtrade International), the International Fair Trade Association (currently, the WFTO), the Network of European Worldshops (alternative channels of distribution) and the European Fair Trade Association.

in the rules and practice of conventional international trade (quoted in Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 27).

This definition was a baseline for the WFTO, Fairtrade International and Fair Trade USA for constructing their own specific interpretations. While the WFTO to this day echoes the FINE definition nearly literally, even more strongly stressing the gravity of fair trade as a business model, Fairtrade International and Fair Trade USA more prominently highlight the role of consumers as active partners in the fair trade project. It is worth quoting the three organisations at length:

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations have a clear commitment to Fair Trade as the principal core of their mission. They, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade<sup>40</sup>.

Fairtrade is an alternative approach to conventional trade and is based on a partnership between producers and consumers. When farmers can sell on Fairtrade terms, it provides them with a better deal and improved terms of trade. This allows them the opportunity to improve their lives and plan for their future. Fairtrade offers consumers a powerful way to reduce poverty through their every day shopping<sup>41</sup>.

Fair Trade Certified™ products were made with respect to people and planet. Our rigorous social, environmental and economic standards work to promote safe, healthy working conditions, protect the environment, enable transparency, and empower communities to build strong, thriving businesses. When you choose products with the Fair Trade label, your day-to-day purchases can improve an entire community's day-to-day lives<sup>42</sup>.

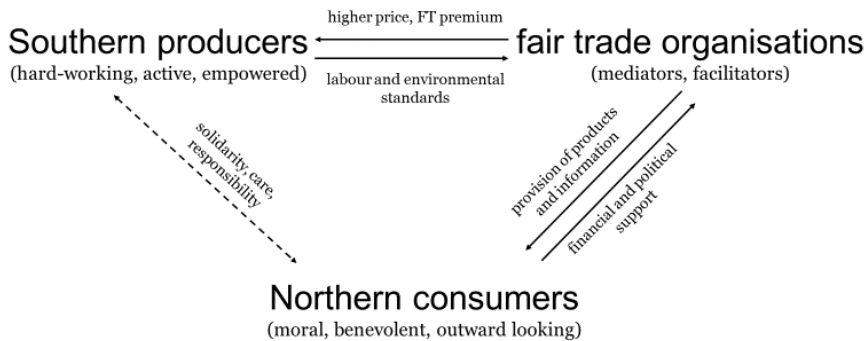
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<sup>40</sup> WFTO, *Definition of Fair Trade*: <http://wfto.com/fair-trade/definition-fair-trade> (accessed 29 June 2017).

<sup>41</sup> Fairtrade International, *What is Fairtrade*: <https://www.fairtrade.net/about-fairtrade/what-is-fairtrade.html> (accessed 29 June 2017).

<sup>42</sup> Fair Trade USA, *What is Fair Trade*: <http://fairtradeusa.org/what-is-fair-trade> (accessed 29 June 2017). Notably, this definition is accompanied by a short animated video that further addresses the prospective fair trade consumer by explicating how 'every purchase matters' and ensuring that 'behind every Fairtrade-certified label is a rigorous certification process, which means you can feel confident knowing you're living your values with each purchase'.

Although these definitions vary from organisation to organisation, they all chart a moral economy that envelops (1) fair trade organisations (commercial and non-profit), (2) producers, and (3) consumers. In this context, moral economy describes the ideal nexus of moral relationships, sentiments and obligations projected among the actors involved in an economic activity (see Fridell, 2006; Sayer, 2000: 79, 2003: 341). Figure 1 presents this moral economy in a distilled form.



**Figure 1** A nexus of relationships embedded in the moral economy of fair trade.

This dissertation is primarily concerned with organisations, commercial and non-profit, that act as mediators between Southern producers and Northern consumers. In their relationship with Southern producers, fair trade organisations strive to provide them with a ‘better deal’. While specific criteria vary from scheme to scheme, a better deal for producers is usually ensured through five broad measures: (1) providing market access for marginalised producers; (2) a stable, guaranteed and minimum fair price above the market level, sufficient to cover production costs; (3) a ‘social premium’ that cooperatives are supposed to invest in community development projects of their choice; (4) long-term, equitable, accountable and transparent trading partnerships; and (5) empowerment of producers as market agents through the development of professional and business skills (Tallontire, 2006: 35; see also Doherty et al., 2012; Levi and Linton, 2003: 416; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Raynolds and Bennett, 2015: 4–5; Renard, 2003: 90; Smith and Barrientos, 2005: 191). In return, the producer cooperatives vow to commit to the labour and environmental standards articulated through principles such as the access of smallholders to democratically governed cooperatives, no child or forced

labour, freedom of association, non-discrimination, gender equality, good working conditions and respect for the environment (see Renard, 2003: 90)<sup>43</sup>.

The obligation of fair trade organisations towards consumers is usually understood as a twofold educational mission: 'to teach consumers that they possess the power to make a positive difference in the developing world through their purchasing behaviour and to encourage them to *act* on this knowledge' (Linton et al., 2004: 231–2; emphasis in original). Similarly, Barnett et al. (2005a: 34) observe that fair trade organisations mediate between consumers and moral causes through the provision of ethical products and via the articulation of 'the contexts of consumer choice'. This means that fair trade organisations are supposed to communicatively reveal the circumstances of the production of goods and raise consumers' awareness of the inequality of global trade (defetishisation) as well as to provide products untainted by injustice. In addition, and crucially for this project, fair trade organisations must morally educate consumers and ensure that the products they purchase allow consumers to, as eloquently expressed by Fair Trade USA, 'live their values'. In order to establish themselves as legitimate and efficient actors, fair trade organisations must be transparent and accountable to consumers (see Clarke et al., 2007a, 2007b; Vestergaard, 2014). In exchange, consumers provide organisations with financial backing – including fair compensation for producers – as well as the social and political support needed to promote and advance their cause (Nicholls, 2010).

In practical terms, then, consumers receive items of high quality and ethical provenance for which they provide compensation that allows producers to improve their standard of living (cf. Johnston, 2001). Ideally, this transparent and mutually beneficial relationship leads to the emergence of a mediated moral relationship (marked in the figure with a dashed, two-way arrow) between producers and consumers, based on principles such as solidarity, responsibility and care. While 'how' exactly this goal is achieved is an empirical question that this dissertation looks at, there is a considerable consensus in academia as well as in industry that, as Renard (2003: 91) puts it, 'Fair Trade aims to create networks of exchange, to establish a relationship between producers and consumers that goes beyond the commercial transaction and gives the producers tools of empowerment' (see also Archer and Fritsch, 2010; Fridell, 2006; Goodman, 2004, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Le Velly, 2007; McEwan et al., 2017; Moberg and Lyon, 2010). In this moral economy, Southern producers (usually imagined as hard-working, active and empowered agents) and Northern consumers (addressed as benevolent and outward-looking moral agents) emerge as key actors, organisationally and practically supported by fair trade organisations as humble mediators.

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the World Fair Trade Organization's (WFTO) 10 Principles of Fair Trade: <http://wfto.com/fair-trade/10-principles-fair-trade> (accessed 29 June 2017).

## **CRITICISM OF FAIR TRADE**

Despite the overall positive and sympathetic reception, fair trade has not escaped criticism (see, for example, Sylla, 2014). The critiques are often set in the context of ‘mainstreaming’, which is a process whereby fair trade organisations pursue increased corporate involvement in order to reach mainstream consumers and expand their market share (for an exhaustive analysis of mainstreaming see Doherty et al., 2012; see also Reynolds and Wilkinson, 2007). Corporate involvement in fair trade typically occurs at two points in the supply chain: in sourcing by transnational brand companies and in retailing via supermarket chains. The mainstreamed incarnation of fair trade is typically viewed as susceptible to co-optation by corporate actors whetting their appetite for a niche market (Archer and Fritsch, 2010: 110; Doherty et al., 2012). Although the full overview of the critique is beyond the scope of this dissertation, in what follows I will reiterate some of its key points. In doing so, I will focus on the criticism that is wielded on the grounds of diluting the moral economy of fair trade as outlined above. Such a corporate-oriented critique is also potentially relevant to a broader concept of ethical trade.

As stated above, one of the core functions of fair trade is to provide the most direct access possible to Northern markets to the most disadvantaged and vulnerable producers, who would otherwise fall prey to the greedy and ruthless ‘coyote’ middlemen that control exports in their countries. In practice, however, this pillar of fair trade is often regarded as corrupted in three ways. Firstly, despite their banner vow to shorten the commodity chain and eliminate the intermediaries, fair trade organisations can be seen as essentially middlemen themselves, dangling in an ever-expanding bureaucratic black hole (e.g., Doherty et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2012; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Robbins, 2013; Valkila et al., 2010). Consequently, the much-desired traceability, transparency and accountability in commodity chains might once again be diffused and lost (Wilkinson, 2007).

Secondly, it often comes under question whether fair trade really targets and aids the most vulnerable producers (e.g., Griffiths, 2012; McEwan et al., 2017; Valkila, 2014). Griffiths (2012: 364) notes that the principle that stipulates that producers should be organised into cooperatives favours the relatively well-off farmers who have some extra resources at their disposal that can be invested in running the cooperative and handling the paperwork. Conversely, the marginalised, unskilled, uneducated and elderly producers located in remote areas are unlikely to join cooperatives. On this note, M’Closkey (2010) discusses the case of the ‘Navajo-inspired’ textiles woven by non-Navajo artisans and sold by a fair trade company. As a result, the market for genuine Navajo fabrics, which are created outside the fair trade system, is severely limited, driving their makers into even direr poverty. M’Closkey (2010: 271) argues that while fair trade provides a ‘shaped advantage’ to the producers within the system, it pits them against other disadvantaged groups that need to compete within the market economy (see also Herman, 2010;

Moberg and Lyon, 2010). This observation adds an additional layer to the overall concern with the glut of fair trade goods that forces producer cooperatives to compete against each other for the scarce market demand (Fridell, 2006: 84; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Robbins, 2013).

Thirdly, and perhaps most sharply, fair trade is accused of falling into the trap of the Western-centric development that it used to position itself against (Griffiths, 2012; Johnston, 2001; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Wilkinson, 2007). That is, fair trade standards and principles – deeply rooted as they are in specifically Western morality, science, organisational culture and tastes – whose implementation is a prerequisite for receiving a higher price tend to misunderstand the local circumstances as well as disregard and suppress the local knowledge, traditions, conventions and circumstances (e.g., McEwan et al., 2017; Robbins, 2013; Valkila, 2009; Vramo, 2012). In fact, some of the earliest and most pressing critiques concern fair trade's ignorance of the voices and needs of producers and workers, which is attributed to the structural lack of well-developed participatory mechanisms (Blowfield, 1999).

The second dimension of the vehement criticism of fair trade is its purported inability to connect producers and consumers in any meaningful manner, be it material or moral. Most tangibly, the capability of the fair trade system to deliver financial benefits to producers is questioned (Griffiths, 2012; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Robbins, 2013). According to Valkila et al. (2010), a significant proportion of the price premium paid by Finnish consumers for Fairtrade-certified coffee does not reach producers. Instead, more than half of the retail price remains in Finland, benefitting roasters and retailers.

On the discursive plane, mainstreaming in particular is considered to flatten the moral message of fair trade and hollow out its political undertones (see Huybrechts and Reed, 2010). In a bid to reach mainstream consumers, the radical commitment to trade justice and equality gives way in fair trade communication to a humanitarian sensibility predicated on sympathy and realised through 'individualised shopping for a better world' (Doherty et al., 2012: 16; see also Renard, 2003). Such marketing discourses tend to emphasise simple and straightforwardly market-based solutions that revolve around a 'fair price' and product quality, thereby contributing to the commodification of morality (Robbins, 2013; see also Herman, 2010; Johnston, 2001; Low and Davenport, 2005b; Nicholls, 2010). Arguably, such mediation might produce consumers for whom buying fair trade products in their nearby supermarket is a habitual, conscience-cleansing exercise of consumer choice deprived of moral reflection (Doherty et al., 2012; Griffiths, 2012; Johnston, 2001; Wheeler, 2012b). Consequently, mainstreaming might undo the potential of fair trade communication to morally educate consumers about their connection and everyday obligations to distant others. This bitter criticism marks the contested terrain of my investigation of ethical trade communication in Poland and Finland as moral education.



## 2.4 FAIR TRADE IN POLAND

In Poland, fair trade is a rather new phenomenon, especially in its organised and formalised incarnation as a movement. As such, it is neither very well known among the public, nor particularly well studied in academia. Due to the limited amount of academic literature on the topic, I reconstruct the history of fair trade in Poland primarily based on the interview conducted on 13 January 2016 with Andrzej Żwawa, the chairman of the management board of Fairtrade Polska, and on the information supplied by Pizca del Mundo during my fieldwork. Secondly, this story is complemented by the online materials found on the web pages of Polish fair trade organisations, the Polish Fair Trade Association<sup>44</sup> and Fairtrade Polska<sup>45</sup>. Finally, I also rely on the little academic literature there is on the topic.

Similarly to other countries, the origins of fair trade in Poland can be traced back to an organisation tied to the Church, that is, to the Polish Fair Trade Association (PFTA; *Polskie Stowarzyszenie Sprawiedliwego Handlu*), set up in 2003 in Gdynia in Northern Poland, which for a long time used ‘Third World and Us’ (*Trzeci Świat i My*) as a part of its official name<sup>46</sup>. In the interviews the close religious connections of the PFTA were mentioned as being problematic – ostensibly because of the vision of fair trade as charity that it advances, but possibly also due to the conservative sentiments that the Catholic Church preserves and safeguards in the Polish society and which are at odds with the left-leaning attitudes of many fair trade activists.

Nonetheless, since its inception, the statutory purpose of the organisation has been global education and the promotion of fair trade. Later on, the PFTA signed a licensing agreement for the use of the Fairtrade logo in Poland and started the distribution of certified products in 2005. The current sales of the PFTA are still too small for the organisation to be able to import the products directly from Southern producers. Therefore, it has to rely on the bigger European organisations, most notably from Germany, as trade intermediaries. The additional fees and margins paid to the intermediaries drive the retail prices on products offered by the PFTA relatively high (Kronenberg, 2010). Since 2010, the PFTA has been the only Polish member of the WFTO. The products imported through European fair trade organisations are currently sold online as well as in the offline store located in Poznań (Greater Poland), owned by the PFTA and described as the only ‘worldshop’ in the country.

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<sup>44</sup> Available at <http://www.sprawiedliwyhandel.pl/en/> (accessed 25 January 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Available at <http://www.fairtrade.org.pl/> (accessed 25 January 2018).

<sup>46</sup> Kronenberg (2008: 133, 2010: 349) mentions a commercial company called Taste of Freedom (*Smak Wolności*) that was set up in 2003 to sell fairly traded coffee from Chiapas in Mexico as the first fair trade initiative in Poland. However, the firm closed down after about a year and was not acknowledged in the interviews.

As the PFTA continued its educational and advocacy activities, in 2009 it was involved in establishing the informal 'Fairtrade Coalition'. The Coalition's goal was to function as an umbrella organisation integrating fair trade actors emerging on the fragmented Polish market, and to cooperate on their behalf with international fair trade bodies (see Stowarzyszenie Konsumentów Polskich, 2010: 11). The Fairtrade Coalition was originally founded by 22 partners: 13 non-governmental organisations (including the PFTA and Polish Humanitarian Action, as well as consumer associations and ecological organisations) and nine small commercial companies and individuals (including Pizca del Mundo). The composition of members has changed over time with some leaving the coalition, including the PFTA, and some suspending their business operations altogether. In 2013, the coalition was transformed into a foundation with nine founding members, Pizca del Mundo being one of them. Since April 2015, the organisation has been the sole representative of Fairtrade International in Poland, which means that it has permission to cooperate with local companies interested in obtaining the Fairtrade certificate. Following a long process, the organisation officially became a member of Fairtrade International in January 2016. Consequently, the Fairtrade Coalition changed its name to the 'Foundation of the "Fair Trade Coalition" – Fairtrade Polska' (in short, Fairtrade Polska), and acquired the status of a 'public benefit' organisation, which allows it to fund-raise. The continuously high involvement of Pizca del Mundo in the efforts to organise and advance the fair trade initiative in Poland is proven by the fact that its representative, Borys, currently serves as chairman of the supervisory council of Fairtrade Polska.

The status of Fairtrade Polska in the structure of Fairtrade International is that of a Fairtrade Marketing Organisation (FMO). The concept of an FMO was created to incorporate into the Fairtrade system the former socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe as well as the countries from the Global South. However, the status of FMOs within the structure of Fairtrade International is still somewhat unclear. While obliged to pay membership fees, FMOs are not granted voting rights in the decision-making process of Fairtrade International. In contrast, such rights appertain to the National Fairtrade Organisations that function in the founding member countries such as the UK, Germany, Belgium and Finland. Poland, however, should be offered full membership in Fairtrade International in the not-too-distant future, not least because of its relatively big population of 38 million<sup>47</sup>.

Due to the relatively late arrival of fair trade in Poland, the society needs intensive global education in order to take an interest in, and offer support to, the cause (see Boenning, 2009; Koszewska, 2011; Kronenberg, 2010; Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014). This is especially true in the context of the fairly recent 'opening up' of the country to globalisation that resulted from political transformations in the 1990s. Thus, Fairtrade Polska invests considerable

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Andrzej Żwawa, 13 January 2016.

efforts in raising awareness and the promotion of fair trade. On an institutional level, Fairtrade Polska coordinates the Fairtrade Towns project, which encourages Polish cities to prioritise fair trade products in their public procurement. However, only one Polish city – Poznań – obtained the certificate, as long ago as in 2008. Moreover, Fairtrade Polska is engaged in advocacy efforts, particularly through encouraging politicians to include fairer North-South relationships in their election platforms. During the campaign leading up to the general elections in 2015, Fairtrade Polska asked the candidates to sign a declaration of commitment to the cause. Most of those who did, however, were associated with the Green Party or the social-democratic grass-roots Partia Razem party, neither of which managed to get into the parliament. As proven by the limited success of these initiatives, the reception, resonance and importance of issues to do with the injustices of global trade are still very low. Hence, in the light of the minimal interest in fair trade among the adult public, Fairtrade Polska relies on schools as the primary arena for global education. Apart from the possibility of forming the attitudes and influencing the behaviours of an incoming generation of consumers, this move is underpinned by two pragmatic reasons: the relative easiness of obtaining funding for projects aimed at schoolchildren, and the already existing drive of some teachers towards more conscious global education.

In fact, because of the limited presence of formal structures and low awareness and support of consumers, fair trade in Poland can be more aptly characterised not as a movement, but as a (not very well-developed) market<sup>48</sup>. Let us consider this claim in detail. In terms of organisational structure, Fairtrade Polska enlists seven non-governmental organisations, eight online stores, six distributors and wholesalers (one of which is the PFTA and two others are identical to the previously mentioned online stores), and one Polish producer as actors involved in fair trade in Poland. The non-governmental organisations include the previously mentioned PFTA and Polish Humanitarian Action as well as a foundation dedicated to consumer education (the Buy Responsibly Foundation), three ecologically oriented organisations (the Foundation for Sustainable Development, the Centre for Environmental Activities ‘Źródła’ and the Alliance of Associations Polish Green Network) and a cultural association, the Association of Local Cultural Centres (SLOT). The commercial fair trade sector in Poland comprises local distributors of foreign fair trade brands and small online retailers catering to individual consumers. The majority of firms work within the food sector, selling coffee, tea, chocolate and the like branded by foreign fair trade companies. Pizca del Mundo is a notable exception, providing a selection of own-branded products imported directly from Southern cooperatives. The second most common area of operations for fair trade companies in Poland is clothing and other cotton products, such as towels. In this sector, one firm stands out among the distributors and resellers of imported fair trade goods. A new addition to the

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Andrzej Żwawa, 13 January 2016.

market, Fairpants was established at the beginning of 2016 as the first Polish, and – according to their website –European, company to produce underwear locally from Fairtrade-certified cotton. Thereby, the second Polish fair trade brand seems to have appeared on the market. In addition, some fair trade stores sell certified cosmetics and office supplies.

The limited awareness of fair trade in Polish society diagnosed by practitioners is also well recognised in the scholarly literature. The indifference to the consequences of consumption manifests itself in a prevalent acceptance of unethical products among Polish society (Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014: 1209; see also Boenning, 2009; Koszewska, 2011). In addition, the level of consumer activism is one of the lowest in Europe, engaging less than 20 per cent of the population (Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 97). In the context of general disinterest, the proportion of Poles aware of fair trade and its principles is estimated to be around 10 (Stowarzyszenie Konsumentów Polskich, 2010) to 37 per cent (Śmiechowska and Dmowski, 2008), with less than 25 per cent recognising the Fairtrade label (Prandota and Rejman, 2013). Furthermore, those ignorant of fair trade are not particularly willing to acquire new knowledge: only 35 per cent of Polish consumers declare any interest in fair trade (Janoś-Kresło, 2014; Radziukiewicz, 2013; Śmigielska et al., 2015). This indifference towards fair trade is reflected in the minuscule sales<sup>49</sup> of fair trade products totalling 2.1 million euros<sup>50</sup>.

A number of possible factors prevent fair trade from taking root in Poland. In terms of ‘cultural’ or ‘psychological’ barriers, the already mentioned deficiencies in global education seem to render Poles incapable of adequately assessing their relatively privileged position in the current world. Two other mental hurdles are the conviction about the low impact of individual consumers on the situation of Southern producers, and limited trust in the honesty of firms involved in the fair trade scheme (Janoś-Kresło, 2014; Koszewska, 2011; Radziukiewicz, 2013). In economic terms, the relatively high price of fair trade products is the most critical impediment (Koszewska, 2011; Kronenberg, 2010). Given that price is still the main criterion guiding the purchasing decisions of Polish consumers (Bołtromiuk, 2009; Radziukiewicz,

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<sup>49</sup> Actually, the smallness of the market continuously manifests itself in the mundane activities performed by people involved in fair trade, often in very tangible ways. For example, during my stay with Pizca del Mundo we spent a significant stretch of time sticking Polish-language labels, indicating the ingredients and nutritional values of the product, onto the packages of British fair trade tea, of which Pizca del Mundo is an exclusive distributor in Poland. It was explained to me that had the sales and, hence, orders been bigger, the British company would have printed the necessary information onto the packages themselves, thereby saving Pizca del Mundo's resources.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Polakom nie zależy na Trzecim Świecie, wolimy kupować taniej’ (Poles do not care about the Third World, we would rather pay less). *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 24 February 2012. Available at: [http://pieniadze.gazeta.pl/Gospodarka/1,125292,11230688,Polakom\\_nie\\_zalezy\\_na\\_Trzecim\\_Swiecie\\_\\_wolimy\\_kupowac.html](http://pieniadze.gazeta.pl/Gospodarka/1,125292,11230688,Polakom_nie_zalezy_na_Trzecim_Swiecie__wolimy_kupowac.html) (accessed 8 February 2017).

2013; Szubska-Włodarczyk and Paszko, 2012), the lower than the EU average purchasing power means that only those with more substantial amounts of disposable income – that is, the middle and upper classes – can afford to buy fair trade (e.g., Boenning, 2009; Janoś-Kresło, 2014). And even when consumers are knowledgeable, mentally primed and sufficiently financially well-off to buy fair trade, the low availability of such products in Polish stores might prevent them from doing so (see *Stowarzyszenie Konsumentów Polskich*, 2010; Szubska-Włodarczyk and Paszko, 2012). Indeed, fair trade products, both certified and non-certified, are currently available in several dedicated online stores (retail and wholesale), and through own brands carried by some of the foreign chains, such as Marks & Spencer and Lidl. Moreover, a limited selection of fair trade products can be found at individual stores of the large foreign supermarket chains (e.g., E. Leclerc and Auchan) or in small organic shops. Supermarkets and organic shops, however, rarely stock fair trade products specifically because of their ethical value. Rather, they are introduced due to their organic and ecological origins or simply to widen the available selection (see *Stowarzyszenie Konsumentów Polskich*, 2010). Despite the rather bleak current picture, Poland has been perceived as a promising emerging market for fair trade consumption (Boenning, 2009; Koszewska, 2011; Kronenberg, 2008, 2010; Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014). All in all, the embryonic condition of the fair trade market in Poland – characterised by a nascent and fragmented structure, and consumers with little interest in, and demand for, fair trade products – provides a somewhat challenging context in which the operations of Pizca del Mundo must be situated and analysed.

## 2.5 ETHICAL TRADE IN FINLAND<sup>51</sup>

The story of fair trade began in Finland much earlier than in Poland, providing a stable foundation for the development of an overarching ethical trade movement. As in many Western countries, fair trade started in Finland with the introduction of ‘worldshops’ (*Maailmankaupat*), the first of which was established in 1978 in the city of Oulu. Currently, there are nineteen worldshops operating across the country. The website of the Finnish Association of Worldshops (*Maailmankauppojen liito*) describes their mission in the following way:

World Shops are shops that specialise in Fair Trade goods. They trade fairly with producer groups from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Their goal is not only to pay a fair price to the producers and improve their

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<sup>51</sup> This section is primarily based on my interviews with Sanna Räsänen, communications officer at Fairtrade Finland, conducted on 2 June and 2 September 2015. In addition, I use Krier (2008) for historical data on fair trade in Finland and the reports available on Fairtrade Finland’s website (<http://www.reilukauppa.fi>).

working conditions, but also to change the structure of world trade so as to make Fair Trade the norm<sup>52</sup>.

In addition to selling products, many of the worldshops run development cooperation projects, either with their trading partners or other organisations (Krier, 2008). According to Krier (2008: 69), one of the worldshops was particularly instrumental in bringing fair trade to Finland: Tampere ATO (*Kehityskauppa*), which also introduced an instant coffee from Tanzania to consumers in many other countries. The organisation started in 1983 and currently operates under the auspices of the WFTO as an importer, wholesaler and retailer of a wide range of food products (e.g., coffee, tea and chocolate) as well as candles and handicrafts. However, as Tampere ATO was not a part of my fieldwork, I will stop here by simply acknowledging its importance in introducing fair trade in Finland.

In 1998, the Worldshop Association teamed up with five other partners – the development cooperation organisations Solidarisuus and Finn Church Aid, the development cooperation platform Kepa, the civil society organisation the Swedish Martha Association in Finland and the Finnish Association for Nature Conservation – to set up the National Fairtrade Organisation called the Finnish Association for Promoting Fair Trade (*Reilun kaupan edistämisyhdistys*)<sup>53</sup>. In addition to the five founding members (the Finnish Association for Nature Conservation seems to have left), in 2017 Fairtrade Finland had 27 other member organisations, including Eetti, the Finnish chapters of UNICEF and World Vision, several trade unions, and environmental, development, church and youth political organisations. Currently, Fairtrade Finland certifies products in Finland as well as in the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Under a virtual duopoly in grocery trading<sup>54</sup>, fair trade products were quickly mainstreamed, with first coffees and teas appearing on the shelves of Finnish supermarkets in 1999 (*Reilu kauppa ry*, 2012). The early and 'wholesale' arrival of fair trade has resulted in very high levels of visibility and recognisability of fair trade products among Finnish consumers. On its Facebook page, Fairtrade Finland quotes a market study from 2017 that concluded that 89 per cent of Finns recognised the Fairtrade label<sup>55</sup> (a study conducted in 2005 estimated that figure to be at the level of 83 per cent; Krier, 2008: 71). In 2015, 83 per cent of those who recognised the Fairtrade mark could explain what the Fairtrade label entailed, and in 2011, 85 per cent of the

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<sup>52</sup> Available at <http://www.maailmankaupat.fi/index.html> (accessed 7 March 2017).

<sup>53</sup> In 2013, on the occasion of its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the organisation was renamed Fairtrade Finland (*Reilu kauppa ry*). In what follows, I will use this shorter name.

<sup>54</sup> In 2016, the market share of the two biggest retailers – a Finnish retailing conglomerate, Kesko, and a Finnish retailing cooperative, S Group – was estimated to be around 85 per cent.

<sup>55</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/reilukauppa/photos/pb.102566909780881-2207520000.1516278884./1562011267169764> (accessed 18 January 2018).

Finnish consumers familiar with Fairtrade found the certification system trustworthy<sup>56</sup>. High consumer awareness goes hand in hand with the consistent growth in the overall sales figures for Fairtrade products: from 13 million euros in 2005 (Krier, 2008) to over 100 million euros in 2011 to 173.5 million euros in 2015 (Reilu kauppa ry, 2016). In 2015, over 1760 Fairtrade-certified products were available in Finland, including coffee and tea, honey, cocoa, sugar, chocolate, bananas and roses. Roses are the most sold Fairtrade-certified product, claiming a 32.5 per cent share of the whole Finnish rose market. Coffee, bananas and wine are other popular Fairtrade products. Moreover, public organisations willingly support Fairtrade in their procurement: in 2015, there were 13 Fairtrade towns and municipalities and 116 Fairtrade parishes in Finland.

In more descriptive terms, the communications officer at Fairtrade Finland maintained that their work overwhelmingly met with a positive consumer response (personal communication, 2015). At the same time, she noted that even though Finnish society was aware of Fairtrade, there was a considerable degree of misunderstanding of what it was. For example, Finns tended to mistake Fairtrade Finland for a producer or retailer, and Fairtrade for the product brand, rather than a certification scheme. Typically, consumers would ask her where the Fairtrade products were available or complain when their local store did not stock certain certified products. More profoundly, she recognised a common confusion as to what products could be Fairtrade certified. This misunderstanding underpinned the accusation that Fairtrade favoured Southern producers over Finnish farmers and flower growers, thereby contributing to the misery of local industries. This charge seemed misguided insofar as the vast majority of Fairtrade products can be produced exclusively in the Global South, the Finnish climate not being conducive to cultivating exotic fruit or coffee<sup>57</sup>. Finally, the communications officer at Fairtrade Finland identified two further ill-informed preconceptions that might have caused some Finnish consumers to dismiss Fairtrade altogether. On the one hand, there was the mistrust towards the organisation itself on the part of those ‘who don’t believe in any organisation, who think that... the whole world is just one big fraud and everyone’s cheating, [and that] we put all money in our own pockets’. On the other hand, some tended to ascribe to Fairtrade

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<sup>56</sup> Available at <http://www.reilukauppa.fi/meista/toiminta-suomessa> (accessed 7 March 2017).

<sup>57</sup> Of course, there are some more problematic commodities such as flowers, honey and some herbs that can be and are produced in Finland. With regard to Fairtrade roses, the communications officer at Fairtrade Finland countered the accusations by pointing out that the crisis in the Finnish flower industry started well before the introduction of the Fairtrade option. She also argued that the local supply had shrunk so much that the choice was no longer between a Finnish rose and a foreign rose, but between an unfairly produced Kenyan rose and a Fairtrade Kenyan rose. Finally, she remarked that from the environmental point of view, it was still more ecological to fly roses from Kenya than to grow them in Finland under the energy-intensive, artificial conditions.

the nearly magical power of instantly improving the lives of producers once and for all.

The picture of Fairtrade in Finland that arises from the above overview is that of a well-established, mainstreamed market. According to the communications officer at Fairtrade Finland, this market is populated largely by enthusiastic, yet slightly ill-informed, consumers. Compared to the negligible Fairtrade sales in Poland, 173.5 million euros in a country of 5.5 million people might impress. Compared to the overall sales in the UK, totalling 1.6 billion pounds in 2015<sup>58</sup>, however, this figure pales considerably. Zooming in on the Fairtrade consumption per capita, we can nevertheless see that an average Finnish consumer spends slightly more on Fairtrade products than their British counterpart per annum<sup>59</sup> (see also Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Yet, it is not the commercial activities that make the Finnish incarnation of fair trade particularly worth studying, but its location at the intersection of business, development cooperation and politics.

Firstly, there is a certain convergence between fair trade and development cooperation projects. In addition to promoting Fairtrade and certifying products, Fairtrade Finland was involved in the period 2014–2016 in development cooperation projects funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Moreover, there is the possibility of convergence of interest and the opportunity for cooperation between fair trade organisations and Finnish businesses that source from Asia, Latin America or Africa.

Secondly, Fairtrade Finland took political stands in their communication that would be unimaginable, or even suicidal, for fair trade organisations in Poland. The most controversial instance had to do with an event organised by Muslim women in Helsinki in which they talked to Finnish people about their clothing. Fairtrade Finland donated certified roses that the women handed out to the passers-by whom they were trying to engage in conversation. Information about this cooperation was subsequently shared on Fairtrade Finland's Facebook page, implicitly valorising the veil and headscarf as parts of the contemporary cultural landscape of Finland. While this post predictably stirred the audience and engendered some racist remarks, the organisation decided to disregard the negative responses and avoided much reputational damage. In fact, in three of the 584 comments the authors threatened that they would not buy Fairtrade-certified products again. In Poland, with its conservative values and strongly right-wing political climate, the fear of a consumer backlash – threatening the already minuscule sales of certified products – prevents fair trade organisations from openly taking stands on political and social issues beyond trade and consumption.

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<sup>58</sup> Approximately 1.8 billion euros; Fairtrade Foundation's Impact Story available at <http://ourimpactstory.fairtrade.org.uk/a-journey-we-are-walking-together> (accessed 3 March 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Roughly calculated, per capita consumption in Finland equals 32 euros per year and in the UK (population 63.5 million) approximately 25 pounds, so some 30 euros per year.



All in all, Fairtrade Finland is a much more multifaceted and multifarious organisation than its counterparts in many other countries. It inhabits the interstices between commerce, business and trade-oriented development cooperation. It nourishes its liberal, left-wing roots and does not shy away from taking political stands. Finally, it also encourages consumers to participate in fair trade beyond voting with their pockets (see Wheeler, 2012a). And this is where Eetti enters the picture as a platform for those most committed to the ideal of equitable global trade.

Having discussed Fairtrade Finland in some detail, it is worth outlining the composition of the broadly conceived ethical trade movement in Finland. Firstly, on the non-commercial side, the 32 Fairtrade Finland member organisations can be regarded as participating in the movement, more or less actively. During my fieldwork, three of these organisations appeared to cooperate with Eetti in particular: (1) Kepa, an NGO platform for civil society organisations working around the issues of global development; (2) the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland (SASK), a development organisation coordinated by the Finnish trade unions; and (3) Service Union United (PAM), a trade union for employees in the private service sector, especially in retail trade, property services and security services as well as tourism, leisure and restaurant services. In addition, several organisations from outside the fair trade 'circles' deal with at least some themes to do with ethical trade, such as Finnwatch, which is focused on global corporate responsibility; Attac, the Finnish chapter of an alter-globalisation organisation fighting for tax justice and the tighter regulation of financial markets; the Youth Academy (*Nuorten Akatemia*), which works with global education; and Friends of the Earth Finland, who concentrate on global equality and sustainability.

Secondly, on the commercial side of the movement, there is a host of Finnish ethical brands and companies. For example, in the food sector Jalotofu is a brand of ethical and Fairtrade-certified tofu; Goodio produces raw chocolate using organic ingredients sourced following the principles of ethical and direct trade; and Louis is a trademark encompassing a wide range of ethical spices and herbs. There are also several firms operating outside the food sector, such as Kaiku, which produces a small selection of goods from Fairtrade-certified cotton, and Mifuko, a WFTO-certified homeware company that marries modern Finnish design with traditional Kenyan craftsmanship. In addition, many of the big Finnish brands offer some Fairtrade-certified options in their selection. For example, the textile company Finlayson produces a range of towels from Fairtrade-certified cotton. Similarly, some of the big food producers, such as Meira and Paulig, offer a Fairtrade option in their coffee selection. Furthermore, many distributors are involved in importing foreign ethical products, including brands such as Clipper, Pukka Herbs, Urtekram and Ethletic. The wide accessibility of ethical, and particularly Fairtrade, products is facilitated by the main retail chains – S group, Kesko and Lidl – which, in addition to carrying many products of ethical firms, often sell Fairtrade products under their own brands. Other than

in chain-affiliated grocery shops and supermarkets, ethical products can be easily purchased online or in specialised shops, including two organic chains, Punnitse & Säästä and Ruohonjuuri.

As the above sketch makes clear, the position of Fairtrade on the market and the stage of the ethical trade movement in Finland are rather advanced. In terms of the market, ethical products are plentiful, easily accessible and recognised by consumers who buy them quite willingly. In terms of the movement, there is a wide range of organisations that, except for Fairtrade Finland and Eetti, might not be fully involved in the problematics of ethical trade but readily come together to address certain issues surrounding global trade. Yet, despite this seemingly bright picture, ethical trade organisations in Finland are aware of misunderstandings and resistance that still persist in the society.

### 3 ETHICAL TRADE COMMUNICATION AS MORAL EDUCATION

To recapitulate, this study is curious about how ethical trade is communicated in Poland and Finland. I approach ethical trade as trade that recognises itself as a mediated relationship between human actors – specifically, producers in the Global South and consumers in the Global North – and, as such, is governed by moral principles (see Goodman, 2004; McEwan et al., 2017). Thus formulated, ethical trade stops being merely a set of consumption-related practices, and becomes a communication problem: it relies on a moral disposition that, rather than being intrinsic to some people and not to others, must be constructed through careful mediation by ethical trade organisations. I see ethical trade communication as mediation between producers and consumers through a ‘Silverstonian’ lens, that is, as an ethically charged communication process where the social values and meanings are constructed, negotiated and circulated (Silverstone, 1999, 2002, 2007). Within this conceptualisation, my research is particularly interested in how ethical trade communication as mediation can function as moral education geared towards constructing consumers who consider the impact on distant others in making their everyday buying decisions (e.g., Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Massey, 2006; Noddings, 1984). This chapter constructs the theoretical scaffolding presented in Figure 2 for studying ethical trade communication as moral education. Firstly, it establishes a conceptual link between the notions of mediation and moral education in communication studies in general and humanitarian communication in particular. Secondly, it engages the mediation–moral education couplet in theorising ethical trade communication. Thirdly, I plug communication theory into the research on ethical trade across disciplines in order to conceptualise two distinct modes of mediation: mediated familiarity and moral education. The section on mediated familiarity begins by discussing representations of distant others in general and zooms in subsequently on the extant analysis of fair trade representations. The section on moral education, in turn, identifies and theorises three dispositions – in methodological vocabulary, signifiers – that ethical trade communication intends to instill in the audience: solidarity, care and responsibility. In doing so, it relies on the research on ethical trade conducted within the disciplines of communication studies, postcolonial theory, human and social geography, anthropology and political science. Finally, to reflect a more media-oriented dimension of the study, the chapter provides an overview of communication literature that discusses the potential of social media in relation to organisational communication, activism and moral education.

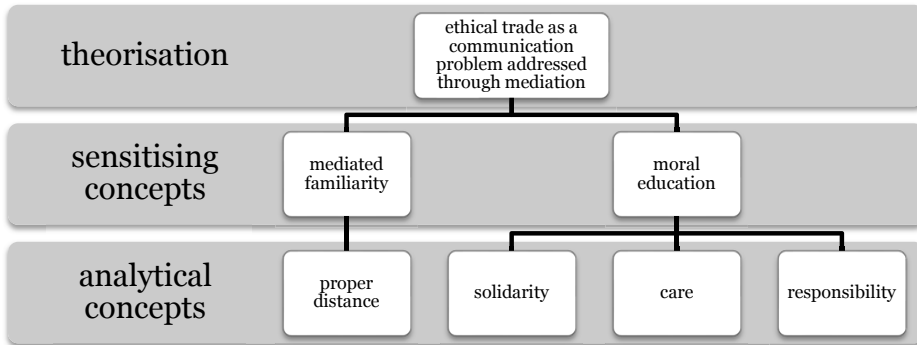


Figure 2 An overview of the theoretical framework.

### 3.1 MEDIATION AS MORAL EDUCATION

This project starts from the assertion that ethical trade organisations mediate between producers in the Global South and consumers in the Global North. In general, mediation carries three distinct meanings: (1) an attempt to reconcile adversaries; (2) an intermediate agency that acts in between the two parties to a relationship; and (3) a direct and conscious activity of expressing otherwise unsaid and obscure relationships (Livingstone, 2009: 12; see also Williams, 1983: 204–207). From the perspective of media studies, mediation – enabled by the capacity of communication technologies to transmit mediated content across physical distances (Silverstone, 2008; see also Madianou, 2013a) – describes the role of media in circulating meaning within and among societies (Silverstone, 1999). As such, mediation encapsulates and engages social actors in the ‘life in the media’ whereby symbolic forms are (re)constructed, (re)circulated and (re)consumed (McCurdy, 2013: 61; see also Madianou, 2013a).

What concerns me here, however, is a less media-centric view of mediation. Silverstone (1999: 8, 2001: 13) captures this sentiment when he writes that to mediate is to create a sense of immediacy through communication, and to participate in mediation is to transcend time and – most crucially for my study – space (see also Tomlinson, 1999: 152). Relatedly, there are three reasons why I approach mediation specifically through Silverstone’s work. Firstly, in terms of the topic of this research, which is ethical trade, Silverstone emphasises the role of everyday experiences in developing ‘an ethics of care and responsibility’ (Silverstone, 2002: 761). While this approach originally accentuates the role of everyday encounters with mediated content in forming relationships with distant others and the world at large (Silverstone, 1999), it lends itself to the extension to the mundane micro-practices of consumption and shopping (see Ahmed, 2000). Secondly, Silverstone’s take on mediation as composed of mundane and immediate experiences justifies the empirical analysis of micro-

practices of communication as well as situating them in the context of a wider social repository of practices and discourses (see also Chouliaraki, 2006). Thus, it also opens the door for bypassing institutionalised ‘media’ and, instead, investigating the role of *mediators* – such as ethical trade organisations – who use personal communication and commercial social media platforms to produce, curate and circulate content (see Couldry, 2008; Livingstone, 2009). In other words, Silverstone enables me to investigate mediation without (the necessary presence of) journalists or media organisations. Thirdly, and crucially for the moral problem dissected in this study, Silverstonian mediation is not only a technology or a neutral transfer of information, but a process with a heavy ethical load (Silverstone, 1999; see also Carey, 2008). In fact, Silverstone goes as far as to argue that no ethics at all is possible without (mediated) communication. The remainder of this section will follow this specific dimension of Silverstone’s take on mediation and explore its connection to the concept of moral education.

According to Silverstone (1999, 2008), living in a globalised world means living in a mediated world. That is, a globalised world as a whole is hardly ever accessible through direct experience. Rather, we get to know distant peoples and places through mediated images and sounds that traverse geographical distance (Silverstone, 1999, 2007; see also Chouliaraki, 2006; Robertson, 2010)<sup>60</sup>. In a world split into the hemispheres of wealth and scarcity, the concern with distance is primarily ethical (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b). The imperative of mediation is, then, not only to overcome physical separation, but also to bridge social, cultural and, perhaps most importantly, moral distance in order to create a sense of meaningful proximity to distant others (Silverstone, 2004; see also Tomlinson, 1999). For this dynamic, Silverstone (2007: 31) coined the notion of ‘mediapolis’ as an attempt to capture the ‘space of mediated appearance’ as an arena of the ongoing (re-)construction of the material world (see also Carey, 2008). Thus, mediation provides a space for mundane cultural encounters and conversations (Tomlinson, 2011: 354) that can connect us to distant others, their lived realities and claims (Silverstone, 1999, 2004). The concept of mediapolis highlights the performativity of mediation: although it is ‘the product of human agency’, born out of the efforts of mediators, it nevertheless carries implications for the lives of distant others (Silverstone, 2008: 65). Against that background, mediation as an ethically charged symbolic process refers to the construction, negotiation and circulation of social meanings, understandings and values in and through communication (Silverstone, 1999, 2002). This is where mediation seamlessly fades into moral education.

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<sup>60</sup> At this point, I would like to return to and emphasise the observation that also many of the products owned and consumed in the Global North inextricably connect us to places where they were produced and to people who produced them. However, commodity fetishism is continuously at work to obscure these links and interrelations.

In general terms, moral education insists on recognising distant others as 'equally deserving' of compassion and global justice (Arthurs, 2012: 144). In humanitarian communication, moral education pins down the ethical obligation of mediators to cultivate cosmopolitan attitudes among the public. Through continuously representing the world and its peoples, mediated content can serve to form and nurture the symbolic relationships between audiences and distant others that hinge on a cosmopolitan sensibility and global imagination (Chouliaraki, 2006; Kurasawa, 2004; Orgad, 2012; Rantanen, 2004; Robertson, 2010; Silverstone, 2007; Tomlinson, 2011). Chouliaraki (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2013a) posits that through the reiteration of moral discourses, mediated stories not only illustrate misfortunes in the lives of distant others, but also promote ethical values and cultivate moral agency and cosmopolitan disposition among the public. For example, they might sensitise audiences to the harms that they might, be it consciously or not, inflict upon distant others (Linklater, 2007). Moreover, images of, and information about, distant contexts might incite new forms of collective 'action at a distance', ignorant of physical separation (Thompson, 1995: 100).

If used as an analytic tool, moral education describes how and to what extent media content can render the plight of distant others worthy of attention, emotion and action (Chouliaraki, 2008b). According to Chouliaraki (2006, 2008a: 371), the possibility of mediation as moral education hinges on mediators achieving two things. Firstly, they must discuss the (structural) causes of the plight of the vulnerable. Secondly, they ought to present the public with concrete propositions for actions to be undertaken in response to the reality behind images (see also Silverstone, 2008; Tomlinson, 1999).

Underlining the link between mediation and technology, Silverstone (2002: 761) defined mediation as a technologically enabled 'transformative process' of communication. In closing on this note, however, it is essential to remember that technology by itself is not an instant fix to moral dilemmas. Indeed, it warrants neither moral education nor a meaningful connection to distant others (see Chouliaraki, 2006; Hand and Sandywell, 2002; Robertson, 2010; Silverstone, 2003; Tomlinson, 2011). In fact, the body of humanitarian communication research on mediated representations of distant others testifies to the often wasted, or not fully exploited, potential of different media, particularly television news, to educate future cosmopolitans and provide means of acting on the suffering of distant others (Arthurs, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2013b; Orgad, 2012; Robertson, 2010; see also Tomlinson, 1999).

### **3.2 ETHICAL TRADE COMMUNICATION AS MEDIATION**

In my view, an 'ethics' of ethical trade resides in its efforts to re-establish trade as an ethical relationship on the foundation of a greater sensitivity to the rights and needs of Southern producers. In this configuration, producers appear as

distant strangers, located beyond the realm of the personal, experienced and directly knowable (Corbridge, 1993; see also Trentmann, 2007). As distant others, Southern producers and their predicament are brought to the awareness of consumers through mediation. In the case of ethical trade, mediation can be both very material, through the provision of products, and more symbolic, through systematically educating consumers about the injustices of global trade or through telling stories about producers (Barnett et al., 2005a; Linton et al., 2004). My focus is primarily on the symbolic, i.e., communicative, aspect of mediation.

Given their clear ethical agenda, ethical trade organisations cannot adopt in their mediation an ‘impartial’ stance. Contrary to the informed but neutral viewpoint that Silverstone (2008: 89) recommends for media organisations, the success of ethical trade is dependent precisely upon the intellectual and emotional investment of the audience<sup>61</sup>. Thus, on the cognitive level, ethical trade organisations as mediators must communicatively create awareness and pass on the knowledge of Southern producers and their predicament (Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Fisher, 2007; Goodman, 2004; Le Velly, 2007; Lyon, 2006; Raghuram et al., 2009; Shreck, 2005). In this respect, the literature concentrates on, and heavily criticises for that matter, the tactic of ‘personalisation’ of trading relationships through textual and visual narratives about individual producers (Ahmed, 2000; Dolan, 2008; Goodman, 2004; Lyon, 2006; Ramamurthy, 2012; Scrase, 2011; Varul, 2008; Wright, 2004). To effectively incorporate distant producers into the cognitive landscape of consumers, ethical trade organisations must reconstruct the fragmented, globalised world in such a way that the intricate connections between faraway locales are emphasised (see Raghuram et al., 2009). Although such links are part and parcel of the everyday circuits of production, trade, shopping and consumption, they often remain obscure to consumers (Ahmed, 2000; Archer and Fritsch, 2010; Clarke et al., 2007a). Hence, ethical trade communication seeks to illustrate the interdependence between Northern lifestyles and consumption habits, and the world of distant sweatshops and remote coffee farms (see Tomlinson, 2011).

This cognitive familiarity and knowledge, however, should be wrapped in a symbolic normative layer that would enable the awakening in the society of strong sentiments of empathy and identification (Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Le Velly, 2007). At the end of the day, the goal of ethical trade communication is not to objectively inform, but to morally educate

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<sup>61</sup>This is not to say that remedying the plight of Southern producers is exclusively in the hands of Northern actors. Rather, I am trying to highlight that the growing interest and pressure generated in the North to remedy the inequalities of global trade might trigger worldwide changes in the mechanisms propelling these injustices, and result in increased possibilities for Southern producers to improve their situation through, e.g., unionisation. Obviously, for such interest to develop, careful mediation between producers and consumers is essential.

consumers, that is, to shape ethical attitudes and moral dispositions<sup>62</sup>. Thus, as mediators, ethical trade organisations have an obligation to represent producers, their predicament and the cause as worthy of consumers' attention and action (see Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b; Rorty, 1993; Silverstone, 2002, 2006, 2007). This task is even more pressing as it involves reworking the instinctive human attitude in which the personal difficulties and needs of significant and proximate others usually take precedence over remote predicaments and vulnerabilities, no matter how dire (Corbridge, 1993; Linklater, 2007; Silk, 1998, 2000; Smith, 1998). In the absence of direct connections and access to distant producers, which can be moderated to an extent through knowledge and information, consumers are unlikely to be concerned about the processes and contexts in which goods that they purchase were produced (Billig, 1999; Hudson and Hudson, 2003). Moreover, the issue of work exploitation might not mobilise relatively affluent consumers who cannot relate to this experience (Allen, 2008; Levi and Linton, 2003; Low and Davenport, 2007). Albeit strenuous, the construction of empathy and identification is the crux of ethical trade communication as moral education: only when included in consumers' moral horizons will distant producers be embraced in the bonds of solidarity, care and responsibility that are typically viewed to organise communities and societies (Keane, 2003; Robertson, 2010; Tomlinson, 1999).

The 'cognitive' and 'moral' levels described above correspond to the two modes of mediation termed here 'mediated familiarity' and 'moral education', respectively. They refer to mediated representations and meta-representations generated and circulated by ethical trade organisations operating in the North. Both these levels are necessary for the construction of a mediated ethical relationship between producers and consumers. The division is primarily analytical as in the actual process of mediation, mediated familiarity and moral education are closely intertwined. The merit of this distinction, however, lies in the fact that it introduces greater tonality into ethical trade communication. In other words, practices and strategies of ethical trade communication can be mapped onto a spectrum that stretches between raising awareness and shaping moral dispositions. The following sections will look at mediated familiarity and moral education in turn with the aim of constructing a framework for analysing ethical trade communication as mediation.

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<sup>62</sup> However, this is not to deny the dialectical nature of the process of mediation and the active role of the audience therein (Silverstone, 2002). Rather, it is to admit that, unlike traditional media producers, ethical trade organisations lay no claims to, nor have any interest in, impartiality. Hence, mediation of the relationship between producers and consumers is transparent in both its contexts and intentions, whether or not this transparency serves to enhance trust in their communication (Silverstone, 2002; see also Boltanski, 1999).



### 3.3 MEDIATED FAMILIARITY

I understand mediated familiarity as a connection to distant others, based primarily on factual knowledge and acknowledgement of affinity (see Chouliaraki, 2006; Tomlinson, 1999). To put it another way, mediated familiarity has to do with the provision of information by ethical trade organisations about Southern producers and their lived realities in a bid to ‘shorten the distance’ between consumers and producers (see Caruana, 2007; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Shreck, 2005). As such, mediated familiarity is constructed primarily by means of representation (see Sturken, 2011: 427), be it through portrayals of individual producers or collective renderings of Southern producers as a ‘class’ of people (see Lekakis, 2013). The asymmetrical character of mediation, and perhaps of communication in general, permits familiarity that is primarily unidirectional (see Ahmed, 2000: 156). In other words, Northern consumers can learn about Southern producers whose opportunities to reciprocate are limited, not least because of the generally more constricted access to media technologies and institutions (see Dolan, 2007; Wright, 2004).

Similar mediated and unidirectional relationships are sometimes theorised as ‘intimacy at a distance’. In the same vein, Orgad and Seu (2014a: 917) talk about intimacy at a distance as ‘a mediated... mostly non-reciprocal bonding with faraway others’ (see also Chouliaraki, 2006: 21). Intimacy at a distance, however, is not an affirmative concept. Rather, it is used in humanitarian communication to criticise standardised representations of distant others that endorse emotional responses that privilege the ‘giving’ self over the suffering others (Orgad and Seu, 2014a; see also Chouliaraki, 2013b). In contrast, mediated familiarity construed in ethical trade communication tries to escape the traps of voyeurism and objectification that lurk behind the practice, common in humanitarian communication, of exposing vulnerable bodies through privacy invasion. These risks are fended off in two interrelated moves. Firstly, ethical trade concentrates on the plight of Southern producers in their working lives, and not on their private hardships<sup>63</sup> (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008). Secondly, mediated familiarity has as its purpose raising awareness and the dissemination of knowledge, not the triggering of emotional or sentimental responses. Thus, founded on knowledge and information, mediated familiarity is a cognitive state rather than a moral disposition (see Caruana, 2007). Yet, as a practice of representation, it can be held to certain ethical standards, particularly in relation to ensuring the ‘proper distance’ (Silverstone, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008).

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<sup>63</sup> This tactic, as we shall see later, is also a double-edged sword: while it respects privacy, it represents Southern producers as one-dimensional human beings predestined to work.

## **PROPER DISTANCE**

As previously mentioned, representation is the key means of constructing mediated familiarity. Representation as a technology of learning about the distant world and its peoples nourishes the ‘global imagination’, which, in turn, guides our ethical conduct and supports our ability to empathise with one another (Orgad, 2012; Robertson, 2010). In other words, global imagination offers the cosmopolitan vision of humanity as a community that inhabits shared social space, and whose members are connected and relevant to one another (Orgad, 2012: 3). Mediated narratives and images that relate the predicament of distant others have the potential to elicit moral responses that can lead to practical actions aimed at relieving the lot of the underprivileged and vulnerable (Chouliaraki, 2006; Orgad, 2012; Orgad and Seu, 2014b). However, whether representations mobilise a response depends on their form, quality and meaningfulness to the audience (Chouliaraki, 2006; Ong, 2009; Orgad, 2012). In the context, in particular, of Baudrillardian critique of representation as simulation – and of mediated suffering as an aesthetic spectacle (see Chouliaraki, 2008b) – it is imperative that the portrayals of distant others and their plight resonate with the ‘local moral horizons’ and personal experiences of the audience (Tomlinson, 1999: 179). For example, meaningful representations should not trivialise the differences between spectators and sufferers, or leave unsaid the systemic conditions that give rise to their respective positions (Beck, 2004: 438; Chouliaraki, 2006; Sturken, 2011). To problematise representations of distant others as the dialectics of difference and sameness, Silverstone (2002, 2003, 2007, 2008) developed the notion of ‘proper distance’.

The concept of proper distance posits that to encourage audiences to act on the realities behind representations, distant others must be presented in both shared humanity (similarity) and difference (Silverstone, 2008: 91). In the most elaborate definition, Silverstone describes proper distance as:

[U]nderstanding [of] the more or less precise degree of proximity required in our mediated interrelationships if we are to create and sustain a sense of the other sufficient not just for reciprocity but for a duty of care, obligation and responsibility, as well as understanding. Proper distance preserves the other through difference as well as through shared identity. (Silverstone, 2007: 47)

Voluminous and vague at first glance, the above passage requires some unpacking. Firstly, proper distance eschews trivial (mis-)understandings of distant others, founded on one-dimensional and simplified representations as essentially different or basically the same (Sturken, 2011). Secondly, the ‘understanding’ at hand is an obligation of mediators who attempt to represent distant others in a meaningful way (Silverstone, 2003). Thus, proper distance, like mediation in general, is not pre-given, but produced by means of human agency (Silverstone, 2003). Proper distance, however, is not only a mediator’s personal code of conduct, but also an ideal to attain for any individual

representation of distant others. Thirdly, the ‘more or less precise degree of proximity’ hints at the relative volatility of proper distance in the sense of having to be determined on a case-by-case basis (see Silverstone, 2003). Fourthly, proper distance facilitates the establishing between audiences and distant others of a mediated ethical relationship, predicated on solidarity, care and responsibility (see Silverstone, 2004). The emergence of such a relationship, to reiterate, is the crux of moral education.

Undoubtedly, the concept of proper distance is a powerful metaphor for thinking about representations of Southern producers. Although it has been successfully deployed and improved upon by a host of scholars (Arthurs, 2012; Chouliaraki, 2006; Hull and Stornaiuolo, 2014; Orgad, 2011; Sturken, 2011), I am obliged to acknowledge its shortcomings. From this study’s point of view, Northern centrism is particularly problematic<sup>64</sup>: while the notion of proper distance assumes the responsibility of mediators towards the marginalised, it is an obligation that hinges on the responsibility for enabling the unproblematised *Northern audiences* to understand distant others (see Ong, 2014). Thus, the proper distance in the representations of distant others springs from a ‘colonial’ (see Raghuram et al., 2009) premise of being maintained for, and judged by, the abstract Northern public:

[Media’s] task is to create some kind of comfort and pleasure for those on the receiving end of such mediations, some comfort and pleasure in the appearance of the strange as not too strange and the familiar as not too familiar. (Silverstone, 2003: 476)

Coming from different directions, several scholars point to other problematic aspects of the notion of proper distance (Arthurs, 2012; Dayan, 2007; Frosh, 2011; Wright, 2011). Most significantly for this study, critics take issue with the concept’s disinterest in the backgrounds of specific audiences and the contexts in which they are located. Wright (2011) criticises the inherent detachment of the strictly normative notion of proper distance from the socio-economic context in which representations are interpreted by the public. To address this shortcoming, Arthurs (2012: 155) proposes that the ‘representational ethics’ of proper distance needs to acknowledge discursive contexts demarcated by, among others, political economy and historical perspectives. Arthurs’ prescription is an important addition to the concept of proper distance and to the theory of mediation in general, which impinges on my approach to ethical trade communication on the very fundamental level.

As the above discussion makes clear, in this dissertation I am interested in proper distance as a tool for analysing textual and visual representations of Southern producers. This admittedly one-dimensional treatment does not exploit the full potential of the concept that could be deployed to investigate

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<sup>64</sup> I would like to thank Professor Hannu Nieminen for pointing out this problem during the 2nd Annual Conference of the Doctoral Programme in Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki in December 2015.

much more complex and two-directional relationships between the audience and distant others. Here, however, I use proper distance to examine the conduct of ethical trade organisations as mediators towards producers, rather than the relationship between producers and consumers. Arguably, this narrower understanding of proper distance makes it easier to apply in empirical analysis.

## **FAIR TRADE REPRESENTATIONS OF SOUTHERN PRODUCERS: COLONIALITY AND COMMODIFICATION**

Obviously, a representational context influences how the Global South is imagined and pictured. Conventionally, the South is discursively constructed in one of two ways, largely depending on the intentions of the party doing the representational work (see Lekakis, 2013: 13). On the one hand, the strictly profit-oriented – and often somewhat callous – contexts require instrumental and objectifying representations of the South as a class of people and spaces that can be exploited through international trade. For example, they might be used for externalising unprofitable and harmful production processes or mined for rare natural resources. On the other hand, the more ‘benevolent’ and often humanitarian initiatives mobilise the portrayal of helpless victims awaiting to be rescued through foreign aid and international charity (Lekakis, 2013). Meanwhile, ethical trade communication seeks to circumvent both these tendencies and instead promotes a representation of the South as inhabited by hard-working agents whose efforts *must* be fairly compensated *in* trade relationships (see Dolan, 2008: 314).

Scholarly examinations, though, are often very critical of how fair trade communication in particular turns this ambition into actual representational practices<sup>65</sup>. Conspicuously, the lion’s share of representations discussed in the extant academic literature is produced by British companies for consumers located in the UK. Perhaps the vast colonial past and problematic legacy makes fair trade in the UK particularly susceptible to visual and rhetorical ‘coloniality’.

Southern producers are usually portrayed as humble, grateful and contented peasants working in idyllic nature. Critics note three overarching, overlapping and compounded negative tendencies in such romanticised, exoticised and stereotypical representations, which all too often wind up reproducing the problems that they seek to rectify. The first tendency is the perpetuation of an image of producers as colonial subjects. Based on interviews with consumers and NGO workers about their imaginings of Africa that frame and situate specific fair trade representations, Dolan (2005, 2007)

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<sup>65</sup> The discussion will be based primarily on the literature concerning fair trade representations of Southern producers as reflections on the general ethical trade imaginary are largely absent. My empirical material shows that the relevance of representation as a genre is indeed much higher for fair trade organisations than more structurally oriented ethical trade organisations.

argues that the narratives of ethical trade and consumption in Britain are deeply enmeshed in the legacy of British imperialism (see also Trentmann, 2007). This colonial heritage is evident in the images of Southern producers as smiling and contented workers that often grace the advertisements and packaging of fair trade products. Ramamurthy's (2012) postcolonial reading of the images of tea pickers in colonial advertising and in the marketing campaigns of fair trade organisations exposes overwhelming similarities between the two imaginaries. She argues that colonial advertising used such images to 'assert the "naturalness" of racial hierarchy where colonial workers were organized by British firms to enable them to be productive' (Ramamurthy, 2012: 367; see also Grosfoguel, 2007). Crucially, Ramamurthy (2012: 377) claims that fair trade advertising pays lip service to fairness and equality, while it in fact forces producers to comply and exhibit the same docility that was previously imposed on oppressed colonial subjects, just in order to please consumers. Furthermore, being always portrayed at work, Southern producers are symbolically denied the right to leisure and consumption, and their status as labourers and servants is reinforced (see Ramamurthy, 2012; Trentmann, 2007; Varul, 2008). Tellingly, it is not only the 'inherited' images that are susceptible to reproducing colonial relations, but so are the attempts to recast fair trade advertising in a fancier and more modern commercial form. In the same vein, Varul (2008) finds problematic the two pictures of styled young African female models used by the Divine Chocolate brand in a marketing campaign that sought to escape the spectre of colonial labour and patronage. He eloquently argues that in linking racialised and sexed-up bodies to a traditionally colonial product, the advertisements fail to avoid the colonial connotations and instead 'swirl around at the margins of a vortex of colonial racist and sexist imagination' (Varul, 2008: 672).

Once Southern producers are construed as colonial subjects, the second tendency is to represent them as victims divested of agency. This tendency, often used simultaneously with the colonial imagery, is widely problematised in the relevant literature (see Berlan, 2008; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Dolan, 2007, 2008; Scrase, 2011; Varul, 2008; Wright, 2004). Varul's (2008) analysis of the images contained in the Traidcraft<sup>66</sup> mail order catalogue and in the advertising campaign of the fair trade brand Divine Chocolate captures the link between coloniality and the disempowerment of producers. Certainly, fair trade producers are represented as worth helping: they are the 'deserving poor' familiar from charity discourses (Varul, 2008: 667; see also Berlan, 2008; Dolan, 2005, 2007, 2008). Yet, Varul (2008: 660) argues, it is the consumers addressed as empowered agents who do the helping at their leisure, without the obligation of intensive and prolonged commitment. Likewise,

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<sup>66</sup> Traidcraft is a fair trade organisation in the UK with explicitly Christian roots. Operational since 1979, it was one of the founders of the Fairtrade Foundation, the British branch of Fairtrade International. Their goal is to 'live out the Christian faith through our mission to fight poverty through trade' (Traidcraft's website, <http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/about-traidcraft>, accessed 26 January 2017).

Berlan's (2008) anthropological study of fair trade marketing of Ghanaian cocoa in Britain contends that farmers are still primarily represented as needy, helpless victims of transnational corporations, dependent for their salvation on the benevolence of consumers. In doing so, according to Berlan (2008: 176), fair trade marketing tends to attribute agency to the consumer, and emotion – primarily that of gratitude – to African producers, thereby eviscerating the discursively proclaimed values of partnership and mutual benefit (see also Wright, 2004: 669). The representations of grateful farmers disseminated by fair trade organisations are, moreover, not truthful to Berlan's ethnographic findings. Rather than being grateful and humble beneficiaries, Ghanaian cocoa farmers view fair trade, like any other trading exchange, as a way of reciprocally satisfying needs, for produce and money, respectively. In accordance with this perception, farmers are ready to bend the rules of the system for their own benefit (Berlan, 2008: 182; see also McEwan et al., 2017). Thus, while proclaiming a radical breakaway from charity and aid, fair trade representations perpetuate the representation of the South as being in need of redemption and salvation by the 'developed' world.

In the representations of fair trade producers, the proclivity to display victimhood is often seamlessly and intimately tied to the third negative tendency, that is, the propensity to commodify producers, their labour and the spaces they inhabit. This combination is palpable in Dolan's (2005, 2007) observation that contrary to the communicative promise of introducing trade equity and equality, the fair trade imaginary deploys a patronising vision of destitution in order to elicit consumer support. She writes that '[t]oday, images of impoverished African workers are commodified by supermarkets and NGOs to peddle ethically produced wares, a strategy that regulates cultural alterity to draw attention to the differences between the fortunate "us" and the downtrodden "them"' (Dolan, 2005: 370, 2007: 249). Empirically, Scrase's (2011) analysis of the Internet websites of two NGOs concerned with ethical trade, namely Oxfam Australia and Ten Thousand Villages, finds that these web pages are permeated with the 'commodification of poverty' whereby the stereotypical representations of marginalised peoples and their labour are exploited for charitable gain.

Moreover, representations of fair trade producers are often accused of commodifying not only poverty, but also farmers and their labour. Goodman (2004: 902) conceptualises commodification performed by fair trade representations as a communicative 'reworking' of commodity fetishism through relocating it from the commodity itself onto the 'images of indigenous producers, tropes of productive tropical nature, and meanings of alternative development'. On that note, Wright (2004: 671) remarks that fair trade representations tend to reveal social relationships of production only partially and 'in ways that render them commodities in their own right'. This is the case, for example, with the abstraction of commodities and their production from the uneasy context of the (gender and economic) structures of oppression (Ramamurthy, 2012; see Raghuram et al., 2009). Empirically, Wright's (2004:

678) analysis of an advertorial published by the *Guardian* for Cafédirect, a fair trade company in the UK, painstakingly reveals how the bodies of Southern producers – alongside the landscapes they inhabit – are subsumed into coffee as a commodity. As the properties of the product, producers and their labour become commodified and purchasable (see also Ramamurthy, 2012). Likewise, the persisting associations of producers with the authenticity, environmental responsibility, idyll and tranquillity of rural life are prone to commodification (see Ramamurthy, 2012: 380; Varul, 2008; Wright, 2004). Luetchford<sup>67</sup> (2008: 145) describes the conventional portrayal of fair trade producers as peasants inhabiting the faraway lands of ‘eternal summer’, and cultivating their fields as part of a ‘peasant economy’ that boldly resists the soulless forces of global capitalism. As a curious excursus, he notes how the stories of producers included on the packaging of fair trade merchandise strike a balance between competing political positions: they appeal to the right by highlighting the independence of farmers as ‘self-determining’ businesspeople, and they resonate with the left in showcasing farmers’ hard labour in ‘working the earth’ (Luetchford, 2008: 148). Finally, he also observes that such a strong focus on the figure of a smallholder farmer leads to their fetishisation (see also Bryant and Goodman, 2004: 359).

Thus, it would seem, fair trade representations spin around in a vicious circle whereby the capitalist commodity fetishism is transformed into an alternative commodity spectacle (Bryant and Goodman, 2004: 359). This new spectacle reproduces the tropes of coloniality, victimhood, disempowerment and commodification. I argue, in anticipation of the empirical analysis forthcoming in Chapter 5, that approaching fair trade representations through the notion of ‘proper distance’ and from the thus far underemployed perspective of media and communication studies (with the exception of Ramamurthy, 2012) provides a useful corrective to the current, heavily criticised practices.

### 3.4 MORAL EDUCATION

In a bid to construct consumers who consider the impact on faraway producers and workers when making everyday buying decisions (e.g., Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Goodman, 2004; Massey, 2006), moral education moves beyond the cognitive level of mediated familiarity to advocate a deepened moral commitment. It builds, however, on mediated familiarity in achieving symbolic recognition of the faces, bodies and predicaments of Southern producers (‘human stories’; Arthurs, 2012: 144). Moral education operates on the level of ‘meta-representations’ whereby a

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<sup>67</sup> Luetchford’s (2008) chapter deals with his anthropological research into how the conventional focus of fair trade marketing on smallholder farmers obscures the appalling conditions of wage labour in the coffee economy, performed by migrants and landless locals.

moral disposition is constructed in relation to the *generalised* distant others whose condition is cast within the context of ‘universal’<sup>68</sup> moral values and discourses (Boltanski, 1999; Silverstone, 2004). In stepping outside the frameworks of institutionalised media and journalists as mediators, and of mediated representations as the only vehicle of moral education, I employ moral education not as an analytic device, but as a sensitising concept that suggests what to look for in the analysis and points out where to find it (Carpentier, 2017: 290). As such, moral education is pinned down by three moral orientations that are particularly relevant for ethical trade: solidarity, care and responsibility<sup>69</sup> (see Richey and Ponte, 2011: 173). Unlike proper distance, which serves me in investigating the performance of ethical trade organisations in representing producers, three moral dispositions are generally taken to characterise a relationship between Southern producers and ethical consumers.

As ‘commonsensical’ concepts quite rarely used as analytical lenses, ‘solidarity’, ‘care’ and ‘responsibility’ share a lot of content. To start with, all three are built on the foundation of knowledge and empathy. They are all cosmopolitan attitudes in that they extend beyond the realm of proximate relationships with significant others towards indirect and impersonal relations with distant strangers (see, for example, Ahmed, 2000; Allen, 2008; Kurasawa, 2004; Raghuram et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010; Tomlinson, 1999). Moreover, solidarity, care and responsibility are all moral commitments with a significant political dimension (see, for example, Fenton, 2008; Micheletti, 2003; Morgan, 2010), although there is a gradation of intensity of this political element from concept to concept. A related feature that all three notions share is the call for action and providing practical aid to the underprivileged (see, for example, Chouliaraki, 2008b; Smith, 1998; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). The character of proposed actions, however, varies. Finally, solidarity, care and responsibility all emphasise the agency of Southern producers as historical actors (see, for example, Calhoun, 2002; Raghuram et al., 2009).

Given these remarkable overlaps, the choice of a term employed to capture the moral orientation advocated by ethical trade often seems to be a matter of authorial preference and, perhaps, the academic debates to which they wish to contribute and within which disciplinary context. While ‘responsibility’ is the most popular in research on corporate social responsibility (see Hughes et al.,

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<sup>68</sup> In Chapter 7, I take issue with the idea of ‘universal’ morality, but, for now, it relates to morality beyond a relationship with a knowable individual within the specific framework of ethical trade.

<sup>69</sup> Predictably, the terms I use here are not exactly emic labels as used by the organisations. They are etic terms, generated through a dialogue between empirical material and the relevant literature. As such, it would be untruthful to claim that the notions of solidarity, care and responsibility organically ‘emerged’ from the material, although they resurfaced every now and then throughout my fieldwork. Nor were they preconceived categories that I imposed on the material, though. Inevitably, some complexity of ethical trade communication was lost as I fit the material under three ‘neat’ labels. Yet, this complexity persistently manifests itself in the overlaps between the notions of solidarity, care and responsibility.



2008), and in work involving the understanding of ethical trade as an incarnation of political consumerism (e.g., Allen, 2008; Clarke et al., 2007a; Holzer, 2006; Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti and Stolle, 2007; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013), ‘solidarity’ (e.g., Adams and Raisborough, 2011; Clarke et al., 2007a; Gendron et al., 2009; Goodman, 2004; Lekakis, 2013; Pirotte, 2007) and ‘care’ (e.g., Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Popke, 2006) are used almost interchangeably. In what follows, however, I will try to analytically disentangle solidarity, care and responsibility. This untangling, similarly to the distinction between mediated familiarity and moral education, is intended to add more nuance to the analysis of ethical trade communication. In doing so, it tries to discern the discrete attitudes towards Southern producers proffered by different ethical trade organisations. Table 1 presents an overview of the main differences among the notions of solidarity, care and responsibility, which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent sections.

**Table 1.** *An overview of the main characteristics of solidarity, care and responsibility in the context of ethical trade*

	<b>solidarity</b>	<b>care</b>	<b>responsibility</b>
<b>theorisation</b>	morality of cooperation	dialectics of care	social connection model
<b>collective or individual orientation</b>	collective	individual	collective
<b>interests of producers and consumers</b>	shared (functional interdependence)	competing, but reconcilable	compatible (part of the same constellation)

## **GLOBAL SOLIDARITY IN ETHICAL TRADE**

In the specific context of market economy and global trade, solidarity can be looked at through the prism of ‘functional interdependence’ (Calhoun, 2002: 160). Building on the Durkheimian notion of ‘organic solidarity’ as ‘social bonds, based on specialisation, that unite members of industrial societies’ (Macionis and Plummer, 2002: 85), Calhoun uses ‘functional interdependence’ to describe how different social groups and institutions depend on each other in the global division of labour and elaborate market relations. It is this interdependence that commodity fetishism labours to obscure and that ethical trade seeks to communicate to consumers. Relatedly, in Fenton’s (2007: 235) view, solidarity demands that the capitalist hegemony be exposed and its impact on production, consumption and other domains of social life be contested.

Solidarity, however, is not limited to common economic interests, even when articulated as functional interdependence firmly situated in the market

realm. Rather, Calhoun (2002: 171) argues, it encapsulates a range of projects geared towards ‘imagining’ a better future together. These projects extend the sense of belonging beyond a localised community of those who are similar, and reach out to form a cosmopolitan community of distant strangers based on a ‘morality of cooperation’ (Fenton, 2008: 49; see also Arce, 2009: 1040; Kurasawa, 2004: 249). As a *morality of cooperation*, solidarity is the glue that binds together communities that would otherwise dissolve in difference (Fenton, 2007: 231; see also Macionis and Plummer, 2002: 85). As a morality of cooperation, solidarity is also constructed. In the same vein, Kurasawa (2004) characterises cosmopolitan solidarity as bonds of reciprocity that might be constructed through transnational practice, public discourse, dialogue and socio-political action. Similarly, Kavada (2014: 351) observes that ‘transnational solidarity’ that makes ‘people feel part of an “imagined community” of distant strangers’ can be facilitated by the dissemination of images and information about distant people and remote places.

Humanitarian communication approaches solidarity from a slightly different angle to political and activist communication. In its specific vocabulary, global solidarity figures as a core proposal for moral agency that hinges on empathy – rather than cooperation – and the willingness to make a difference in the lives of the less privileged (Chouliaraki, 2008b, 2011). Yet, both conceptualisations agree that affect and emotion are not enough for solidarity to emerge: for that to happen, material engagement is also necessary (Chouliaraki, 2008b; Fenton, 2007, 2008; Tomlinson, 1999).

Thus, tying these two conceptions together, I regard solidarity as having a double footing. Morally, it is grounded in the human capacity for compassion (Linklater, 2007). Politically, it is premised on an ‘inclusive politics of voice and representation’ (Fenton, 2008: 49). This inclusive politics renders solidarity a collective effort, carried out in cooperation between the privileged and the marginalised as equal partners.

Plunging from the level of general theorisation into the empirical setting, Goodman (2004: 906) argues that ‘solidarity in difference’ is at the heart of ethical trade’s attempts to extend care and responsibility to distant others via mundane practices of eating and drinking (see also Renard, 2003). According to its most zealous proponents, the terms of exchange put forth by ethical trade are firmly set in a ‘real relationship of solidarity’ (Gendron et al., 2009: 67). More concretely, Pirotte (2007) claims that ethical trade seeks to incorporate solidarity into commercial transactions in two ways (see also Barnett et al., 2005a). Firstly, ethical trade organisations defetishise conventional commodities by communicatively revealing the plight of their distant producers. In doing so, they attempt to lay the moral foundations of empathy and compassion. Secondly, ethical trade organisations provide and/or promote products aimed at alleviating the predicament of producers. In doing that, they suggest a tangible and practicable option for cooperation through consumption. Arce (2009: 1031) describes this model as ‘commercial solidarity’ in that it both augments the viability of market economics as a space

for solidarity, and alters the meaning of trade through presenting it as a tool of development in the globalised world (see also Goodman, 2004, 2010; cf. Dean, 2005).

Yet, 'monetary' solidarity is problematic in that it might work to reinforce the hierarchies and asymmetries inherent to the donor–beneficiary relationship (Varul, 2008). Echoing the problem of fair trade representations mentioned above, the promotion of consumption as an articulation of solidarity positions Northern consumers as saviours of the underprivileged whose livelihoods become inextricably linked to consumers' lifestyle choices (Goodman, 2010: 105; see also Ahmed, 2000: 169; Berlan, 2008). Although such links no doubt exist and are crucial for sustaining the difficult economic situation in the Global South (see Dicken, 2002; Prebisch, 1959; Smith, 2016; Sowa, 2011; Tomlinson, 2011), when not elaborated, they reduce solidarity rooted in the complex interdependence to a one-way relationship, communicated as a function of consumption, not cooperation. The problematics of enacting solidarity through trade and consumption is further amplified by the previously discussed mainstreaming of fair trade and, by extension, ethical trade. Indeed, scholars claim that the imperative of solidarity is gradually subordinated to the depoliticised discourse of fair price and the commercial mantra of premium quality (Goodman, 2010: 111; Low and Davenport, 2005b). Bringing all these together, the solidarity that I am after in my empirical analysis is a morality of cooperation, articulated in moral, political and 'consumerist' terms.

## **THE DIALECTICS OF CARE IN ETHICAL TRADE**

In the context of ethical trade, I read care as a dialectics. Let us start, however, by moving upwards to a more general theorisation in order to understand what is actually at stake when we talk about care as a dialectics. Care refers to the 'provision of practical or emotional support' (Milligan and Wiles, 2010: 737), and it comprises all human activities performed to maintain and improve the world (Popke, 2006). Care is a life orientation that dictates compassion for (distant) others and concern over their inclusion (Popke, 2006). Even though care is primarily an individual moral compass, Morgan (2010: 1860) boldly argues that it can also be politicised and adopted as a guiding principle in public life. On a micro-scale, care is enacted through the embodied practices that form the backbone of everyday life, consumption being one of them (Raghuram et al., 2009; Silverstone, 2002).

In ethical trade, care is contingent on the provision and possession of knowledge about Southern producers as distant strangers (see Pirotte, 2007; Popke, 2006), which I here call 'mediated familiarity'. Silk (1998: 168) describes this model of care as 'third-party beneficence', whereby the flow of information from mediators to consumers triggers an action directed at a distant context. Significantly, given the interdependence between producers and consumers, care should not be perceived as a unidirectional relation of

charity (see Popke, 2006; Raghuram et al., 2009; Silk, 1998). Rather, a caring relationship should be cognisant of the agency of Southern producers and understand that the higher price is not benevolence, but an attempt at justice and fairness under the inequitable conditions of global trade. This call for care as universal justice and fairness might unwillingly pit the interests of distant strangers against partiality towards close ones (see Corbridge, 1993; Friedman, 1991; Linklater, 2007; Silk, 1998, 2000; Smith, 1998). The approach to care as dialectics tries to capture precisely this tension in ethical trade communication.

My theorisation is directly inspired by Miller's (2001a) analysis of the 'dialectics of shopping'. The dialectics of shopping recasts buying as an inherently moral domain in which one expresses a position towards the world and its peoples, both close and distant (Miller, 2001a: 111; see also Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Dolan, 2007: 243; Wilk, 2001). Thus, consumption, projected as a constant negotiation between competing values and interests, transcends the strictly utilitarian logics guided by an imperative of maximising own benefit (Archer and Fritsch, 2010). In Miller's view, ethical consumption is subject to haggling between caring for close ones, especially family members, and caring for Southern producers as distant strangers. On the one hand, care for close ones demands careful spending of household resources, preferably on high-quality products that have a positive influence on the family's well-being (Miller, 2001a: 126). On the other hand, caring for distant others entails suppressing thrift and buying ethically produced goods, which are more beneficial for producers, but usually more expensive for consumers (Miller, 2001a: 134). What Miller seems to overlook, though, is that ethical trade does not require consumers to compromise or sacrifice the well-being of their family members, but, rather, encourages them to offer *some* attention to the underprivileged and the unequal distribution of resources worldwide (see Friedman, 1991).

What follows is that ethical trade organisations need to be mindful of this tension and continuously address it in their communication. In this setting, the dialectics of care describes the *harmonising reconfiguration* of the relationship between care for oneself and close ones, and care for Southern producers as distant strangers. This reconfiguration is often achieved by emphasising global interdependence and interconnectedness (see Calhoun, 2002; Raghuram et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010). In other words, care for distant strangers is often anchored in care for oneself or some significant others (see Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Smith, 1998: 24).

## **RESPONSIBILITY IN ETHICAL TRADE**

This section is substantially more elaborate than the preceding discussions on solidarity and care. The reason for that is my intention to use responsibility as a sole analytical concept in the empirical study of Eetti. Thus, I need a device that can be deployed in many directions and at various levels. Given the

quagmire that often lurks behind the notion of responsibility, I will attempt to theoretically circumscribe what political and moral responsibility might mean in the context of ethical trade. In doing so, I intend to identify a sophisticated concept that transcends two current master narratives of global trade: (1) an orthodox narrative that locates the responsibility for adverse consequences of trade with the market itself (see Allen, 2008; James and Patomäki, 2006), and (2) a 'progressive' narrative that points to the consumer as the primary responsible subject. Furthermore, I will introduce the 'citizen-consumer' as an ideal-type responsible subject of trade and consumption, and briefly outline the histories of consumer activism in Poland and Finland.

### ***From individualised responsibility to social connection model***

The fragmentation of production and the ever-growing number of intermediaries diffuse responsibility for the adverse workings of global trade among different actors in commodity chains. As Allen (2008: 17) observes regarding the proliferation of sweatshops in the global garment industry, the market alone appears to bear responsibility for 'how things come together, how... design, sourcing, production, assembly and export are pieced together through a series of commercial contracts' (see also Lury, 2011). Where the idea prevails that market forces should not be tamed, responsibility is conventionally moved to individualised, self-governing consumers (Lekakis, 2013: 59). Let me unpack this loading of responsibility onto consumers in a foray into the meanders of advanced liberal governmentality and the associated interpretation of ethical consumption as an enactment of individualised responsibility.

The current historical moment, sometimes termed 'advanced liberalism', is marked by the global dominance of neo-liberal rationality underpinned by the 'economisation' and marketisation of previously non-economic domains (Burchell, 1996; Rose, 1993). From a composite of phenomena engendered by the turn to advanced liberalism, the reconfiguration of the relationship between the subject and the state is of significance here (see Brown, 2015: 17). Historically, the state produced government, defined in general terms as 'a way of acting to affect the way in which individuals *conduct themselves*' (Burchell, 1996: 20, italics in original), which directly regulated the population within and through the political institutions of rule. In this configuration, matters of global trade and its consequences were firmly located within the purview of state government. However, with the entrenchment of neo-liberal rationality, the balance has shifted from the government's 'technologies of power', geared towards controlling the conduct of individuals, to the 'technologies of the self' through which individuals influence their own conduct (Foucault, 1982a [2003]). This 'outsourcing' of government in parallel with the prioritisation of economy as a crux of social life have led to the emergence of a new technique of rule, described as 'governmentality' (Dean, 1999; see also Brown, 2015; Foucault, 1978[2003]).

Governmentality casts individuals as economic and entrepreneurial subjects motivated by rational self-interest (see Slater, 1997). The economic register within which governmentality operates insists on the application of 'entrepreneurial' – free, competitive, rational, active, responsible, etc. – conduct to all spheres of social and private life, such as education, health and, crucially for this research, consumption (see Romaniszyn, 2011). Freed from the state's political control, individuals are encouraged to strive towards self-mastery through exercising self-regulation and self-control (Rose, 1993: 289, 1996; see also Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Kelly, 2001; MacTier, 2008). In the context of the rolling back of the state institutions and regulations, thus formed self-governing entrepreneurs are needed to actively participate in addressing public issues, on a par with non-governmental bodies (Carvalho, 2005: 16). This process can be conceptualised as 'responsibilisation', whereby public issues are transferred from the domain of the state government to the realm of individual morality (Foucault, 1978[2003]: 233; see also Burchell, 1996: 29). In other words, responsibilisation privatises public issues (MacTier, 2008; Maniates, 2002), and conditions individuals to assume personal responsibility for mitigating issues that have been collectively generated (Carvalho, 2005).

Ethical consumption is sometimes represented as a practical exercise of such individualised and privatised responsibility (see Lekakis, 2013; Maniates, 2002; Middlemiss, 2010). It is not difficult to see why such framing renders ethical consumption a truly problematic phenomenon. Firstly, picturing global equality as a matter of private consumption choices implicates individuals in both causing the problem and in remedying it (see Carvalho, 2005; Maniates, 2002). Consequently, it obscures the collective dimension and structural character of the injustices of global trade (see Lewis, 2008). Secondly, focusing on private and thoroughly apolitical consumption as a solution to global inequality runs the risk of completely erasing the political layer of the problem at hand (see Dean, 2005). As a result, the collective ideological debate and shared legislation may be inhibited (see Carvalho, 2005; MacTier, 2008). Without those, the curtailment of undeniably harmful activities of, for example, multinational corporations might be effectively impossible. Thirdly, loading the responsibility for own life and social well-being on individuals normalises the existence of inequality and poverty, which are viewed as resulting from personal shortcomings, rather than as by-products of structural arrangements (Dean, 1999: 203; Johnston, 2001). In the context of ethical trade, forcing individuals into the universal mould of entrepreneurial conduct might inhibit solidarity and desensitise consumers to the plight of structurally underprivileged Southern producers who are regarded as failed entrepreneurs of the self. Finally, by virtue of its association with a higher price, ethical consumption emerges as a privatised solution to global inequality available only to those in possession of substantial resources (see, for example, Boenning, 2009; Johnston, 2001, 2008; Koszewska, 2011; Littler, 2008).

Contrary to the individualised and voluntaristic conception of responsibility outlined above, ethical trade posits that Northern societies as a whole have a moral and political *obligation* to act on the predicament of distant producers (see Ahmed, 2000; Allen, 2008; Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram et al., 2009; Robertson, 2010; Tomlinson, 1999: 183). Morally, responsibility hinges on a certain cosmopolitan sensibility of shared human nature and interdependence (Massey, 2004: 16; see also Robertson, 2010; Silverstone, 2003). Politically, it is contingent on the inextricable, market-mediated, structural connection (see Allen, 2008; Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram et al., 2009; Young, 2003, 2004). Thus, I approach responsibility as a tangle of moral and political obligations. Silverstone hints at this dual character in describing responsibility as a duty of citizenship: ‘As citizens we are expected to take responsibility for, and to act responsibly in relation to, ourselves, our neighbours and also the strangers among us’ (Silverstone, 2004: 443). Such citizenship, however, is not a property of a nation state; it envelops the whole planet as a shared space for which everyone must assume at least minimum responsibility (Silverstone, 2008).

The significance of responsibility to consumption and trade is perhaps most influentially articulated in political consumerism, which Micheletti (2003: 2) defines as ‘actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices’. In a nutshell, political responsibility denotes here ‘accountability for one’s attitudes and actions’, where accountability stands for understanding the social consequences of individual choices as well as exercising due diligence in avoiding the negative repercussions of these choices (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 21). Consequently, political consumerism pushes political responsibility beyond the exclusive purview of governments and international authorities to implicate citizens who are expected to contribute to the alleviation of adverse effects of consumption through their choices in the marketplace (Lewis and Potter, 2011; Micheletti and Stolle, 2007). Stolle and Micheletti (2013: 21) propose a concept of ‘individualised responsibility-taking’ to capture a ‘reasonable individual choice involving considerations about the societal effects of one’s actions’. They appreciate the strong normativity embedded in the notion, which demands consumers exercise ‘reasonable choice’ even when they are not legally obliged to do so, or when it involves compromising their own needs and lifestyles. In this, their reading of responsibility comes very close to the attitude that I understand as a desired product of moral education of consumers.

While political consumerism deserves credit for firmly locating the concept of responsibility in the moral landscape of trade and consumption, the conception of responsibility that it advocates is not without problems. Firstly, its proposition of ‘individualised responsibility-taking’ recalls the problematic notion of individualised and privatised responsibility discussed above. Stolle and Micheletti (2013: 26) try to escape the trap of responsabilisation – and, in my opinion, fall right back into it – through formulating individual

responsibility-taking as an uncoordinated, 'do-it-yourself' approach of acting on a private initiative, *outside* traditional public institutions. Secondly, and relatedly, I pursue the concept of responsibility that implicates more strongly commercial organisations and public institutions. Finally, for my needs, the notion of responsibility needs to emphasise the agency of distant others as historical actors shaping their own lives. Here, I follow the postcolonial reading of political responsibility as a joint and dialogical process that centres on the notion of shared agency and disposes of the view of privileged acting on behalf of the powerless (see Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram et al., 2009: 8). In celebrating global political responsibility as shared agency, it is nevertheless crucial to remain mindful of the 'structures and limitations of the past' that shaped the conditions and forms of present agency (Raghuram et al., 2009: 10).

Arguably, the shortcomings of the concept of responsibility embedded in political consumerism are amended by Young's (2003, 2004, 2006) 'social connection' model of responsibility – curiously often evoked in Micheletti and colleagues' reflections on political consumerism (Micheletti, 2008; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008). In broad strokes, Young (2006: 119) argues that because the actions of any one consumer cannot be lifted out of the mesh of unjust structures and processes of global trade, there is a personal responsibility that each of us bears for trade inequality (see Young, 2004: 372). Unlike privatised responsibility, personal responsibility does not remove the collective dimension of the commitment. In fact, as Young (2003: 41) observes, poor working conditions and violations of human rights commonly encountered in sweatshops in the Global South are not the fault of a single perpetrator, but the sum total of doings of numerous individuals and institutions (see also Noxolo et al., 2012). Thus, the responsibility for righting the wrongs is shared by multiple actors: international brands and corporations, global and national lawmakers, local factory owners, consumers and even producers themselves. Certainly, the responsibilities of different parties vary quantitatively and qualitatively, and depend on the nature of their 'connection' to distant others, their power to influence structural conditions and the privilege that structural injustice engenders for them (see Young, 2003: 43). In Young's (2004: 379) view, the primary responsibility of consumers is not to resolve the injustice of global trade through their consumption choices, but to work towards the amendment of processes that generate and reproduce inequality. The specific ways and means of acting on this responsibility are, however, multiple and open-ended (see also Middlemiss, 2010).

As a lens for the empirical analysis that I seek, Young's (2003, 2004, 2006) framing of responsibility has a potentially encouraging and empowering cadence. It does not overwhelm consumers by putting the burden of addressing inequality exclusively on their shoulders, but instead implicates multiple actors in sharing responsibility. It offers a range of possible ways of taking up responsibility, which exceed the realm of individual ethical consumption and are open not only to affluent individuals. It also brings to the



fore political and collective actions. In this configuration, consumers are expected to question the 'normal' conditions of global trade to diagnose injustices to which they then respond according to the best of their abilities, preferably through collective action. Below, I will take a closer look at the citizen-consumer figure as an ideal-type responsible subject of consumption.

### ***Citizen-consumers: Responsible subjects of consumption***

Scholars interested in ethical consumption and ethical trade often point to the increasing significance in this context of the hybrid that has come to be known as a citizen-consumer, be it in an affirmative (e.g., Carrier, 2012; Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti and Stolle, 2007; Scammell, 2000) or a more critical manner (e.g., Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2008). In the same vein, Wheeler (2012a: 494) describes the citizen-consumer as 'a figure who, powered with the right information, is able to regulate market relations and public services through the exercise of individual choice'. Thus, succinctly put, the subject position of the citizen-consumer serves to reconcile the supposedly contradictory interests of a selfish consumer and a politically oriented citizen (Wheeler, 2012b: 15; see also Banaji and Buckingham, 2009; Carrier, 2012; Clarke et al., 2007a, b; Lekakis, 2013; Sassatelli, 2006; Scammell, 2000; Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010). The highly contested yet persistently reiterated belief in some essential separation between the positions of citizen and consumer is underpinned by their presumably competing and incompatible loyalties and priorities (see Bevir and Trentmann, 2008). On the surface, it seems as if consumer and citizen could not inhabit the same body: the former responsible for bringing about social erosion and environmental destruction, the latter a potential saviour of the globe (Soper, 2004, 2007). In this constellation, a citizen figure is seen as a politically involved public hero of democracy whose choices are morally relevant and accountable as well as well informed and socially oriented<sup>70</sup>; a consumer, in contrast, embodies an individualistic, private chooser guided by self-interest (Scammell, 2000: 352; see also Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Gabriel and Lang, 1995: 174; Romaniszyn, 2011; Soper, 2004, 2007). As some critics dutifully observe, the citizen and the consumer are the ideal types, respectively celebrated and demonised, the impact of whose mundane coexistence and supposedly novel convergence is conventionally overstated (Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Hilton, 2008).

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<sup>70</sup> As Gabriel and Lang (1995: 175n) remind us, in the envisioning of a citizen as a hero of public and social life it is easy to fall into the trap of idealisation that forgets the deep-seated discrimination that underwrites the idea of citizenship. In fact, the possibility of becoming citizens for some is predicated on the simultaneous exclusion of others – the 'outsiders': immigrants, refugees, vagrants and so on. While this discrimination is different from the 'consumerist' discrimination against the poor and underprivileged, its consequences are often as material.

These routine visions of the consumer subject are asserted to have material consequences for organising the current political life and setting. Rudimentarily, two somewhat antithetical visions of the consumer are quoted in the literature: while the critics of consumerism perceive self-interest pursued by consumers as whimsical and egoistic, the political right draws on a notion of the consumer as an archetypical rational chooser (Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Everson and Joerges, 2008; Maniates, 2002). As 'consumer' becomes the primary (quasi-)political subject position assigned to individuals by increasingly right-wing governments, consumption is reimagined as 'voting' (with one's wallet) and the marketplace gradually replaces politics as a dominant social arena for exercising citizenship (see Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Everson and Joerges, 2008; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Lerner, 1997; Lockie, 2009; Sassatelli, 2009; Slocum, 2004; Soper, 2004). As the narrative of ethical consumption usually has it, the arrival of this new style of politics and governance – alternatively termed 'subpolitics' (Bakardjieva, 2010; Sassatelli, 2006), 'lifestyle politics' (Bennett, 2004; Giddens, 1991) or 'advanced liberalism' (Burchell, 1996; Trentmann, 2006) – has triggered the bridging of the gulf between the contradictory positions of citizen and consumer. As a result, the traditionally 'civic' concerns spill into the private domain of consumption, informing and infusing material practices and desires, whereby the border between citizen and consumer observably blurs.

In the same vein, Scammell (2000: 352) wrote at the turn of the twenty-first century that '[i]t is no longer possible to cut the deck neatly between citizenship and civic duty, on one side, and consumption and self-interest, on the other. They are not at opposite ends of the spectrum'. She hints at the possibility of a citizen-consumer under the circumstances of increasing individualisation and privatisation of public matters (see Burchell, 1996; Johnston, 2008; Maniates, 2002). By undertaking politically informed actions, not only can citizen-consumers enact their own ethical conduct, but they can also – through the support of non-governmental organisations and advocacy networks – keep in check transnational corporations, whose irresponsible conduct is often pictured as a primary driver of social and environmental deterioration (see Sassatelli, 2006). In any case, becoming a citizen-consumer is contingent on the willingness to compromise – at least, to an extent – one's own needs and preferences in order to address pressing social and environmental problems through consumption choices (see Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2008; Micheletti, 2003; Scammell, 2000; Trentmann, 2006). Although usually portrayed as the primary motivations of citizen-consumers, compromise and sacrifice are not the only possible drivers of ethical consumption. Soper (2004, 2007) flips the notion of citizen-consumers as compromisers on its head and talks about 'alternative hedonists' instead, whereby the aims of ethical consumption and the needs of (citizen-)consumers for a simpler, slower, more sustainable and less materialistic 'good life' seamlessly coincide.

In this context, the emblematic late-capitalist ideal of consumer choice often emerges as a key technology for helping citizen-consumers to generate social change (see Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Johnston, 2008; Slater, 1997; Trentmann, 2006). This fixation on choice can be problematic in that it entrenches the supposedly progressive citizen-consumers in the hegemonic discourses of consumerism and neo-liberalism, and, as such, limits their options for altering the rules of global trade. For example, it is not uncommon for unethical enterprises to begin to cater to ethically inclined customers in the perennial capitalist quest to reinvent themselves (see Johnston, 2008; Klein, 2010; Lockie, 2009; McGuigan, 2009). That is, the introduction of ethical product often serves to expand the range of available options, rather than to truly improve the practices of sourcing and production. Sassatelli, however, argues that the choice put forward to citizen-consumers is in fact a progressive reworking of the hegemonic meaning of sovereign choice (see also Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Sassatelli, 2009):

[Choice] is framed as a consequential and momentous practice, capable of expressing consumer sovereignty *only* if consumers do not lull themselves with the sirens of the Smithian tune, but take full responsibility for the environmental, social and political effects of their choices. (Sassatelli, 2006: 227; italics mine)

Despite the relatively recent currency of the notion of citizen-consumer, academic literature tries not to lose sight of the historical embeddedness of consumers as always already moral and political figures (e.g., Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2008; Lang and Gabriel, 2005; Micheletti, 2003; Miller, 2001a; Trentmann, 2006). To strengthen the argument about the possibility of convergence between consumption and citizenship, Micheletti (2003) traces the record of consumer movements, boycotts and buycotts, dating back to the American War of Independence as a continuous history of political consumerism. Similarly, although on a slightly shorter timeline, Lang and Gabriel (2005) identify four different ‘waves’ of consumer activism: (1) the cooperative consumers in nineteenth-century England, whose goal was to establish self-sufficient small-scale community ‘economies’ as an alternative to the free market; (2) the value-for-money activism initiated during Fordism to help consumers navigate more efficiently through the growing marketplace and increasing abundance of goods; (3) Naderism in the post-war US, which pitted the rights of individual consumers against corporate giants; and (4) ‘alternative consumerism’, which encourages more sustainable consumption and which first emerged in the 1970s, and gained currency in the 1980s (see also Gabriel and Lang, 1995 and, for a brief overview, Johnston, 2008: 236–9).

Approaching the notion of consumer in the spirit of Foucauldian genealogy, Trentmann (2006) troubles these progressive and linear narratives of consumer activism. He points to the fact that what we understand as consumer

activism today self-identified as a *citizen* movement at the time. Even more significantly for my research, Trentmann reconstructs the different articulations of ‘consumers’ in different historical periods, including the reformist imaginings of the citizen-consumer hybrid in the nineteenth century. This genealogy unsettles the causality often assumed between the reinvention of government in the final decades of the twentieth century and the subsequent resuscitation of citizenship in the domain of consumption. By excavating the historical roots of the modern consumer, Trentmann (2006: 50) reminds us that ‘[t]he consumer, like “class”, “citizen” or “nation”, is no natural or universal category but the product of historical identity formations, in which actors through available traditions make sense of the relationship between material culture and collective identity’. Similarly, Hilton (2009) argues that the original introduction in the aftermath of World War II of the consumer as a new blueprint for citizenship served, in fact, to overcome historical divisions of, for example, class, gender and ethnicity, and to embrace the whole society (see also Trumbull, 2006). This impossibility of truly separating and pinning down the specific identities (or, more precisely, subject positions) of ‘citizen’ and ‘consumer’ cuts through the understanding of the ‘citizen-consumer’ figure in this dissertation, and, in fact, permits its very thinkability.

### ***Consumer activism in Poland and Finland***

In this section, I will briefly look at the histories of consumer activism in Poland and Finland, where Pizca del Mundo and Eetti operate. While the present state of consumer engagement with ethical trade has been discussed earlier (Sections 2.4 and 2.5), here some historical trajectories will be explored. In doing so, I hope to once again signal the significant contextual differences between the two countries as well as their differences from the Anglo-American developments recounted above; these differences will be taken up in much more depth in Chapter 7. In my short account, I will concentrate on the developments following World War II when consumer societies were first established, and when consumers began to emerge as a core interest group in the post-war arrangements (Hilton, 2009: 55).

In Poland, the formation of consumer activism took place against the background of the communist regime with its cumbersome command economy<sup>71</sup> (Burrell, 2011; Hilton, 2009; Mazurek, 2012; Romaniszyn, 2011). Preoccupied with production as a central economic activity, the communist government nurtured the ideological disdain for consumption as a petite-bourgeoisie pastime. This orientation led to continuous supply shortages as well as to cyclical price hikes that exacerbated the consumption-related

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<sup>71</sup> Earlier examples of consumer activism in Poland include the infamous racist boycotts of Jewish stores, firstly in partitioned Poland before World War I, and later in the interwar period as well as the economic boycott of Nazi Germany by Polish Jews (Hawkins, 2010).

grievances of the society (Hilton, 2009). Most pointedly, the increase in food prices and the introduction of other austerity measures in December 1970 caused mass protests, which, in turn, forced the then leader, Władysław Gomułka, out of power (Landsman, 2005: 214). Consumption, thus, was an economic sphere that the communist state could not completely ignore.

Instead, consumption could be harnessed to improve the command economy. On the state level, consumption was addressed through a consumer lobby within the governmental Institute for Domestic Trade and Services, which considered the informed and empowered consumers as a stakeholder group crucial to organising a more efficient trading system (Hilton, 2009: 67). More relevant for the discussion on consumer activism was, however, the emergence in the 1980s of the Federation of Consumers as an intermediary between consumers and the state. This state-unaffiliated body of expert activists worked towards more just redistribution of goods and amending inappropriate production schedules (Hilton, 2009). In addition to their expert activities, the Federation established a platform for more organised forms of consumer activism. These operations included the setting up of a network of consumer clubs, and the coordination of high-profile campaigns and boycotts (Hilton, 2009: 68). Importantly, all these actions were geared towards improving the supply chain within the command economy and not towards overthrowing it (Hilton, 2009).

The bulk of consumer activism over the four decades of the communist regime was, nonetheless, constituted by more individual, even individualistic, forms of action. Indeed, economic shortage and scarce provisions set a peculiar course for consumer activism that concentrated on circumventing the official economy through the 'informal' market (Culiberg, 2015; Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi, 2012; Mazurek, 2012). A variety of immediate 'resourcefulness' strategies were deployed to obtain scarce goods and maintain living standards when long-term planning was not possible (Mazurek, 2012: 301). In a fascinating chapter, Małgorzata Mazurek (2012) recounts the tales told by two Polish families about the multiple strategies of 'finagling' and 'swindling' that were often – albeit not always – underpinned by the 'amoral familialism' that favoured family and friends without much regard for harm inflicted by this preference on strangers. Consequently, people turned a blind eye to the role that their individualistic brand of consumer activism played in perpetuating the shortage economy and the cumbersomeness of the redistribution system. Rather, they constructed their resourcefulness unproblematically as a necessary response to the inefficient supply policies introduced by the communist government to oppress the society (Mazurek, 2012).

In sum, the communist legacy constitutes a background for the current low level of consumer activism estimated at less than 20 per cent of the population (Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 97). Arguably, when affluent consumerism arrived in Poland in the early twenty-first century (Mróz, 2009), the previous ideal of a consumer society as guaranteeing access

to more goods for more people had already been replaced worldwide by the pursuit of free choice (see Hilton, 2009). Relatedly, the delayed appearance of private enterprises was met not only with distrust, but also with general acceptance of the fact that the primary objective of business is to make a profit, not to contribute to global, societal and environmental betterment (Gasparski, 2005). Consequently, the typical model of organised consumer actions addressed at ‘producers’ (understood also as brand companies) and concerned with protecting their collective interests and with redressing inequality and injustice has not taken root in Polish society (see Trumbull, 2006).

Meanwhile, in Finland the state was not historically a target of, but a key actor in, consumer activism. Trumbull (2006) characterises the post-war consumer market in Finland by its ‘associational’ approach to consumers, which recognised them as an interest group that deserved a voice in bargaining for their own interest. According to this view, consumers’ interests were achievable through organised, collective actions. To ensure that consumer interests were properly represented, an assortment of institutions – including the consumer ombudsman – was established (Trumbull, 2006). Furthermore, the associational approach rested on the premise that the interests of ‘producers’ and consumers were largely convergent and attainable through multilateral negotiations (Trumbull, 2006: 80). Arguably, such a consensual attitude is a defining feature of social arrangements in Finland (Korhonen and Seppala, 2005). Here, we get a clear sense that historically consumer activism in Finland was institutional and state organised, rather than grass-roots. This approach aligns well with Finns’ high trust in institutions, especially those of the state (Korhonen and Seppala, 2005).

Thus, while consumers’ own interests were properly secured by the state, the globalisation of production and trade has turned the spotlight on the behaviour of Finnish enterprises abroad, particularly in the Global South (Korhonen and Seppala, 2005: 15). Relatedly, according to Stolle and Micheletti (2013: 96), the percentage of political consumers in Finland is among the highest globally. Yet, as we will also see empirically in Chapter 6, large-scale consumer activism is considered an unlikely response to corporate neglect and violation: there is a persistent conviction in Finnish society that consumers possess too little power to influence trade (Korhonen and Seppala, 2005: 20; see also Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). Instead, companies and government are held responsible for addressing trade-related social issues, with the responsibility of the former being on the rise (Korhonen and Seppala, 2005; Salonen et al., 2014).

### **3.5 COMMUNICATION REPERTOIRE OF ETHICAL TRADE**

In this section, I will look at the communication repertoire of ethical trade. Mattoni (2013: 46) defines a ‘repertoire of communication’ as an amalgam of

communicative strategies, tactics and practices employed to ‘sustain interactions within broader political arenas’. To slightly reformulate the typology proposed by De Pelsmacker and colleagues (2007: 109), the communicative efforts of ethical trade organisations can be summed up as consisting of: (1) marketing own ethical brands and products; (2) campaigning directed at consumers; and (3) promoting the ethical trade agenda to firms, brands and governmental institutions (see also McDonagh, 2002). Taken together, these undertakings seek to enhance the welfare of Southern producers through disseminating information and encouraging action (Lekakis, 2013: 93; McDonagh, 2002: 657).

With that in mind, this section will present an overview of different modes and channels that ethical trade employs to communicate with two main stakeholder groups: (1) consumers and (2) institutional actors, primarily corporations, but also governments. To the best of my knowledge, no comprehensive research on the communication repertoire of ethical trade has been conducted so far. While my modest sketch does not seek to fill that void, in what follows I will pull together separate threads from studies scattered across a range of disciplines, including media and communication studies, marketing and business studies, political science, geography and sociology. After a cursory overview of the repertoire of ethical trade communication, I will discuss in some detail the possibilities that social media offer for ethical trade communication. That review is indispensable given the Facebook-centric design of the case study of Pizca del Mundo.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH CONSUMERS**

Ethical trade organisations seek in their communication with consumers to mobilise their support in order to gain leverage for ethical intervention in the governance of global trade (see Clarke et al., 2007a, 2007b; Vestergaard, 2014). Broadly speaking, consumers can support ethical trade through individual ethical consumption as well as participation in more collective and politically oriented actions. For that, awareness-raising and knowledge-building are essential (Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Hughes et al., 2008; Le Velly, 2007).

Legacy media are the first channel that ethical trade can use to communicate with consumers. As Hughes and colleagues (2008: 351) eloquently describe, mediated stories serve as ‘forms of knowledge concerning commodity biographies that shape consumers’ understandings of the journeys taken by goods through production and distribution networks’. In doing so, media reports bring the lot of faraway producers – otherwise removed from consumers’ lives – right into the everyday spaces and routines of consumers (see Belk et al., 2005). The crucial advantage of legacy media is that they offer access to the largest and most diverse audiences. Some scholars, in fact, credit the ‘mass media’ exposure with the emergence of ethical trade as a more consolidated, legitimate and recognisable agenda (Hale, 2000; Strong, 1996;

Wright and Heaton, 2006). Hughes and colleagues (2008) also note a critical role in this development of ethical trade organisations as brokers between media, consumers and corporations under attack. In general, it seems that the anti-sweatshop movement has been the most successful in garnering the attention of legacy media (see Micheletti and Stolle, 2007), and its coverage in the US newspapers has been thoroughly analysed (Greenberg and Knight, 2004; Guo et al., 2012).

There are, however, limitations to the use of legacy media by ethical trade organisations. The key limitation is the relatively short lifespan of media interest, which comes in waves, sparked by particularly controversial or dramatic events (Roberts, 2003; for some examples see Chapter 1). Furthermore, not even drama and controversy are a foolproof warranty of media attention (see Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 260). Hence, ethical trade organisations cannot rely on legacy media for sustained communication with consumers (see Balsiger, 2010). In retrospect, Wilson and Mutersbaugh (2015: 283) note that ethical trade campaigns assembled around media exposés in fact provided no long-term accountability. The quickly shifting media spotlight allowed the targeted companies to take the easy way out and, for example, quietly relocate their production, instead of addressing the human and labour right violations at their source factories (see also Lekakis, 2013; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013).

Given the lack of continuous access to legacy media as a channel for communication with consumers, ethical trade organisations invest considerable resources in the production of own material. Here, fair trade marketing and advertising have been particularly closely scrutinised. Nicholls and Opal (2005: 153) formulate the goal of fair trade marketing in terms of 'articulat[ing] the social and economic interconnectedness between producer and consumer in a commercially viable way'. They discern three consecutive phases in fair trade marketing that targeted increasingly larger segments of consumers: from (1) the 'process' focus that foregrounded the ideals of justice and equity to (2) the 'product' focus that concentrated on positioning fair trade products as goods of superb quality to (3) the 'place focus' that is aimed at fostering community actions, e.g., Fairtrade Towns (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 161). All these divergent stages are underpinned by an ambitious idea to sell ethically produced and sourced goods by creating 'a sense of global community' (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 154; see also McDonagh, 2002: 653). However, the review presented in Section 3.3 of critical analyses of various fair trade marketing materials – including packaging and point of sales information, product catalogues, advertisements, marketing campaigns, advertorials and Internet websites – shows that this bold ambition is rarely realised.

On top of marketing and advertising geared towards selling products, ethical trade organisations produce material whose primary objective is to raise trade 'literacy' (Nicholls, 2002; Nicholls and Opal, 2005). While it is viable to argue that fair trade blurs the division between marketing, education



and campaigning (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 166), there is an indication that consumers, at least in Belgium, preferred ‘credible’ and ‘semi-commercial’ information sources, such as leaflets and pamphlets, to blatant advertising in ‘mass media’ and on billboards (De Pelsmacker et al., 2007). On that note, ethical trade organisations are often involved in producing and circulating new knowledge. Communication material of this kind – such as newsletters, brand reports, ethical shopping guides and industry analyses – has not received much scholarly attention, despite its prominent role in the ethical trade’s repertoire of communication (for brief mentions see Balsiger, 2010; McDonagh, 2002; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008). Indeed, the launching of a new denouncing report can reignite public interest in the injustices of global trade (see Balsiger, 2010).

While legacy media, marketing, advertising and informational material are vehicles of *mediated* communication between ethical trade organisations and consumers, occasions such as seminars, workshops and fairs provide an opportunity for personal and *direct* communication. According to the survey conducted by De Pelsmacker and colleagues (2007), this mode of communication is highly valued by consumers. For example, various ad hoc ‘street actions’, including information stands and leaflet distribution, can be employed to mobilise consumers and engage them in micro-actions, such as signing a petition (Balsiger, 2010).

Among established events, the Fairtrade Fortnight, organised by the Fairtrade Foundation in the UK to display and boost the sales of fair trade goods, is perhaps the most prominent (Nicholls, 2002; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Wheeler, 2012a, b; Wright and Heaton, 2006). Wheeler (2012b: 74) characterises the Fairtrade Fortnight as an opportunity for fair trade actors to come together to ‘celebrate their support of fair-trade and hopefully encourage others to support the movement too’. In the detailed ethnographic account of the Fairtrade Fortnight in 2008, she also remarks that the event worked as a trust-building exercise, whereby consumers were reassured of the positive influence of fair trade on Southern producers (Wheeler, 2012a). Engaged conviviality, promotion of the cause and trust building are, I believe, the overarching purposes of all direct-communication events that ethical trade organisations arrange.

## **COMMUNICATING WITH INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS**

As previously stated, communication with consumers is mainly concerned with raising awareness and garnering consumer support. This support is then utilised as leverage in communication directed at institutional stakeholders, primarily brand companies and governments, to initiate governance changes. This can be done either through amicable lobbying, negotiations in corporate boardrooms (Balsiger, 2010; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008) and networking at conferences, exhibitions and trade fairs (Hughes et al., 2008; McDonagh, 2002), or through generating pressure and outright confrontation. Amiable

strategies have proved successful in convincing local governments to switch to more ethical public procurement policies (see Micheletti and Stolle, 2008; Nicholls and Opal, 2005), whereas confrontational ones, for example, forced Starbucks to source (some) coffee on fair trade terms (e.g., Klein, 2010), and coerced US universities to avoid purchasing sweatshop-produced apparel (e.g., Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). In what follows, I will present several communicative channels and tactics that ethical trade uses to pressurise corporations, often tapping into and capitalising on consumer engagement.

Here, again, the attention of, and exposure in, legacy media might play an inciting role. Most obviously, negative press generates direct pressure on brands that fear for their corporate image (see Freidberg, 2003; Klein, 2010). This pressure is, of course, further amplified by consumer mobilisation. In that respect, Hughes and colleagues (2008) link media exposés of poor working conditions to the consumer mobilisation in the UK and student protests in the US, which, in turn, triggered (some) changes in the sourcing practices and policies of British supermarkets and American clothing brands (see also Blowfield, 1999; Hughes, 2001; Micheletti and Stolle, 2007; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Wilson and Mutersbaugh, 2015).

Mindful of the flimsiness of media attention, ethical trade organisations continuously invest own resources and capitalise on consumer engagement to sustain the pressure on corporations. A typical example of such efforts is ‘discursive political consumerism’, which Micheletti and Stolle (2008: 753) define as a *communicative* advocacy strategy targeted at corporate actors and critical of their policies and practices. Two particularly well-recognised tactics that figure under this umbrella term are ‘culture jamming’ and ‘subvertising’. While culture jamming refers to any acts of playful and creative hijacking of rhetorics and symbols of consumer culture in order to articulate counter-consumerist messages (Harold, 2004), subvertising targets and parodies advertisements in particular (see Bordwell, 2002; Klein, 2010; Littler, 2008). In this regard, Stolle and Micheletti (2013: 203) observe that brands and corporations are not only targets, but also ‘the source, medium, and political message board of activism’. Culture jamming and subvertisements can attack any aspect of consumer culture: overconsumption, environmental degradation, manipulative marketing, insincere advertising, etc. However, in terms of ethical trade communication, of particular interest are those jams that tackle the issues to do with sweatshop production in the Global South.

Here, the most widely reproduced and discussed example is the ‘Nike email exchange’ that dates back to 2001 (see Lury, 2011; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008; Peretti and Micheletti, 2011; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). In a nutshell, this emblematic case involved a student whose request to print the word ‘sweatshop’ on customisable Nike sneakers as ‘a small token of appreciation for the sweatshop workers poised to help me realize my vision’ was repeatedly rejected by the brand’s customer service (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 179). Subsequently, the email exchange went ‘viral’, reaching an estimated 11 million people around the globe and feeding into the already heated anti-Nike

campaign (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). This case hints at the potential of the Internet as a channel for ethical trade communication.

In addition to somewhat individualised, although firmly rooted in the framework of ethical trade movement (see Balsiger, 2010), articulations of discursive political consumerism, ethical trade communication with institutional stakeholders can take a more coordinated form, involving a sizeable number of consumers. The most basic of such forms are petitions and letter writing campaigns addressed at brand corporations, retailers or politicians (Balsiger, 2010; McDonagh, 2002; Wheeler, 2012b). A step further in terms of collectivity and intensity are street actions that target particular institutional actors, such as rallies at brand boutiques and corporate headquarters (see Balsiger, 2010). The most powerful, but rarely deployed, tactic of ethical trade communication is protest (see Balsiger, 2010). While it might not be self-evident, protest is a communicative event in that it brings people together under a shared message, which is thus amplified and then circulated through personal and mediated communication. Perhaps the best-known instance of demonstrations intimately linked to the ethical trade theme are the sit-ins organised by United Students Against Sweatshops at university campuses across the United States in the late 1990s (Micheletti and Stolle, 2008; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). The student protests are credited with triggering some reluctant changes in Nike's sourcing policies (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013).

## **POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN MORAL EDUCATION OF ETHICAL CONSUMERS**

Above, I sketched the communication repertoire of ethical trade communication. In studying the communication practices of ethical trade organisations, I could not overlook the growing significance of social media in the communication repertoire of social movements. In what follows, I will review the literature on the potential of social media (and broadly the Internet, where social media-specific discussion is not available) as a part of the ethical trade communication repertoire in three domains: (1) internal and outward organisational communication; (2) social media activism; and (3) ethical life and moral education.

### ***Social media as a tool of organisational communication***

Although in social media the boundaries between internal and external organisational communication are blurred (Uldam and Askanius, 2013: 166), I will attempt to husk some potential benefits of social media that are peculiar to each of these domains. In terms of internal communication, literature centres on the capacities of social media in three aspects. Firstly, it might help organisations to deepen and strengthen their supporters' political

identifications and commitment to the cause. This can be achieved through continuous online accessibility and a constant stream of posts across multiple platforms that enable uninterrupted connection and connectivity within the movement (Constanza-Chock, 2013; Kavada, 2014; Uldam and Askanius, 2013; Wildermuth, 2014). Secondly, social media fosters horizontal communication among members, and two-way information flows between members and the organisational core (Vromen and Coleman, 2013: 77; Wildermuth, 2014). This facilitates the modes of deliberation and connection among individual activists, which were difficult to attain otherwise (Fenton, 2012a). Moreover, the flattening of the communication structure ushers in the decentralisation of movement, allowing members to act more independently from, yet in harmony with, the organisational core (Constanza-Chock, 2013: 97)<sup>72</sup>. Thirdly, and relatedly, social media provides a communication infrastructure that enables more efficient mobilisation of members through simplifying the arrangement of collective actions geared towards achieving certain results (Stein, 2009: 753; see also McCurdy, 2013; Padovani, 2013).

Externally, social media enables social movement actors to challenge the monopoly of institutionalised media in terms of public visibility. Theoretically, social media could help to 'level the playing field' between social movements and their more resource-rich adversaries, such as corporations and governmental institutions, through offering a higher speed of communication at a much lower cost and with virtually unlimited capacity to host easily produced content (Stein, 2009: 750; see also Kavada, 2014: 358; MacTier, 2008). In more detail, social media helps movements and organisations to bypass the mainstream media gatekeepers and, in doing so, facilitates the promotion of niche causes to potentially unlimited audiences who would otherwise remain unreachable for activist communication (Poell and van Dijck, 2015; Stein, 2009; see Uldam and Askanius, 2013: 162). In the case of more controversial issues, organisations can use social media to disrupt dominant discourses, and to counter the unfavourable and untruthful representations perpetuated by mainstream media (McCurdy, 2013: 59; Stein, 2009). Moreover, social media might be used for advocacy purposes, especially to engage the public (McAnany, 2014; Wildermuth, 2014). By lowering the threshold for participation, social media can help to mobilise a host of new supporters in a more efficient way by offering more flexible and fluid forms of action (Benkler, 2006; Kavada, 2014; Tufte, 2014; Vromen and Coleman, 2013). It also helps to reach out to geographically distant activists

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<sup>72</sup> Here, of course, I am aware of the quagmire of privacy violations, corporate surveillance and possible state persecution that threatens social media activists (e.g., Joseph, 2012). However, in the case of ethical trade in the Global North the risk is minimal (see Vromen and Coleman, 2013). Obviously, the situation is very different for union and labour rights activists in the Global South who often face repression, incarceration and persecution even to the point of assassination. See, for example, the cases of the imprisoned Chinese activist Meng Han, and the gunned-down Colombian unionist Alberto Román Acosta González.

and groups interested in similar issues to form transnational advocacy networks (Kavada, 2014; Stein, 2009).

However, social media as a channel of organisational communication is not free from pitfalls. Firstly, the social media environment produces a new attention economy. The possibility of social movement actors generating their own content and distributing it to a wide public has a flip side in the form of overflowing information streams that might overwhelm and desensitise users for whose attention they are competing (Poell and van Dijck, 2015). Furthermore, social media algorithms, guided as they are by corporate interest, are susceptible to the 'echo chamber' effect: they tend to display and highlight content that reinforces users' prior perspectives and opinions (see Colleoni et al., 2014; Poell and van Dijck, 2015; Uldam and Askanius, 2013). Secondly, while it is an efficient tool for impromptu campaign mobilisations, social media alone does not support community building. As noted by Kavada (2014), rather than mobilising activists as constitutive units of social movements, social media tends to interpellate them as individuals, thereby inhibiting the emergence of a collective identity. Consequently, even though social media might strengthen the commitment of long-time members, it is unlikely to transform a collection of new supporters into a durable network or community (Poell and van Dijck, 2015: 529). Thirdly, social media encourages the spread of event-oriented content that does not necessarily present issues at stake in sufficient detail and an appropriately large context (Poell and van Dijck, 2015). Finally, the lowered threshold for participation and less systematic gatekeeping are not only an invitation for marginalised voices and progressive initiatives, but also provide a platform for non-democratic actors to garner more visibility in the public sphere (see Cammaerts, 2009; Downing, 2014).

### ***Social media activism***

The second domain in which social media might prove useful for ethical trade is its potential for fostering activism. Particularly in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, and the subsequent Indignados and Occupy Wall Street movements, social media appeared as a revolutionary force in its own right, reinvigorating long-time activists and activating those who had not been politically engaged before (Baron, 2012; Castells, 2012; Howard and Hussain, 2011; Joseph, 2012; see also Orgad, 2012: 2). As the initial enthusiasm about the efficacy of social media for political contestation subsided, the fundamental question resurfaced of whether social media, and the Internet in general, is a legitimate political sphere. Frequently, the politicising potential of social media is perceived as being tempered down by its technocratic nature and corporate ownership entrenched in late-capitalist values and ideologies (Dean, 2003, 2005, 2009; Fenton, 2012b; Poell and van Dijck, 2015). Indeed, the commodification logics guiding social media (Fenton, 2012b) might at times be problematic for ethical trade, which stands in partial opposition to

corporate capitalism. While delving into details of the discussion on the political potential of the Internet and social media is beyond the scope of my dissertation, I find it relevant to briefly consider what kind of activist engagement social media is typically thought to encourage.

Generally, there is a widely held consensus that the Internet and social media are particularly likely to foster activism related to the issues of lifestyle and everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2010; Bennett, 2012; Fenton, 2012a; Scammell, 2000). Given that ethical trade is intimately entwined with consumption, an emblematic lifestyle activity, the Internet and social media might be particularly helpful in mobilising the public around ethical consumer choices (see Bennett, 2012; Reisch, 2001; Ward and de Vreese, 2011). Indeed, Banaji and Buckingham (2009: 1220) conclude their investigation of websites promoting ethical consumption by stating that they offered new and informal modes of addressing audiences as citizen-consumers.

In framing ethical trade as an issue to do with *lifestyle politics*, social and political significance is constructed around individual lifestyle values. This is done through the use of a 'lifestyle vocabulary' that revolves around consumer choice and responsibility, and serves to articulate messages about global justice (Bennett, 2004: 102; see also Giddens, 1991: 214; Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010: 1894). Social media allows the society to stay better informed about the 'externalities' of production and consumption, such as the deplorable working conditions in the Global South and the negative environmental impact of production (see Scammell, 2000). It also allows the public to politicise spaces and modes of private communication through plugging into popular discussions and sharing information (Bennett, 2012: 26), especially through hashtags. In this way, social media peppers the political landscape with personalised political causes, presented in relation to one's own life and lifestyle, promoted via channels of personal communication. Similarly, drawing on Beck's notion of subpolitics as the 'political' performed by traditionally non-political actors (see Mouffe, 2005: 40), Bakardjieva (2010: 134) describes individual micropolitical activities enabled by the Internet as 'subactivism', that is, the 'small-scale, often individual decisions and actions that have either a political or ethical frame of reference (or both) and remain submerged in everyday life'. Referring specifically to Facebook, she points to its potential for connecting the political/ethical and abstract issues with the realm of the (inter)personal, mundane and tangible. Thus, political and ethical causes as well as concrete proposals for daily actions put forth by otherwise impersonal and unfamiliar organisations might enter the personal feed via known people and groups with whom we are connected (Bakardjieva, 2010: 142; see also Chouliaraki, 2013b; Madianou, 2013b).

The developments described above contribute to the lowering of the threshold for identification and participation, potentially mobilising those who were out of reach for the classic forms of social movement activism. However, Bennett (2012: 36) observes that the actions and postulates encouraged by the affordances of social media are usually tempered. That is,

in the context of ethical trade, they tend to aim at ‘smoothing out’ the edges of overconsumption, instead of encouraging its radical minimisation. Often, social media activism involves actions that are designed as one-off and consumerist, effectively curtailing the potential for long-term and more intense engagement with the cause (Chouliaraki, 2013b). Moreover, Fenton (2012a: 159) warns that the multiplication of activist voices enabled by personalised communication platforms, such as social media, might be detrimental to the cause as if ‘no institution can contain, frame or coordinate those voices, then fragmentation and political dissolution can occur’. Finally, social media activism is susceptible to appropriation as a venue for individualistic self-presentation, rather than a tool for social change (Curran et al., 2012: 180; Madianou, 2013b).

### ***Social media as a site of moral education***

The final domain in which social media can support ethical trade communication is moral education and ethical life. While the above discussion on social media as a tool of organisational communication and a platform for new forms of activism was necessary because most scholarly interests gravitate in those directions, the potential of social media for moral education is the key concern for my research. Yet, this area also appears to be the least studied of the three. I argue that social media, like the Internet in general, should be viewed as one of the crucial contemporary moral spaces in that it is one of the primary arenas where moral views and ethical sentiments are formed and expressed (see Orgad, 2007). Although I do not overlook the fact that social media as a moral space is bounded by corporate interest and tends to promote technologised ‘patches’ for solving social issues (see Poell and van Dijck, 2015), I want to follow other researchers who look at it as more than ‘clever market devices’ (Zylinska, 2013: 91; see also Madianou, 2013b; Madianou et al., 2015; Pantti, 2015, 2016).

As a potentially reflexive moral space, social media is located in the interstice of the everyday life banality where a new relation to oneself, and perhaps one’s surroundings, can be forged (Zylinska, 2013: 99). In extending the ethical life beyond the self, social media can work in two ways. Firstly, social media might provide the public with a broader overview of, and a deeper insight into, the issues at hand. The multiplicity of stories, images and competing viewpoints circulating in social media can also nurture the cosmopolitan imagination through expanding the public’s moral horizons to incorporate people who are geographically, socially and culturally distant (Orgad, 2012: 6). Yet, according to a metaphor similar to the ‘echo chamber’, this possibility might nonetheless be curbed by the ‘capsular’ nature of ‘networked media technologies’, such as social media, which envelop users and separate them from one another, effectively inhibiting the development of cosmopolitan disposition (see Jansson, 2011: 239). To me, however, the full

dismissal of social media on account of its isolating users in their self-centred bubbles appears somewhat overdetermined by technology.

Secondly, the potential 'cosmopolitan public' can engage via social media in an interactive, immediate action in response to a cause or event (Madianou, 2013b; Pantti, 2015). However, as I have alluded to above, the criticism of ethical actions favoured by social media is fierce. They are regarded as individualised, consumerist, of low intensity and short-term, and accused of promoting 'the pleasures of the self' over a sustained commitment to the cause in acting on the predicament of distant others (Chouliaraki, 2013b: 75). Furthermore, Madianou (2013b) suggests that the easiness and immediacy of Internet-enabled responses might produce hollow, fetishised actions that distract the public from pursuing a deeper understanding of underlying causes and contexts.

For ethical trade, the affordances of social media that facilitate the constructing of an ethical relationship between producers and consumers are the most salient. On that note, one of the most highly praised features of social media is the fostering of the circulation of raw, unedited, first-hand accounts of 'ordinary' people, who usually do not receive much space in the mass media (see Orgad, 2012: 24). (This is, arguably, the case with producer cooperatives in the South, some of whom curate their own social media profiles.) Taking this observation a step further, my investigation of social media content hinges on the rationale that the moral impact of mediation is enhanced by the incorporation of the agency and viewpoints of producers as distant others. Social media and the Internet in general are possible arenas for Southern producers to influence and even to dictate new modes of representation that would potentially consider Spivak's (1993: 70) distinction between the two meanings of representation: as 're-presenting', that is, depicting, and as 'speaking for', which effectively leads to silencing.

To exploit the possibility of increased participation for marginalised groups on social media, ethical trade organisations might benefit from using content generated by Southern producers in three ways. Firstly, it provides a more or less steady flow of first-hand knowledge about producers and their lived realities, which, in turn, supports the cumulative building of a moral relationship between the audience and distant others (see Frosh, 2011). Secondly, producer-generated content helps to shorten the distance between producers and consumers in a manner that is guided by the viewpoints and voices of distant others, and, therefore, is more conducive to 'proper distance'. Thirdly, increasing the agency and visibility of producers in mediated content challenges the master narrative of rational choice by advocating the incorporation of 'sentimental' (see Rorty, 1993) and 'psychological' (Goodman, 2004) motivations into consumer decision-making.

However, there is evidence that social media might not fulfil its promise to act as a space for appearance and self-representation for marginalised groups (Chouliaraki, 2011; Maasilta and Haavisto, 2014; Madianou et al., 2015; Silverstone, 2007). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this failure is related to the uneven



distribution of Internet access among the world populations, where those located in the North are better connected than those in the South. The decentralisation of voice, therefore, usually pertains to the inclusion of more of the ordinary Northern voices (Chouliaraki, 2011: 367; see also Silverstone, 2001: 20). Even if the voices of distant others are included, they usually belong to those who are better-off, effectively inhibiting the participation of the most marginalised groups (Madianou et al., 2015). Moreover, the nature of the Internet as a communication technology is such that even if the voice of distant others emerges online, it can remain unheard (Maasilta and Haavisto, 2014) or might be switched off at any time (Silverstone, 2003). As a result, even if social media offers a space for individual expression, it might be unable to provide any true agency for marginalised groups who often lack social and symbolic capital (Fenton, 2012b; Madianou, 2013a). Despite the ambivalent status as de facto corporate entities and non-neutral spaces of appearance, social media is nevertheless worth investigating as a channel of communication for causes such as ethical trade whose access to mainstream media is limited.

## 4 METHODOLOGY: FOUNDATIONS AND CONTEMPLATIONS

To briefly recap, the ethical trade's project of moral education is geared towards 'producing' consumers as supporters of ethical trade, motivated by solidarity with, as well as care and responsibility for, Southern producers who are themselves construed as objects of knowledge. In this configuration, ethical trade communication qua mediation appears as a discourse that ethical trade organisations offer to the public. To study mediation as a plausible project of moral education, I opted for the Foucault-inspired post-structuralist approach. While not supported by positivist and post-positivist paradigms with their realist ontologies, my approach to mediation as producing certain attitudes could hypothetically be accommodated within the constructivist, or constructionist, framework (see Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The constructionist focus is on an individual, often abstracted from the social setting or situated in a limited interactional context (see Gubrium and Holstein, 2003)<sup>73</sup>. In comparison, the advantage of the 'Foucauldian' approach is its explicit concern with the material, non-discursive conditions with which the ongoing process of construction of social reality is knotted (Carpentier, 2017; Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Olssen, 2003). Yet, the 'materialist' interest did not serve Foucault as a device to discover an overdetermining causality, as is the case in Marxism, but to address contingency and the possibility of change in social life and its subjects (Foucault, 2003; Olssen, 2003; see also Kendall and Wickham, 1999: 5).

Obviously, my concern with history, contingency and social change is much more modest than Foucault's grand projects of disrupting the most treasured certainties that pin down the fabric of social life. Given the unassuming ambitions of this project in relation to social change, my engagement with Foucault can be more aptly conceptualised as 'thinking with', rather than strictly employing, his theory (see Jackson and Mazzei, 2013). In fact, Foucault (1995: 720 cited in Prior, 1997: 77) himself endorsed a creative approach to his *oeuvre*: 'All my books are little toolboxes. If people want to open them, to use a particular sentence, a particular idea, a particular analysis like a screwdriver or a spanner... so much the better!' In any case, though, the possibility of situated change is precisely what ethical trade relies on: in terms of generating attitudinal change through communication as moral education, and in terms of producing an economic impact on Southern producers through encouraging changes in both individual micro-practices of consumption and global trade governance. Let me now unpack my methodological approach in more detail.

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<sup>73</sup> Of course, the boundaries of constructionism are as elusive as those of post-structuralism. Thus, the distinction I present here is but one among the myriad of alternative understandings (see, for example, Carpentier, 2017).

## 4.1 POST-STRUCTURALIST DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

My methodological outlook is a patchwork of approaches woven on the broadly post-structuralist warping frame. As commonly acknowledged, post-structuralism is a multifarious and contested terrain, whose nebulousness is notoriously epitomised by the fact that its conventionally recognised founding figures, such as Foucault, did not readily identify themselves with this position. Albeit disputed, the term ‘post-structuralism’ is nevertheless useful for situating my study within the motley crew of scholarship associated, more or less closely, with the ‘Foucauldian’ discourse analysis (see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Kendall and Wickham, 1999). Broadly speaking, post-structuralism describes a ‘radical break with the humanist, modernist, imperialist, representationalist, objectivist, rationalist, epistemological, ontological and methodological assumptions of Western Enlightenment thought and practice’ (St. Pierre, 2011: 615). Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine (2008) describe this fissure as threefold and consisting of: (1) the repudiation of the view of ideology as an all-encompassing form of state power (see Kelly, 2009); (2) an emphasis on the productive power of signification in relation to social reality (see Foucault, 1972); and (3) the rejection of the humanist subject as predating social relations (see Olssen, 2003). As evidenced in the research questions (**RQ 1**: *How do ethical trade organisations mediate between producers and consumers?*; and **RQ 2**: *What subject positions does ethical trade communication construct for its recipients?*), I am especially interested in the second and third rupture.

As anticipated above, this research realises the post-structuralist approach through the deployment of a brand of ‘Foucauldian’ discourse analysis (see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Kendall and Wickham, 1999). The Foucauldian approach to discourse is explicitly concerned with politics instead of linguistics (Foucault, 1972: 49; Olssen, 2003: 194). Thus, the notion of discourse used here departs from its traditional, strictly linguistic meaning as ‘a mere intersection of things and words: an obscure web of things, and a manifest, visible, coloured chain of words’ (Foucault, 1972: 48). Instead, discourse is a signifying ‘space’ where meaning is continuously contested and renegotiated (Torfing, 1999: 85). More than simply representing material reality, discourses have a double capacity: they both meaningfully describe and *constitute* the world and the subjects that inhabit this world (Foucault, 1972; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 225). Thus, discourses are ‘practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak’ (Foucault, 1972: 49) that encompass a system of ‘thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of actions, beliefs and practices’ (Lessa, 2006: 285; see also Hall, 1997b: 44). Put even more simply, the basic ontological premise of discourse analysis is that the material ‘reality’ obtains meaning through discourse, which, in its turn, is open to change (see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 267; Charmaz, 2008; Foucault, 1972; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Hall, 1997b: 45; Laclau and Mouffe, 1990). Discourse and materiality,

therefore, construct the social world together, a position that Olssen (2003) calls ‘materialist post-structuralism’ (see also Kendall and Wickham, 1999). In acting on this ontology, Foucauldian discourse analysis takes a keen interest in material circumstances and non-discursive practices with which discourses interact in co-constituting social reality.

To address the question of subject positions discursively produced by ethical trade communication, I draw on Foucault’s theory of subjectification. In Foucault’s analytics of power/knowledge, subjectification describes both the passive subordination of individuals to power and the active constitution of individuals as subjects (Foucault, 1982b: 781; Kelly, 2009: 88). As I understand them, these two meanings of subjectification correspond to two distinctive types of ‘technologies’: the technologies of power – often taken to mean the ‘pastoral’ power over conduct, rather than force and coercion (Foucault, 1982a, b; see also Burchell, 1996) – and the techniques of the self (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008), respectively. Technologies of power are the domain of state government, particularly in advanced liberalism (Burchell, 1996). The in-depth recapitulation of changes in the mode of power exercised by the political government is, however, beyond the scope of this study (for an overview, see Foucault, 1978; Olssen, 2003). The technologies of the self, succinctly put, refer to the practices undertaken by individuals to constitute themselves as ethical subjects working towards a broadly understood moral aim determined within a particular moral order (Foucault, 1982a; see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Zylinska, 2013). A subject is, therefore, more than just a product or resultant of the vectors of external power and domination (see Arribas-Ayllon, 2005; Kelly, 2009).

At the level of discourses, and this is the level that concerns me most, the Foucauldian theory of subjectification posits that every discourse produces a position for the subject from which the meaning and knowledge contained in this discourse makes the most sense (Foucault, 1982b: 781; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 226; Hall, 1997b: 56). According to Foucault (1982b: 778), subjects are discursively produced through ‘dividing practices’ whereby the subject is either split inside themselves or divided from others. The ‘positioning of subjects within a discursive structure’ is termed ‘subject position’ (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 267). Subject positions are multiple, contradictory and discontinuous ‘locations’ that emerge through and within power relations embedded in the discourse (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1982b). The positions produced by discourses are contingent, not determined or determining (see Foucault, 1982b). Although individuals are inclined to identify themselves with subject positions constructed by the discourse, they are not bound to do so (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 268; see also Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1982b; Hall, 1997b; Kelly, 2009). Instead, there is an interplay between the performative power of discourses, (material) structures and the agency of subjects (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Carpentier, 2017; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). Yet, there are material and discursive limits to the possibilities for individual self-

constitution. Active agents as they are, individuals inevitably construct and perform their selves in relation to, on the one hand, a situated material ‘reality’ (see Carpentier, 2017; Olssen, 2003) and, on the other hand, the norms delineated and constituted by the discourses already in place (Butler, 2001; Davies, 1991).

Informed by the post-structuralist discourse theory and its approach to subjectification, my empirical recourse into ethical trade communication proceeded in three moves. Firstly, I attempted to investigate how ethical trade organisations discursively constructed trade as a mediated ethical relationship between Southern producers and Northern consumers. Having assembled the conceptual framework around the notions of solidarity, care and responsibility as the moral signifiers typically connecting producers and consumers in the academic and industry discourses of ethical trade and consumption, I inquired into the specific articulations of these signifiers as deployed by Pizca del Mundo and Eetti. To meaningfully analyse the limited and purposefully generated material at hand – substantially different from the broad and historical material that interests the ‘classical’ Foucauldian discourse analysis – I drew on various theoretical and methodological frameworks to elicit vocabulary that most aptly captured my empirical problem. In practice, I borrowed concepts from discourse-theoretical analysis and critical discourse analysis, but also from distinct strands of ‘structuralist’ and materialist theories, such as Marxism, world-systems theory and narratology. Crucially, each such loan was infused with the decisively post-structuralist ontological view of the social world as simultaneously constitutive of and constituted by discourse (see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 267; Foucault, 1972; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Hall, 1997b: 45; Laclau and Mouffe, 1990). In other words, when I adopted structuralist and materialist concepts, I stripped them of their reductionist and overdetermining character. In sum, this first step of the empirical investigation can be understood as a ‘microanalysis’ of the selected statements of discourse (see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008) with the conceptual arsenal summoned from across various analytical approaches.

In the second move, I attempted to gauge *what* these situated articulations of solidarity, care and responsibility tried to accomplish in terms of the moral education of consumers (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 215). In other words, I looked at what subject positions were constructed for consumers in relation to other ethical trade actors. While the basic production of individual consumer subjectivities is the task of government (see Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2001; Trentmann, 2006: 28), ethical trade organisations can try to discursively impact upon how individuals constitute themselves as moral subjects within the framework of their everyday consumption (e.g., Dolan, 2007; Miller, 2001a; Wilk, 2001). To locate this second move theoretically, I linked the identified articulations back to the discourses of ethical trade produced by the academic literature and practitioners alike. On the basic level, ethical trade communication appeared discursively to constitute Polish and

Finnish subjects as ‘Northern consumers’ divided from ‘Southern producers’. The division between consumers and producers is often conceptualised as an opposition between ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, presupposing the moral obligations of the former towards the latter. Throughout this move, I continuously kept in mind that in the post-structuralist approaches to subjectification, the subjects addressed by ethical trade communication can reject the subject position offered to them.

Thirdly, in a theorising move, I tackled the question of *why* ethical trade was communicated in the way it was in Poland and Finland. In doing so, I extended the ‘materialist’ interest of the Foucauldian post-structuralism, which posits that discourses and materiality are inseparable (Carpentier, 2017; Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Olssen, 2003). Namely, I situated the uncovered discourses of moral education within the context of the material conditions under which they were produced to anchor them in the broader framework of global trade to which they gave meaning (see Orgad, 2012; Zarycki, 2014: 14).

In this section, I constructed the methodological scaffolding of the present study. The remainder of this chapter will carve out some of the reflexive specificities of this approach. In particular, I will reflect on scientific authority as an ethical position, and on its relationship with the ‘disciplinary work’ in the social sciences. Finally, I will problematise the naturalised notion of ‘data’, present my take on empirical material and provide an overview of techniques that I employed to generate it.

## **4.2 ETHICS OF SUBJECTIVITY**

The productive capacity of discourses (see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 267; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Hall, 1997b: 45; Laclau and Mouffe, 1990) has two main implications: (1) an assumption that an ‘object’ of our study acquires meaning through discourse (more ontological point); and (2) the recognition that ‘scientific knowledge’ about this object is also discursively constructed (more epistemological point) (Foucault, 1972; for a similar discussion on social constructivism see Charmaz, 2008). It seems to me, though, that while the first tenet is commonly acknowledged, the positioned nature of social research largely remains implicit. Consequently, the post-structuralist knowledge production seems to rely on claims to objectivity and truth laid by positivists. To take my post-structuralist position seriously, in what follows I will attempt to demystify some of the ‘behind the scenes’ of a research process that goes into the production of seemingly authoritative knowledge claims (see Petersen, 2004: 3; St. Pierre, 2002).

In accordance with the epistemological premise of post-structuralism, I view the account presented in this dissertation as a (rendition of) discourse as well. For that reason, I want to explicitly acknowledge that the narrative I chose to present is but one of a myriad of alternative narratives of the same phenomenon, all of them equally (im)plausible and (non-)objective (see

Petersen, 2016: 6). Although I believe my account to be informed by adequate academic theories, recognised scientific research methods and meticulously documented empirical material, had I chosen different literature or techniques, or developed a different relationship with my participants, the findings could have potentially been very different (see Denzin, 2014). Thus, this methodological chapter serves, among other things, to reveal my personal investments and (some of) the detour routes that I took during my research to arrive at the present narrative.

As a discourse, this dissertation not only situates my research problem in the historical and cultural context, but also implicates myself as an agent in the process of ‘making sense’ through generating and analysing empirical material (Charmaz, 1995, 2008; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). As Davies (2004: 5) argues, ‘[w]ays of making sense’ – and, thus, of producing knowledge – ‘are not innocent’. This epistemological position entails knowledge being situated, inevitably partial, positioned, locatable and embodied (Denzin, 2014; Haraway, 1988; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011: 9). For me, this recognition implies a certain ethical position: *an ethics of subjectivity* (or objectivity achieved through reflexive subjectivity, see Marcus, 1995: 112; Wallerstein, 2011: 9), to which I now turn.

Conventionally, subjectivity is discussed (or left unsaid) in a binary opposition to ‘objectivity’, the latter being a preferred option. In fact, objectivity is often quoted as the core ethical principle of scientific knowledge production (see Boellstorff et al., 2012: 41; Haraway, 1988). In the most common and unproblematised understanding, objectivity denotes a lack of bias. As such, it demands that researchers remain detached from, and neutral towards, the topic and participants of their study. Objectivity requires researchers to strip away their personal beliefs, preconceptions and ideals. It enforces a certain mindset and vocabulary that sometimes occlude the agency of a situated researcher. While such a convention is supposed to constitute the bedrock of ethical research practice, to me – and many others before me (e.g., Charmaz, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2007; Haraway, 1988) – it begs the question of who bears the responsibility for research if the researcher as a human agent is effectively removed.

For some, the upholding of objectivity is what differentiates rigorous academic research from opinion, indoctrination or propaganda. Some are committed to protecting objectivity as a research standard even as it is being hollowed out of meaning before their eyes. From where I stand, such devotion might be ethically counterproductive in at least two ways. Firstly, it might fetishise objectivity, converting it into a ‘floating’ signifier emptied of its original significance, yet overflowing with meaning (see Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008: 8). Thus, if not problematised, objectivity is likely to create confusion as its meaning might vary from writer to writer, and from reader to reader of an academic text (see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 268). Secondly, objectivity might serve to mask a set of subject positions and deep-seated but not always conscious preconceptions that shape research, but

conventionally remain unacknowledged. Inevitably, every researcher infuses their knowledge production with both agency and a situated view (Boellstorff et al., 2012: 66; see also Charmaz, 2008; Tedlock, 2000). Echoing Donna Haraway (1988: 583), 'only partial perspective promises objective vision', and only on the condition that one embraces their 'limited location'. Thus, it seems that for me, the only viable approach that permits some version of objectivity and is fully congruent with the post-structuralist paradigm is an ethics of subjectivity, whereby I endeavour to be tolerably transparent about my choices, subject positions and the emotional and personal investments that impinged on the research process (which were plenty) (see Charmaz, 2008: 402).

At the outset of my research, I was suspicious of the idea of an individualistic and consumerist solution to the problem of global inequality proposed by fair trade/ethical trade. This suspicion was primarily theoretical and sprang from the heavily critical literature. Only much later did I realise that this criticism was peculiar to the countries that had been the focal points of fair/ethical trade research, that is, the UK and the US. Of course, there are differences between the ethical trade narratives and discourses produced in the two countries, the American ones being considerably more skewed towards businesses and individual consumption (Bennett et al., 2011). Yet, both these countries are characterised by a permeating logic of commerce and commercialisation (see Trentmann, 2006), which has generated idiosyncratic tensions between a deeply moral imperative of fair/ethical trade and market interests (see Varul, 2009). Such conflicts appeared to be hardly pertinent to either the nascent fair trade market in Poland or the stubbornly persistent Finnish welfare state with its well-developed civil society.

Having freed myself from theory-induced suspicion and prejudice, I attempted to approach both the topic and the empirical cases open-mindedly, cool-headedly and 'objectively'. However, I soon started to filter my 'objectivity' through a growing fondness for both the cause and the research participants. The ethical trade movement turned out to be inhabited by people, predominantly females, with whom I shared social sensitivity and sensibility, political inclination and a moral compass. Even though the only time we ever spent together was 'professional', the identification was inevitable. From my perspective, maintaining the position of a 'professional stranger' turned into an unattainable fiction (see Tedlock, 2000). The participants became my teachers, associates and, to an extent, friends. Thus, even the critical remarks expressed in this dissertation are underpinned by a deep appreciation of, and sympathy towards, their efforts, an understanding of the difficult choices they sometimes need to make and a willingness to contribute to their cause.

Eetti Helsinki, in particular, offered me a sense of belonging and social purpose that is at times difficult to achieve for a foreigner, particularly one situated in a context as enclosed and abstracted from the general society as academia. In enacting the practices of commitment, affection, dialogue, collaboration and accountability, I organically chose 'friendship' as my



fieldwork ethics (Lindlof and Taylor, 2011: 141). It would be utterly unethical to claim that such a mode of engagement had no influence over the generation and, later, analysis of empirical material. In conducting a research with the adjective 'ethical' in the title, I can only fully acknowledge my emotional investment and reflect on it critically.

### 4.3 WRITING THE 'PROMISCUOUS' INQUIRY

In this convoluted section, I would like to reflect on two further features of my approach: the theoretical and methodological 'promiscuousness' (Childers, 2014), and the significance of writing as a research technique. As is evident in the theoretical assemblage presented in Chapter 3 and in the methodological patchwork discussed above, the treatment by this project of disciplinary and theoretical boundaries was somewhat liberal. In more detail, this monograph is to be presented and defended in the discipline of media and communications. The initial research interest, social media, was firmly located within the discipline. However, the scope soon started to expand to incorporate other modes of communication. In a word, I was curious about *mediation*: mediation understood as an ethically charged symbolic process of negotiation and circulation of meaning (Silverstone, 1999, 2002, 2007, 2008). Yet, my approach to mediation was somewhat removed from its original context of journalism and the tangible presence of institutionalised media. To analyse mediation without the necessary presence of media, I reached out to the theoretical and methodological repositories of other fields and disciplines, including postcolonial theory, political economy, feminist studies, social and cultural anthropology, geography and political science. This is, of course, a rather standard practice in media and communication studies. However, the ethics of subjectivity compels me to acknowledge the messiness and accidentality of my theoretical framework and methodological scaffolding.

Throughout the project, I uncoordinatedly traced and audaciously borrowed and patched together ideas not across, but *in ignorance* of the presumed disciplinary boundaries. What followed were loans, appropriations and – hopefully productive – 'misreadings' of various theories and concepts (see Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). I am tempted to term my approach 'promiscuous' in a promiscuous alteration of a phrase coined by Childers (2013, 2014). Even though my research was not feminist, Childers was one of the many feminist scholars from whom I keenly borrowed, especially from their poignant philosophical and methodological contemplations. Childers' (2013: 607) original use of the epithet 'promiscuous' in relation to feminist research describes her relationship to the conventions of her discipline: her 'feminist entanglements' with issues beyond the interrogation of gender, which were 'loyally disloyal, and wonderfully infectious' to her original feminist training. My ties to media and communication studies are somewhat similar: while this discipline inevitably informs my interests and shapes my

perception, it could not quite contain my research problem or exhaust it theoretically and methodologically (see also St. Pierre, 2011).

The second sense of promiscuity refers to the research process itself. The notion of promiscuity articulates the incompatibility in qualitative empirical research between the imagined research process and the ‘real life’ field (Childers et al., 2013: 513). The promiscuous responsiveness to the material conditions in which discourses are submerged was very congruent with my approach (see Childers et al., 2013; MacLure, 2013; Voithofer, 2013). Specifically, Childers (2014: 819) calls for promiscuity in research that embraces ‘an unruly approach to thinking about and engaging with empirical materials that is less interested in doing it “right” and more interested in flexing, breaking, and blurring theoretical and analytic boundaries as needed to respond to the field’. Thus, she joins the ranks of researchers, largely feminist scholars in the field of education, who seek to shake the cornerstones of established research practice, such as data (Denzin, 2013; Petersen, 2004, 2013; St. Pierre, 1997), fieldwork (St. Pierre, 2002) and coding (St. Pierre, 2011). While I cherished their input and attempted to reflexively embed it in my own study, the promiscuity of my approach was still more modest. It resided in capriciously drawing on, dismembering and reassembling various paradigms, theories and traditions, rather than in disposing of the old approaches and inventing the research practice, or its components, anew (see Voithofer, 2013).

Relatedly, I see this dissertation as a writing process: not only does it report on a research process, but it also *embodies* my research. It was a meandering journey over which I had much less control than I would have ever imagined. Remaining faithful to the ethics of subjectivity, I ran into a problem of how to write a post-structuralist research account of a promiscuous research. In other words, how could I document a necessarily tangled and circular research process in a truthful yet intelligible way? Conspicuously, writing – beyond linguistic technicalities and structural conventions – remains a somewhat suppressed research phase, despite its undeniable relevance to the production and dissemination of knowledge. Meanwhile, writing is both a technology for recording knowledge and a method of producing knowledge about the world and – like any other discursive practice – constituting the world itself. In Denzin’s (2014: 569) words: ‘Writing is not an innocent practice, it is a form of pedagogy, a way of making the world visible. Writing is simultaneously a method of discovery, a method of interpretation, and a method of analysis’ (see also Richardson, 2000, 2002). Writing, therefore, is more than an unproblematic and transparent activity of documenting the world (see Richardson, 2000). While I will not contemplate here the crisis of representation (see Petersen, 2015), I would like to acknowledge the significance of the ‘linguistic turn’ – implicated as it is in the post-structuralist thought – for the possibilities of scholarly capture of a world that always already exists within at least one system of signification (Richardson, 2000; Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005; Voithofer, 2013: 534). With all these

concerns in mind, I wanted to avoid writing a post-structuralist research in an untroubled realist manner.

A helpful entry into conceptualising post-structuralist writing is offered by Steph Lawler's notion of a research report as a 'research narrative' – 'the researcher's own account of how the analysis "came to be the way it is"' – organised by the principles of clarity, reflexivity and openness (Lawler, 2008: 47). Taken seriously, this view unsettles the traditional, arguably masculine and certainly realist, conception of scientific authority grounded in the claims to reliability, validity and generalisability. Instead, the conception of scientific writing as a narrative encourages a more situated, personal and political style of writing whereby the researcher's self is inserted into the text (Denzin, 2014). Having designed the research and planned the dissertation in accordance with social scientific conventions, I decided to subvert them a little by following Lawler and Denzin's tentative advice. Thus, at the same time as I was 'doing' scientific authority, I was trying to undo it by employing a more personal, conversational and transparent writing style (on the 'double move' of doing/undoing see Davies and Petersen, 2005; see also Childers et al., 2013: 513). While conforming to the academic standards, I was continuously and actively trying to reflect on my research as a practice and process. Nonetheless, even though I found inspiring the feminist research that turned its gaze back on the positioned academic self, Beverley Skeggs' (2002) plea to remove reflexivity from the 'mobile' self of the researcher and reattach it to the research process proved sobering. According to Skeggs (2002: 369), concentrating on research as a story of the growing and transforming self is 'a technique for seducing the reader' that reconfirms the academic's authorial power and carries the risk of fixing research subjects in place. Thus, albeit I found it illuminating to interrogate my relationship with the research process and participants, I decided to write these reflections into the dissertation only to the extent that they made my research more accountable and my personal investments more transparent.

I chose a monograph, as opposed to a compilation of journal articles, as the format for this dissertation because of the belief that it would allow me to write a fuller research story with fewer interruptions and limitations. It seems to me that the mainstream social scientific publishing is fixated on *results as research*, rather than on results as an outcome of research as a process. While this is generally understandable, to stay true to my epistemological position, in this dissertation I wanted to not only report the results of empirical investigation, but also to give an account of how these understandings were generated. In other words, despite my continuous appreciation of empirical results, I have found the theoretical, philosophical and methodological aspects of research at least equally captivating and totally educative. Yet, even in the context of a meandering and messy project that only learns what it is truly curious about as it unravels, the empirical results occupy the centre stage. To stay true to my newfound interests, I nevertheless decided to lay bare the facets

of the research process that are usually absent from the more constrained writing formats.

Laurel Richardson captures very well the approach that I used to put this dissertation on paper when she writes:

I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it. I was taught, however, as perhaps you were, too, not to write until I knew what I wanted to say, until my points were organized and outlined. (Richardson, 2000: 924)

I have always enjoyed writing and never experienced a serious case of writer's block. Yes, I would postpone writing until I found the right word to start off a new page or until I had a full day – half a day at the very least – to devote to writing. After all, writing an academic dissertation was such a serious matter. Until I realised that it really was not. I took my research seriously and dedicated countless hours to becoming reasonably knowledgeable about the topic. I knew my theory, I was familiar with my material, I was slowly assembling my philosophical outlook. I was competent enough to say *something* about ethical trade communication in Poland and Finland, albeit necessarily partial and situated (see Haraway, 1988; Richardson, 2000: 928). And, of course, it was highly unlikely that anyone would hold a doctoral student to be an ultimate authority on anything. Having realised that, I just let go. I let go of claims to authority, of pressure and of writing stress<sup>74</sup>. Writing became enjoyable again, punctured by playfulness with words and thought through 'subversive' metaphors (see Richardson, 2000). All this, of course, within the confinement of linguistic spaces available to non-native English speakers.

With all that in mind, I have come to see my doctoral dissertation as a written account that answers three major questions: (1) the *what* question, which demands a bounded description of a 'real-life' phenomenon and its theorisation; (2) the *how* question, which asks about how the previously conceptualised phenomenon figures in the concrete empirical material; and (3) the *why* question, which is curious about the reasons behind the empirically excavated articulations of the phenomenon. In addition, there are two important bridges that the dissertation needs to erect: (1) a philosophical-methodological bridge that allows for moving from defining the phenomenon

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<sup>74</sup> Here, I think yet another disclaimer about my background is in place. Coming from Poland, my roots are in a largely masculinist, patriarchal, authoritative and argumentative schooling system. These features favour certain philosophical positions, such as the acceptability of a single truth only (realism/positivism), which must be argued strongly in order to assert authority. This, in turn, legitimises writing predilections that include the suppression of an authorial voice, (over)use of the passive voice, complex syntax and long sentences, unnatural use of loan translations and so on. Having switched my academic language to English – and my environment to the somewhat more open Finnish university – I had to actively counteract these tendencies. Without doubt, however, traces of this early conditioning can still be detected.

theoretically to studying it empirically; and (2) a bridge connecting the particular research back to the academic universe and, in a very tentative and measured way, beyond it. The process of answering these neatly laid-out questions and the building of the self-evident bridges is, however, such a bundled, meandrous and circular process that it cannot quite be captured in the linear structure of a doctoral dissertation. Although this conventional structure is more of an artificial, a posteriori recreation of the research process rather than its faithful projection, its virtue is readability. Thus, albeit I adhere to the linear reporting, I would like a reader to bear in mind that this is not how the research truly unravelled.

#### 4.4 DATA: INTERRUPTED

Since it is an account of an empirical study, which was in itself a political and moral endeavour (Denzin, 2013), this dissertation is informed by empirical material, commonly referred to as ‘data’ or ‘evidence’. Curiously, the concept of ‘data’ is so deeply ingrained in social scientific parlance that methodological textbooks rarely make an effort to explicate what it means beyond the enumeration of different types of ‘data’ ‘collected’ through various methods and techniques of ‘data collection’. On that note, Koro-Ljungberg and McLure (2013: 219) observe that ‘data’ is conventionally viewed as an unproblematic ‘key element of one of the main grand narratives of research’. To disrupt this taken-for-granted idea of ‘data’, Denzin (2013) provocatively ponders the ‘death of data’. Two of the 15 reasons that he enlists for abandoning the noun ‘data’ particularly reflect my own uneasiness with the concept: (1) ‘data are not things that can be collected, coded [and] analyzed; data are processes constructed by the researcher’s interpretative practices’; and (2) ‘data are ideological productions’ (Denzin, 2013: 355; see also Davies, 2004; Miller, 1997). My concern, however, is not to jettison the idea of ‘data’. While I cling to the need to use the entity of ‘data’ in empirical research, I opt for a productive reconceptualisation of its identity. The ‘data’ used in my research does not sit well with the conventional definition of an autonomous, yet passive and uncorrupted, entity waiting to be harvested by an objective researcher in pursuit of an impartial and complete knowledge.

To that end, the concept of *creata* offered by Petersen (2004, 2013) appears to be a productive rethinking of the contested ‘data’. Petersen (2004: 71) writes that ‘[t]he point of “creata” is thus that data are generated, and generated from (multiple and changing) somewhere(s), rather than innocently gathered from the pre-discursive reality and only become discursive the moment they are read and re-presented’. Three points are of crucial importance here. Firstly, *creata* embodies situated knowledge in that it underscores the researcher’s agency in generating, selecting, processing and analysing empirical material. Secondly, the notion of *creata* recognises that the gathered material provides only *some* of the possible answers to the original research questions,

sometimes those answers that the researcher unconsciously favours (see also Rittenhofer, 2002). Thirdly, creata acknowledges its always already discursive character.

In this dissertation, my pet phrase ‘empirical material’ refers specifically to the purposefully selected, discursive and always co-created (by the participants and myself) creata. Although the analysis included only the material meticulously documented either by organisations (social media channels, printed leaflets and educational materials) or in my own transcripts and notes, I was also informed by more ‘elusive’ and ‘intangible’ creata (see St. Pierre, 1997). Sometimes their ephemerality was a direct result of the fragmented nature of my note-taking, whereby a specific wording or particular aura was lost between the ‘jots’. Their spectres, however, remained, haunting the analysis. At other times, the creata was elusive from the outset, hovering in spaces between and around St. Pierre’s notions of ‘emotional’ and ‘sensual data’. Furthermore, as is typical – yet still worth acknowledging – of qualitative research, I generated creata in conversation with theoretical ideas. Thus, theoretical framework and empirical findings cannot easily be disentangled (see Miller, 1997).

## **4.5 CASE STUDIES**

At the outset of my doctoral project, I was curious about social media and the possibilities it offered for the promotion and advancement of niche social causes, such as ethical trade. The natural starting point for creata generation was, thus, social media itself. However, as time passed, I realised that social media was only one element, and admittedly one of the most mechanical, in the ‘communication repertoire’ of ethical trade organisations (see Mattoni, 2013). Analysing it in isolation, therefore, would not only be partial, but also run a risk of fetishising the technology.

Thus, my research is an attempt at a comprehensive empirical study of ethical trade communication that moves beyond the offline/online binary through investigating mediated as well as ‘unmediated’ communication practices to explore ‘the cultures and attitudes underlying the use of communication technologies’ (Kavada, 2014: 359). In other words, I investigate social media concurrently with, and as a part of, the broad communication repertoire of ethical trade organisations (Kavada, 2013: 77; Mattoni, 2013). The remainder of this chapter will discuss the continuously morphing research design of the two empirical cases introduced in Chapter 1 as it unravelled from the media-centric to the beyond-the-media-centric to the non-media-centric (see Morley, 2009).

## **PIZCA DEL MUNDO**

The study of Pizca del Mundo's communication combined a variety of methodological concepts and approaches that highlight the performativity of communication in simultaneously representing and generating the 'reality' (see Carey, 2008; Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b, 2013a; Silverstone, 2008). As such, it was also in concert with the overarching post-structuralist sensitivity that sees communication as a discourse that is both 'meaningfully descriptive' and constitutive of the world and its subjects (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 225). In what follows, I will present an overview of the material and methods of analysis employed in the empirical inquiry into Pizca del Mundo's communication.

### ***Empirical material***

While I have been following Pizca del Mundo on Facebook since summer 2013, the systematic observation began in November 2014 and lasted for about a year. Over that period, I familiarised myself with all the content posted on the Facebook page since its establishment in July 2012. I also followed all the links contained in the posts, read all the comments added by the Facebook fans and often traced the personal profiles of those fans. In a word, I conducted a provisional version of 'netnography', that is, an ethnography of an online community (Kozinets, 2010: 25).

Two questions emerged from the continuous conversation between the theory and this preliminary netnography: (1) How do Pizca del Mundo use the Facebook fan page to construct solidarity between Polish consumers and Southern producers?; and (2) How do Pizca del Mundo mediate 'proper distance' in the representations of Southern producers deployed on their Facebook page? My intuition was that these questions would help to grasp some of the unique features of Facebook as a platform for communicating niche social causes and representing distant others. To answer these queries, I assembled the corpus that spanned all available content posted by Pizca del Mundo from the inception of the Facebook page on 9 July 2012 until 11 September 2015, a total of some 500 posts. The information input by the page administrator into the default fields requested by Facebook – namely 'Overview', 'Short Description', 'Long Description' and 'Mission' statements – was also investigated. This preliminary inspection of the corpus provided an overview of the content and allowed me to select the material that was most helpful in answering the research questions in a more disciplined analysis.

Importantly, the material elicited from Facebook was firmly situated within the wider context of my engagement with ethical trade in Poland. That is, after prolonged observation and detailed analysis of Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page, I set out to undertake a short fieldwork at the firm's office between 14 and 18 December 2015. During that week, I participated in the daily operations of the company (which largely revolved around managing the online store and, to a lesser extent, the offline shop) and partook in a series of four global

education<sup>75</sup> workshops that the founders of Pizca del Mundo organised for middle-school children as part of a wider educational programme in responsible consumption. The workshops demonstrated the influence of ‘our’ consumption on people in the Global South, mainly through discussing production chains of everyday commodities, such as chocolate, tea and coffee. In addition to the five work days, lasting from eight to ten hours each, I also spent some free time with Aga, the founder of the firm. This short field trip resulted in a body of notes revolving around ‘mundane’ observations and casual chats with ‘colleagues’ at work, the recordings from four school workshops (about 1.5 hours each) and an unstructured interview with Aga. This empirical material allowed me to analyse the actual communication practices of Pizca del Mundo as well as the conceptualisation, understanding and rationalisation thereof.

In addition, to more deeply understand the ethical trade movement in Poland and to better contextualise the operations of Pizca del Mundo, I conducted six additional interviews during my field trip to Poland in December 2015 and January 2016. Three of the interviewees were representatives of different organisations dealing with issues to do with ethical trade, and three were consumer activists. Each of these interviews was preceded by some observation of the informant’s social media activities: personal, in the case of individual consumers, or organisational.

As a result, the empirical case study of Pizca del Mundo’s communication comprised three parts. Firstly, I ventured into the empirical material to explore the representations of Southern producers posted on Pizca del Mundo’s Facebook fan page as manifestations of mediated familiarity. Secondly, I looked at the articulations of solidarity in Pizca del Mundo’s Facebook communication. Thirdly, I analysed the interview conducted with Aga to understand the conceptualisations of care that guided the firm’s communication. The three parts are discussed in more detail below.

### ***‘Narratological’ excursion into Facebook***

As my first point of interest, I selected 50 posts that contained visual or textual representations of Southern producers to undergo analysis from the perspective of my reading of the notion of proper distance (presented in Section 3.3). To approach this material methodologically, I combined the performativity of mediated content embedded in the post-structuralist theory of representation with narratological concepts (see Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b, 2013a; Hall, 1997b; Orgad, 2012; Silverstone, 2008). Narratology, a ‘theory of

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<sup>75</sup> In Poland, ‘global education’ is generally viewed as a component of civic education geared towards raising awareness of global processes and interdependencies, and preparing students to face global challenges in an active, critical and responsible manner. It is carried out within the framework of formal education and encompasses issues such as overcoming stereotypes and prejudices, appreciation of diversity, respect for human rights and intercultural empathy (see Popow, 2015a).



narratives, narrative texts, [and] images ... that “tell a story” (Bal, 1997: 3), is a structuralist approach to narratives whose ambition consists in dissecting narratives into ‘universal’ components that are subsequently brought together in quasi-mathematical formulae (Prince, 1982). Despite these clearly positivistic undertones, the well-developed narratological concepts were helpful in theorising the different forms of mediated agency of Southern producers that I had not been able to capture using conventional discourse-analytical approaches, namely discursive agency, narrative agency and voice. In addition, narratology chimed with a popular view of the social media content curation as ‘digital storytelling’, defined by Couldry (2008: 374) as a widely distributed capacity to represent the world, enabled by a publicly accessible communication infrastructure.

Having said that, I would like to once again emphasise that the narratological concepts were used here not to label mimetic reflections of reality (see Orgad, 2012: 18). Rather, narratology served me to theorise some aspects of representations approached from the post-structuralist standpoint as ‘renderings’ of the social world that re-present, as well as construct and constitute, this world and endow it with meaning (see Hall, 1997b: 25; Orgad, 2012: 20–3). In other words, I used narratological concepts to attend to the various ways in which the representations of Southern producers as active agents served to present them as being worthy of consumers’ attention and action (see Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b; Rorty, 1993; Silverstone, 2002, 2006, 2007).

I approached the material as a single narrative that was composed of a stream of ‘stories’ about distant others. Each of the 50 posts constituted an individual story with a plot of its own that contained characters and recounted events. Firstly, in treating Pizca del Mundo as a narrator in their capacity to curate content, I examined their position in the narrative (see Bal, 1997). Secondly, I inspected the discourse of the narrative, that is, the manner in which the events were presented (Culler, 2001: 183). This analysis led me to identify Southern producers as the collective subject of the whole narrative. I also determined that subjects were revealed by the discourse of the narrative, that is, by the way events and characters were represented, rather than by the events as such. Thus, the agency of Southern producers in actively shaping their everyday realities is termed *discursive agency*. Thirdly, I investigated whether and how Southern producers could motivate and influence the process of narration through *narrative agency*. Three forms of narrative agency – acting, looking and speaking (Bal, 1997) – were mapped onto the analysed material. Fourthly, the narratologically understood *voice*, that is, the instances of Southern producers speaking in their own words, were identified in three posts. This narratological understanding of voice, even though less sophisticated, is nevertheless congruent with the notion of voice as the ability to give an account of oneself used in communication studies (e.g., Couldry, 2010; Madianou et al., 2015). An overview of three forms of mediated agency – discursive agency, narrative agency and voice – is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2.** *Three forms of mediated agency*

	<b>Discursive agency</b>	<b>Narrative agency</b>	<b>Voice</b>
<b>Role of producers in the narrative</b>	producers actively shape their lives, but do not influence narration	producers motivate narration through looking, acting and speaking (expressing viewpoints)	producers are internal narrators, speaking in their own words
<b>Level of narrative</b>	discourse (manner of telling the story)	narration (process of telling the story)	narration (process of telling the story)
<b>Primary mode of representation</b>	're-presentation' (content generated by Pizca del Mundo)	content generated by producer organisations accompanied by Pizca del Mundo's commentary; viewpoints expressed in reported speech	speaking (direct speech)

### ***Discourse analysis of Facebook content***

My second point of interest in studying the content of Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page was the different articulations of solidarity. For this purpose, I chose content from the corpus that related directly to fair trade, its principles (e.g., fair price) or aspects (e.g., products and production processes). The final material encompassed the visual and textual content of 91 posts. Even though there was some inevitable overlap between the material analysed here and in the previous part, it was considerably reduced by the different selection criteria (representations of producers versus representations of fair trade). The divergent composition of the material also accounts for the somewhat differing, however not contradictory, findings between the two parts.

Methodologically, I deployed a discourse analysis that was especially suitable for investigating solidarity as a social practice realised in relation to the structures of global trade (see Fairclough, 1992; Young, 2006). However, my approach cannot be comfortably situated within a framework of any one strand of discourse analysis. Rather, it was an assemblage of concepts and strategies predicated on the Foucauldian notion of discourse as a 'system of representations' that influences how 'ideas are put into practice and used to

regulate the conduct of others' (Hall, 1997b: 44; see also Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). Even though the analysis hinged on a very close reading of the limited material, it was performed in relation to a wider moral discourse of fair trade. With that in mind, I approached the material as a collection of various articulations of solidarity. In doing so, I treated solidarity as a signifier articulated through the bringing together of different elements, such as knowledge, emotions, consumption practices, and actors – producers, the firm, consumers – in various constellations.

In the first step of my discourse analysis, I produced a series of memos that synthesised the topics covered by each post. Subsequently, the posts were tentatively coded and those tackling similar issues were grouped together to form initial categories (see Charmaz, 2006; Fairclough, 1992). In an abductive move based on the theorisation of solidarity as a morality of cooperation, I thematised distinct categories as educating consumers about the Global South, representing fair trade and Southern producers, advocating fair trade, describing the influence that Pizca del Mundo and their products have on the livelihoods of underprivileged farmers, and demonstrating possible connections between consumers' lifestyle and the situation of producers in the South. Through the process of continuous 'progression from interpretation to description and back to interpretation' (Fairclough, 1992: 231), I identified overlaps and contact points between the content of the different thematic clusters in terms of the subjects they represented and addressed, and the relationships they charted among these different subjects. Finally, I arrived at three distinct articulations of solidarity within the fair trade discourse present on Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page.

### ***Discourse-theoretical interview analysis***

My last point of interest was the conceptualisation of care that guided Pizca del Mundo's communication. To access this notion, I conducted and analysed the in-depth interview with Aga conducted on 18 December 2015, on the last day of my week-long fieldwork with the firm. As my methodological framework, I chose the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), adapted to communication studies primarily by Carpentier (Carpentier, 2014, 2015, 2017; Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007; Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008). I considered the discourse theory to be the most appropriate analytical approach because the notion of dialectics of care applied here as the primary analytic concept exposes not only a moral dimension, but also political significance of care. That is, it puts at stake the allocation of emotional and material resources among disparate groups.

Importantly, the analysis was neither concerned with the linguistic details and concomitants of verbal interaction, such as gestures and facial expressions, nor treated an interview as a self-contained event separated from a wider social context. Rather, I used an approach in which nuggets derived from the interview illustrated how the wider communication practices of Pizca

del Mundo are conceptualised. Thus, in line with the principles of discourse theory, the analysis was macro-contextual and macro-textual (see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 277; Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008).

Drawing on the general approach outlined in Section 4.1, the discourse-theoretical analysis proceeded in two steps. Firstly, I analysed the articulation of the dialectics of care deployed by Pizca del Mundo. Secondly, drawing on the political identity theory embedded in the discourse theory (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008: 9–11), I examined and situated in relation to each other the subject positions constructed in the dialectics of care, such as consumer/citizen, producer and fair trade organisation.

## **EETTI**

Unlike the methodological mosaic deployed in the case study of Pizca del Mundo presented in the previous section, the investigation of Eetti was designed as a singular piece of research. It used one, albeit broad, theoretical notion – that of responsibility – to probe mediation as moral education. It analysed one set of empirical material through one methodological approach that hinged on the combination of elements derived from the discourse theories of Foucault and of Laclau and Mouffe.

### ***Ethnographic-style participant observation***

My first encounter with Eetti occurred over a year into my study, when I was already somewhat familiar with both the themes and the organisational landscape of ethical trade. It took place at the first meeting of the renewed Eetti Helsinki, a local English-speaking volunteer group. Having received in my university inbox a notification about the upcoming discussion on ethical issues in the global garment industry, I registered for the meeting in the hope of gaining a theoretical insight into what new areas of concern were worth dealing with in my research. What I received, however, was not only an abundance of new knowledge, but also an overview of discourses surrounding ethical trade, some of which appeared familiar from the literature, while others had a ring of newness to them. Intrigued, I decided to investigate it further. Luckily, the organisation welcomed my active involvement in the Eetti Helsinki group, which was my primary ‘field’, and also accommodated my research needs.

My participant-observatory fieldwork with Eetti Helsinki stretched from April 2015 until June 2016. At that time, the group was composed of five ‘core’ volunteers – three females and two males, three of them foreigners, including myself – who coordinated the events or participated in most them. The number of other participants varied, but usually oscillated around 10 to 15, primarily young females, and many of them students at institutions of tertiary education. In the course of my fieldwork, I participated in an array of events,

ranging from monthly meetings of the volunteer group (usually lectures or discussions) to internal meetings, to training sessions open to the general public, to film screenings, to fairs, to more ‘culture jamming’-like events such as selling shoes at a price equal to the wage of an Indian producer (0.14€ per pair) and (pay-as-much-as-you-feel, all-you-can-eat) fair trade chocolate café. I also wore multiple hats at these events: I was a careful listener to others’ presentations and I gave a presentation myself (on corporate green- and fairwashing); I observed and participated in events organised by others and I put a few of them together myself; I sold coffee at 7 am at a demonstration against the government-instituted cuts to public spending, and made hot chocolate on Restaurant Day. That approach reflected the communicational focus of the organisation for whom direct and personal – *embodied* – communication is still the main tool in their communication repertoire (Mattoni, 2013). Hence, the decision to extend the focus beyond social media sprang from the realisation that for Eetti, social media – particularly Facebook – served primarily to share and circulate external content, not to produce their own, and to communicate with their members, not to reach out to the general public. On most occasions, social media was nevertheless implicitly present as either an organising and promotional tool for events or as a campaigning platform.

In studying Eetti, I relied primarily on techniques borrowed from ethnographic research, such as participant observation, deep hanging out, and ethnographic and ‘informant’ interviews (see Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). I chose the ethnographic approach to create a generation because of a deep conviction about the value of *emic* understanding in research involving human participants in general (see Boellstorff et al., 2012; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011; Marcus, 1995; Tedlock, 2000), and of context in discourse studies in particular (Krzyżanowski, 2011; Miller, 1997). Of course, there are some potential incompatibilities between ethnography and post-structuralist discourse analysis. Most crucially, while ethnography assumes the bottom-up construction of social reality from everyday practices to overarching social processes, Foucauldian discourse analysis proposes the reverse, namely that individuals in their everyday lives plug into standard discursive repertoires (Miller, 1997: 25–6). Mindful of these differences, I do not intend to negate them, but I rather follow Miller’s (1997: 41) advice on strategically ‘bridging’ different theoretical formations to achieve the analytic goals of the project. And the primary goal here is investigation of how the established global discourses on (ethical) trade play out in the everyday communicative practices of Eetti geared towards morally educating consumers, and how these everyday practices, in turn, might contribute to the macro-discourses. The value of this interplay resides in its potential to reveal ruptures and contingencies ordinarily masked in the established discursive repertoires of ethical trade. Moreover, it is possible to bridge the Foucauldian presumption that discourses organise subject positions and the ethnographic perception of people as messy and inconsequential; after all, nobody is either bound to accept subject

positions on offer or confined to a singular and stable subject position. To bridge discourse-analytical and ethnographic ambitions, I applied the tempered, less intense variants of ethnographic methods to generate ultimately textual creata. After all, as Denzin (2013: 355) posits, the methods stored in the ample repository of qualitative research are always already open to reappropriation.

I adopted participant observation as the primary technique of creata generation to provide me with a rich texture of the discourse of moral education produced and circulated by Eetti as well as a vivid context in which to situate this discourse. Somewhat organically, my participant observation in Eetti Helsinki quickly became much more about participation than observation. Over the course of a few months, I graduated from the initial position of a 'professional stranger' to a fully fledged activist for whom the 'lived reality' of ethnographic engagement was the core of 'intellectual and emotional' life (Tedlock, 2000: 458). From the very beginning, I was open about my research intentions, which, in the face of an ever-changing composition of the volunteer group, I also made explicit at every meeting. This approach facilitated authenticity and accountability and supported my becoming a useful and valuable member of the group (see Lindlof and Taylor, 2011)<sup>76</sup>.

While Eetti Helsinki was at the heart of participant observation, I also partook in some events organised by Eetti for the NGO's membership base where the working language was Finnish. While my passive language skills were sufficient to follow the discussion, my limited speaking ability effectively inhibited active participation. In such cases, I resorted to 'deep hanging out', that is, an unstructured observation devoid of a prior theoretical concern (Kirpalani, 2016: 71). In other words, I did not seek to find answers to any predetermined questions, but rather kept a curious eye on possible emerging new lines of inquiry.

### ***Empirical material***

The ethnographic-style fieldwork generated three types of material that I later used in the analysis: in-depth interviews, field notes and audio recordings of events. The various categories of material interacted in a mutually generative and constitutive manner. Succinctly put, the practices and observations contained in the field notes prompted the interview questions that engendered answers that drew discursive frames around the observed practices. These frames were then spontaneously (re)articulated during the audiotaped events, and so on.

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<sup>76</sup> My temporary takeover in summer 2016 of the volunteer group that had been at the centre of the fieldwork conveniently marked the end of the creata generation process and provided a handy 'exit strategy' as my influence over the communication strategies of the group would have been too tangible.

Throughout my fieldwork, I produced more or less detailed field notes, either manually on site or using word processing software at home immediately following the events. Over time, as my involvement with the organisation and participation in the events intensified, I gradually abandoned the systematic and exhaustive field notes in favour of ‘jotting’ vestigial notes ‘on the go’ while fully and actively participating in the events (see Boellstorff et al., 2012: 85; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011). I did not intend for these notes to be analysed, but rather wanted them to aid my memory and build an ‘intellectual’ and ‘emotional’ repository. Hence, these residual notes were never elaborated on. Given the concern with generating textual material, I audio-recorded some of the most relevant and unique discussions and training, including the open training on ‘Global trade, CSR and shoes’ held on 17 October 2015. Later, I transcribed verbatim the parts most relevant for ethical trade communication qua moral education. In the analysis, these extracts were used as everyday illustrations of the somewhat abstract ideas expressed in the interviews. The distinction between carefully documented ‘audio’ creata and sparse notes that only serve to open certain ‘pockets’ in my memory becomes more blurred, and in fact less relevant, in the context of the ethics of subjectivity that posits the partiality and situatedness of all knowledge claims (see Haraway, 1988; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011).

As anticipated above, participant observation and deep hanging out informed and provided a context for a series of ‘informant’ interviews (see Boellstorff et al., 2012: 92; Lindlof and Taylor, 2011: 176–177). The interviews were aimed at understanding the situated experience, knowledge and world views on which participants drew in their particular moral education discourse (see Lindlof and Taylor, 2011: 173). In more detail, five qualitative, open-ended, in-depth interviews were informed by my growing familiarity with ethical trade in general and Eetti in particular as well as by my participation in Eetti events and my following of their social media activity. I conducted the interviews to obtain the most direct access possible to the latent notions on which Eetti’s communication hinged. Each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours, except for one that was unexpectedly interrupted after 30 minutes. Courtesy of the participants, all interviews were conducted in English. Although I transcribed them verbatim, the excerpts presented here were linguistically adjusted to avoid grammatical errors, which are inevitable when speaking in a foreign language. The original meaning, however, was retained in all cases. Three of the interviews were with nominal Eetti employees, and two with the most committed volunteers active in the Eetti Helsinki group:

- (1) an introductory interview with Lotta, the executive director, and Anna H, the local coordinator of the Europe-wide campaigns Clean Clothes Campaign and Change Your Shoes (24 June 2015)
- (2) an interview about social media with Anna YA, the then acting director of Eetti (23 February 2016)

- (3) an interview about global education with Anna YA (9 March 2016)
- (4) an interview with Melissa, the coordinator of the Eetti Helsinki group (1 September 2015)
- (5) an interview with Rosa, a volunteer for Eetti Helsinki (23 February 2016).

### ***A discourse analysis***

As expounded above, the study of Eetti's communication as moral education was a discourse analysis. In this inquiry, discourse analysis denoted not a formalised method composed of a sequence of procedures, but a methodological framework hooked into the concepts derived from the work of Foucault and of Laclau and Mouffe. Based loosely on the work of these discourse theorists, the analysis proceeded in three moves, akin to those presented earlier in Section 4.1. Firstly, my empirical investigation looked into the rearticulation of responsibility as a moral cornerstone of the Eetti communication as moral education. My main argument here was that Eetti's communication relocated responsibility to different actors than the conventional discourses of global trade. To reiterate, Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105) define articulation as 'any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice'. As this definition suggests, and as Stuart Hall (in Grossberg, 1996: 53) makes clear, articulation is a linkage that can discursively unite *any* separate elements. As such, articulation is not natural, pre-given, necessary or permanent, and can, therefore, be broken and established anew between different elements. Thus, it was possible for Eetti to redraw responsibility as a relationship connecting disparate agents of global trade in novel ways.

Secondly, I probed how Eetti rearticulated the role of an individual consumer conventionally trapped in a binary opposition between a passive dupe of the Frankfurt School and their disciples, and an active, rational chooser of neo-liberalism (e.g., Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Mackay, 1997). To do so, I engaged the methodological concept of subject position (see Foucault, 1982b: 781; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 226; Hall, 1997b: 56). Theoretically, I deployed the notion of citizen-consumer available in the repository of fair and ethical trade (e.g., Banaji and Buckingham, 2009; Clarke et al., 2007a, b; Lekakis, 2013; Sassatelli, 2006; Scammell, 2000; Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010; Wheeler, 2012a, 2012b).

Thirdly, I analysed how individuals subjected to Eetti's communication adopted, or not, the subject positions constructed for them. For that, I relied on the Foucauldian theory of subjectification, which reminded me that the subjects addressed by the discourse were not bound to ensconce themselves in the position furnished for them by this discourse (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 268; see also Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1982b;



Hall, 1997b; Kelly, 2009). Here, two interviews conducted with Eetti Helsinki volunteers were the primary material.

## **5 PIZCA DEL MUNDO**

This chapter delves into Pizca del Mundo's communication, especially as manifest in the content of their Facebook page. The overarching question is, again, how does Pizca del Mundo mediate between Southern producers and Polish consumers? In order to tackle this copious question, I focus on the articulations of moral signifiers of solidarity and care deployed to morally educate consumers. It is important to observe at the outset that the notion of responsibility, with its political undertones, is absent from Pizca del Mundo's communication. In examining the articulations of solidarity and care, I also paid close attention to the particular fair trade landscape painted using these signifiers, and what constellation of relationships was sketched within this landscape. As we already know, the conventional fair trade discourse positions producers and consumers as the key figures in the moral relationship mediated by fair trade organisations. With that in mind, I also looked at the representations of Southern producers, on the one hand, and at the subject position constructed for Polish consumers, on the other.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. In the first section, before beginning the analysis of social media content, I situate social media in the context of the everyday operations of Pizca del Mundo, which I glimpsed through my short ethnographic fieldwork. The two subsequent sections present a close reading of the content that Pizca del Mundo shared on their Facebook fan page. The objective of the close reading was to explore the distinctive features of Facebook, such as the 'sharing' functionality and the continuous flow of content, as modes of articulating moral discourses surrounding ethical trade. In more detail, Section 5.2 focuses on representations of Southern producers as articulations of mediated familiarity, and Section 5.3 explores the articulations of solidarity. In Section 5.4, in turn, I look at the qualitative interview conducted with Aga to elucidate the conceptualisations of care in which the stories that Pizca del Mundo shared on Facebook were rooted. Curiously, the analysis reveals some seeming incompatibilities between how the firm addresses and imagines the public in their capacity as already existing and prospective fair trade consumers, and how fair trade usually envisions consumers. These discrepancies are probed in Section 5.5, which assembles the fair trade landscape presented in Pizca del Mundo's communication.

### **5.1 SOCIAL MEDIA IN PIZCA DEL MUNDO'S REPertoire OF COMMUNICATION**

As I mentioned earlier, this project was initially curious about the potential of social media in communicating and garnering public support for niche social

causes, such as ethical trade. To account for this early focus and its subsequent receding into the background, it is very relevant to situate the use of social media in the context of the actual daily routines and workings of Pizca del Mundo. Incidentally, I used Facebook to first get in touch with the firm in order to arrange the possible fieldwork. The preceding email had remained unanswered for over a month, prompting me to use the more invasive communication channel that is Facebook messaging.

In the five days that I spent at Pizca del Mundo's office in December 2015, no new content appeared on their Facebook page. The actual period of inactivity was, however, longer than that, and lasted from 11 December 2015 until 4 January 2016. In fact, analysis of the Facebook page from its establishment in July 2012 until September 2015 proves that updates were very irregular, intertwining periods of very intense activity with stretches of stagnation. Aga explained that because of being often 'buried under the paperwork' they had no time to properly curate their fan page<sup>77</sup>. Indeed, the pre-Christmas period appeared to me to be a hectic time of hurried reporting for the labelling organisations, coupled with the intensified shop-running routines (the never-ending sequence of inventory, delivery, unpacking of delivery, accounting for delivery, handling mail orders, sending packages, accounting for orders, inventory). Intermittently, local customers would appear looking for Christmas gifts or their favourite products, or simply to have a chat. Despite the overall hustle, Aga and Borys found the time to travel to Wrocław over two weeks in December to give workshops for middle-schoolers as a part of a project on responsible consumption. In the face of an already overwhelming workload involved in running the firm, my tentative observation was that social media activity did not figure as an integral part in the communication repertoire of Pizca del Mundo.

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<sup>77</sup> This seems to be symptomatic of many ethical trade organisations that I was in touch with throughout my fieldwork both in Poland and in Finland: while they consistently appreciated the potential of social media in general and Facebook in particular, they confessed to not having enough time for actually putting that potential into use. Some organisations did not have a social media strategy at all, some had an underdeveloped one and some had a strategy that they did not have the time to implement. There were, nonetheless, two notable exceptions. The first of these was Fairtrade Finland, whose communications officer was very well trained in, and knowledgeable about, social media, to which she had a systematic and strategic approach. Yet, she clearly prioritised traditional media over social media, based on recognition of the corporate interest of Facebook and its uncertain future as a free – both in terms of being free of charge and without constraints – channel of organisational communication. An opposite strategy was employed by the Buy Responsibly Foundation in Poland whose communication efforts revolved very much around social media and its innovative use. The strategic and methodical approach of both organisations is reflected in the number of 'likes' and interactions they have received on Facebook: over 52,000 'likes' for Fairtrade Finland and 60,000 for the Buy Responsibly Foundation. These numbers appear truly magnificent compared to the 2,300 'likes' for Pizca del Mundo and 5,000 'likes' for Eetti (January 2018).

Although social media was orbiting quite far from the centre of attention, a certain division of labour was performed in the background: Aga acted as the primary responsible person for posting ‘non-commercial’ content on the Facebook page, one of the employees dealt with commercial content such as new products and special offers, and a second employee worked on reaching out to other organisations. The only spontaneous – that is, not triggered by my prompt – mention of social media that I witnessed that week was a discussion that the two employees had about the *real significance* of Facebook reach and statistics, for example, a growing number of likes. When asked about this, one of them remarked that social media audiences were fragmented and that users were encircled in interest ‘bubbles’. Thus, he argued, rarely could Pizca del Mundo’s content reach those who were uninterested in the firm or fair trade in general. Consequently, Facebook functioned as a tool for ‘preaching to the choir’. This employee’s lay theory of social media (McCurdy, 2013) aptly described what I earlier referred to as the ‘echo chamber’ effect (see Colleoni et al., 2014; Poell and van Dijck, 2015; Uldam and Askanius, 2013). In a similar vein, Aga punctured the potential of social media for morally educating consumers by stating that ‘[s]tatistically speaking, on Facebook people look at pictures. Let’s be honest’. These claims point to a secondary role that Facebook plays in Pizca del Mundo’s repertoire of communication, especially in relation to the embodied personal communication. Indeed, the primary mode of communicating with current customers and reaching out to a wider public was through personal encounters and interactions at the shop, stalls at various regional fairs and ecological markets, and during workshops at cultural and socially oriented events.

Although the subservient position of Facebook in Pizca del Mundo’s repertoire of communication is self-evident, I maintain that the use of its exceptional affordances is worth examining. This uniqueness was acknowledged in Aga’s summary of the firm’s use of Facebook:

[W]e don’t really have time to use the potential of Facebook to the fullest, but indeed we share our ideas and knowledge there... [W]e talk about our suppliers and how they are doing. We are more concerned with making people know the supplier, know where [the product] is from... Why we want to portray a person [a producer] is because other firms have no clue about who produces for them, and they can only claim that [the product] is Fairtrade and it respects the minimum price... We have an opportunity to say that this coffee was produced [for example] by Gerardo Rodriguez. (Interview with Aga, 18 December 2015)

In contrast to many other fair trade firms, Pizca del Mundo do not use the packaging of their products or their website to provide information about the producers. Thus, Facebook is the only form of mediated communication that the firm employs to morally educate consumers. Of course, the educational efforts are, in a sense, a marketing device: they hinge on a commercial imperative to increase sales in order to improve the material standing of their

suppliers in the Global South as well as their own financial well-being (see Varul, 2009). And this obligation to contribute to the betterment of the livelihoods of farmers that Pizca del Mundo know personally (see Section 1.3) is the primary signpost that guides the firm's communication with consumers, most of whom are anonymous to Aga and her colleagues. For this reason, there is no need to gloss over the coexistence of ethical motivations with business means and monetary incentives here.

## 5.2 AGENCY AND PROPER DISTANCE IN FACEBOOK REPRESENTATIONS<sup>78</sup>

The study starts from the recognition of the potential of social media in correcting the often-failed modes of fair trade representation discussed in detail in Section 3.3. With that in mind, the purpose of this section is twofold. Theoretically, it problematises the conventional idea of fair trade communication as 'shortening the distance' between producers and consumers by positing that the distance needs not to be short, but proper (Silverstone, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008). As such, the forthcoming analysis is an exercise in deploying relevant analytical concepts derived from humanitarian communication and media ethics in a new setting, rather than a critical interrogation of these concepts (for a critical overview see Ong, 2014).

Empirically, this section examines the representations of Southern producers posted on Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page as articulations of mediated familiarity. To reiterate, I theorise mediated familiarity as a cognitive state of (some) familiarity with Southern producers and their lived realities that allows consumers to establish affinity with distant others and constitutes the foundation for consciously incorporating the concern for the well-being of distant others into their consumption choices. In this light, representations emerge as both a vehicle for *carrying knowledge* about Southern producers and a performative mode of *production of knowledge* about distant others (see Hall, 1997b).

Knowledge about producers is usually disseminated to 'shorten the distance' between producers and consumers (see Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Shreck, 2005). As I discussed earlier, shortening the distance conventionally refers to both the deliberate shrinking of commodity chains and the assumption that a shorter chain and the information flows embedded in it automatically entail social connection and moral obligations (Goodman, 2004; Low and Davenport, 2007; Raynolds, 2002, 2008; Shreck, 2005). As pervasive as this idea is in the industry and in the academic discourse on fair trade, this double meaning is problematic, because it overlooks the

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<sup>78</sup> This chapter is based on a published analysis of the Facebook communication of Pizca del Mundo and Fairtrade Finland (Polynczuk-Alenius, 2018). It has, however, been substantially revised for the purposes of this dissertation.

performativity of mediation and representation in the construction of empathic and moral relationships with distant others (see Hall, 1997b; Orgad, 2012; Silverstone, 2007). Indeed, even though mediated familiarity is not a moral disposition in and of itself, but rather a cognitive state, representations can be held to certain ethical standards that ponder their potential to encourage consumers to act on the realities beyond the image or text.

I draw on the notion of 'proper distance' in analysing the shortening of the distance as an ethically charged process of mediation (Silverstone, 2002, 2003, 2007, 2008). In a nutshell, and as I explained in more detail in Section 3.3, here the notion of proper distance is taken to denote a mode of representation that allows for empathy towards, and greater understanding of, distant others through portraying them in both their shared humanity (similarity) and their differences (Silverstone, 2003, 2007). Thus, this section attempts to answer the question of how proper distance is mediated in the representations of Southern producers deployed on Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page. To transform the voluminous and elusive notion of proper distance<sup>79</sup> into an analytical tool suited for studying fair trade representations, I propose to conceptualise similarity as the agency of producers (see Chouliaraki, 2006; Orgad and Seu, 2014b), and difference as the adverse circumstances that shape this agency (see Raghuram et al., 2009).

I choose agency as an appropriate articulation of similarity between Southern producers and Northern consumers because of its centrality to the concept of fair trade (see Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Dolan, 2008). Indeed, the ultimate objective of fair trade is for producers to seize control of the relevant commodity chains, thereby strengthening their power in global trade (Brown, 2007). In the daily operations of the fair trade system, producers are ideally addressed as masters of their own destiny who endeavour to escape poverty and consciously invest financial premium in the development of their communities (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Dolan, 2008; Tallontire, 2009). This participatory model endows Southern producers with both agency and voice (Dolan, 2008). Thus, at the level of representation, the agency resides in describing producers as active subjects who try to sustain their living through hard work and participation in the global marketplace (Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Luetchford, 2008). Here, I follow the large body of humanitarian communication research in claiming that representing distant others as active agents – as opposed to passive victims – facilitates the development of empathy (e.g., Chouliaraki, 2006; Linklater, 2007; Orgad and Seu, 2014b; Robertson, 2010). At the same time, I acknowledge the inevitable ambiguity of representations of Southern producers as active subjects, because their agency is always already contingent on the ethical conduct of Northern consumers (Fridell, 2006; Goodman, 2010; Hall, 1997a).

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<sup>79</sup> Of course, as noted earlier, my treatment of 'proper distance' is one-dimensional and arbitrary, and multiple other readings and uses of the concept are possible.

In its perfunctory meaning, ‘difference’ refers to the conspicuously distinctive appearance of Southern producers. As a component of proper distance, it should be conceptualised more profoundly as the unveiling of material deprivation of producers, which is conditioned by the neocolonial organisation of global trade (see Brown, 2007; Smith, 2016). These exploitative trading relationships and the resulting poverty constitute the context of producer agency (Raghuram et al., 2009; see also Johnston, 2001). By emphasising the connections between prosperity in the North and poverty in the South as the material context of the agency of producers, I attempt to mitigate the Northern-centrism inherent in the notion of proper distance. As I discussed earlier, Northern-centrism resides in concentrating on the responsibility of mediators to the audiences, rather than to the distant others.

Following on from this discussion, I suggest using the perspective of proper distance to reread the ‘failed’ fair trade representations. Typically, the literature views flawed representations as commodifying Southern producers and/or portraying them as colonial subjects. This happens as an unintended result of the deployment of exoticised and stereotypical images and textual descriptions of producers as humble, grateful and contented peasants working in idyllic nature (Berlan, 2008; Goodman, 2004; Wright, 2004). My rereading approaches ‘commodification’ as an inadequate representation of producers’ agency (‘similarity’), and posits that ‘colonial’ representations result from the insufficient elaboration of the circumstances that shape this agency (‘difference’). Firstly, in commodification, production processes, and by extension producers, are misrepresented as the attributes of purchasable items (Goodman, 2004: 902; see also Dolan, 2008; Fisher, 2007; Lyon, 2006; Varul, 2008). From the perspective of proper distance, conflating Southern producers with commodities erases their agency as makers of products and instead ‘subsumes’ them into a product as its property (see Wright, 2004). Secondly, Southern producers might appear to consumers as colonial subjects. Always presented at work and surrounded by exotic nature, producers are merely a part of faraway landscapes (Lyon, 2006: 487; Varul, 2008). Particularly when it is coupled with a commonly deployed imagery of smiling people ‘like us’ (Ramamurthy, 2012), this mode of representation reduces producers to romanticised colonial subjects by obscuring the oppressive trade system that causes the differences between their life situations and ours (see Dogra, 2012).

I argue that fair trade representations would benefit from incorporating the agency and viewpoints of producers as well as elaborating on their lived realities. In doing so, I approach Facebook as a possible arena for Southern producers to influence and even dictate new modes of representation, which would take into account Spivak’s (1993: 70) distinction between the two meanings of representation: as ‘re-presenting’, that is, depicting, and as ‘speaking for’, that is, effectively silencing. While the lack of status and linguistic capital might inhibit the participation of underprivileged distant others in the representational practices of the institutionalised gatekeeper

media (see Spivak, 1993), the Internet seems to downplay the significance of these resources (Mitra, 2004; Mitra and Watts, 2002; Silverstone, 2007: 42). Arguably, the Internet provides the 'language' and technology to empower the marginalised to speak for themselves and in their own words (Mitra, 2001, 2004). Porous gatekeeping, ease of content production and interactivity are often referred to as the features of the Internet that are conducive to the decentralisation and democratisation of voice (Chouliaraki, 2011: 367; see also Chouliaraki, 2010; Madianou, 2013a, b; Mitra, 2001, 2004; Silverstone, 2007). Social media is a case in point: through enabling the easy production and sharing of content, it facilitates the participation of marginal voices (Madianou, 2013b: 250). Facebook, with its some two billion users worldwide, appears to have a particularly high potential to host a multitude of diverse voices.

Yet, as I noted earlier, several accounts claim that the Internet might in fact fail to fulfil the promise of democratising voice (Couldry, 2010; Madianou et al., 2015; Silverstone, 2007), and that decentralisation usually pertains to the increased participation of ordinary Northern voices (Chouliaraki, 2011: 367). Even if the voices of distant others do emerge, they usually belong to those who are better off, which effectively inhibits the participation of the most marginalised groups (Madianou et al., 2015). Moreover, the nature of the Internet as a communication technology is such that the (marginalised) voice can be switched off at any time (Silverstone, 2003).

Despite these drawbacks, and its relatively low priority in the daily operations of Pizca del Mundo, I see Facebook as being worth studying as a channel for shortening the distance between producers and consumers for two primary reasons. Firstly, the affordances of Facebook might enhance the conventional fair trade representations through potentially facilitating a direct connection between producers and consumers. Facebook also allows for a context that shapes producers' agency to be elaborated because of its nearly unlimited space and continuous mode of communication. Secondly, although it would be an error to assume that an electronically mediated connection implies a simultaneous social connection (see Silverstone, 2003), the repetitive presence on consumers' Facebook walls of representations of distant producers could potentially facilitate the cumulative building of a knowledge-based connection (see Frosh, 2011; Le Velly, 2007). With that in mind, the ultimate goal of the forthcoming analysis is not to normatively assess which representations are 'good' and which are 'bad', but to explore the opportunities offered by Facebook for improving representational practices of fair trade organisations.

## **THE AGENCY OF PRODUCERS IN FACEBOOK REPRESENTATIONS**

The analysis conducted with the use of narratological concepts of discursive agency, narrative agency and voice (as introduced in Section 4.5 and particularly in Table 2) revealed that Pizca del Mundo offered Southern



producers varied forms of agency that largely transcended the layer of discourse in the narrative and penetrated the narration. In particular, producers motivated the narration through acting, looking and speaking (Bal, 1997). Arguably, on three occasions the porousness of the narrative allowed distant others to speak for themselves in their own words.

To start from the beginning, in terms of narration, Pizca del Mundo often used the first-person plural, thereby appearing as a character in the story: 'We know that it will sound romantic and fantastic, but we REALLY search for these delicacies far far away, in the Peruvian *selva*, for instance'. Thus, the stories of the firm and its products become simultaneously stories about producers:

Do you know why our Peruvian coffee is so delicious? Piece of cake: all love, assiduity and care extended by the farmers that cultivate it are transferred into the soil, then make their way to the coffee seed and get into a tiny seedling. (Pizca del Mundo, 4 March 2014)

Telling such fairy-tale-like stories about strenuous physical labour carries the risk of decontextualising and romanticising production processes and, by extension, the producers (Dolan, 2008; Ramamurthy, 2012; Varul, 2008). It might also eradicate the difference between producer and product (Wright, 2004). However, these early pitfalls were avoided in other posts that provided factual and contextualised accounts of the lived realities of Southern producers as active agents influenced by the structures of global trade ('Have you heard about the programme which encouraged Peruvian farmers to switch from cultivating coca to cocoa? Central Peru is perfectly suited for that, farmers can reach the highest productivity per hectare in the entire world.').

Moving on to the agency of Southern producers, their discursive agency was articulated in two very general posts that departed from the vision of fair trade as a charity scheme and emphasised the capacity of producers as business partners (see Dolan, 2008):

People producing coffee, tea or cocoa thousands of kilometres away do not care about our mercy or good will.... They simply want to be treated fairly while trading, [and for us] not to overuse our privileged position.... They want to live decently on their work, not on our alms. (Pizca del Mundo, 18 August 2013)

Thus, the image of producers was that of active agents capable of shaping their own lives despite the unjust structures of global trade (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Luetchford, 2008). These posts stressed that the material poverty impinged upon the opportunities of Southern producers to realise their priorities and aspirations in life, which were otherwise considered fundamentally similar to those of Polish consumers: 'They want their children to have the same opportunities as our children have.... They want to live, work, love and study – the starting point is to understand that they are exactly the same as we are!'

The discursive agency of producers was concretised in posts about specific farmers, often identified by their cooperative membership, performing particular activities in agricultural fields, such as ‘meticulously preparing new seedlings, which is important at the outbreak of the *la roya* fungus in Peru’. In such posts, the agency of the producers was apparent at the narrative level of the story. It was articulated not only in their representations but also through actions that motivated, rather than simply illustrated, the narration. By presenting producers as agents who actively dealt with their predicament through concrete everyday activities, Pizca del Mundo transformed fair trade producers from the emblematic ‘deserving’ poor (Adams and Raisborough, 2008) into embodied characters who were located in concrete places and situations (see Bal, 1997; Couldry, 2010).

A close examination revealed that producers themselves were the direct source of knowledge, and that their gaze frequently motivated the narration. In other words, Pizca del Mundo often shared mainly visual content that producer organisations, most notably their major coffee supplier in Peru, posted on their own Facebook pages. Consequently, producers were offered narrative agency to prompt relevant topics (see Touri, 2016). For example, the outbreak of coffee leaf rust and the subsequent attempts to restore the plantation featured prominently in the content shared by Pizca del Mundo, as did the technological development of the cooperative: ‘Thanks to the purchase of new machines (partly financed by the Fairtrade premium), the productivity of the processing plant has grown by 500 per cent’. Such posts presented Southern agriculture as an industrial processing enterprise, not a backward and romanticised effort by individual peasants (Berlan, 2008; Brown, 2007; Ramamurthy, 2012; Varul, 2008). Enabled by the technological affordances of Facebook, the sharing of content generated by distant others partially reverses the portrayal of fair trade producers as objects of consumers’ gaze (Ramamurthy, 2012) to subjects who look, see and represent their lived reality through digital storytelling (see Mitra, 2001).

The posts generated by producer organisations consisted of not only photos but also brief comments written in Spanish. Because of the perceived need for translation and the willingness to provide consumers with additional context and a ‘thicker’ description (Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003), Pizca del Mundo usually elaborated on these original captions. For instance, a photo described by the cooperative simply as ‘[o]ur new nursery facilities’ (see Picture 1) was supplemented by Pizca del Mundo with a backstory about a fungus outbreak and the struggles of organic farmers to tame it:

We have mentioned that a coffee fungus, cutely named *la roya*, rages about in Latin America, haven’t we? Conventional farms handle it more easily [by] treating fungus with chemicals. Organic farms, and those prevail in Peru, incur massive losses. Some farmers had to cut up to a half of their bushes. New [bushes] will only fructify in three years. And this is

how the preparations look; in the photo a plantation of new seedlings in our cooperative. (Pizca del Mundo, 16 January 2014)



**Picture 1** New nursery facilities (copyright: Central Unitaria de Asociaciones Agraria Villa Rica).

This high degree of mediation inhibited the voice of producers – understood as speaking in their own words and using direct speech (Bal, 1997) – yet it incorporated their viewpoint into the narration. The viewpoint of producers was even more explicit in a post that recounted a personal meeting with the executive director of the Peruvian coffee cooperative:

Two days ago in Lima, we met with the director of the Cunavir cooperative, Noe. He confirmed that [coffee seedlings] were relatively grown already, and that despite the social problems in the region, everything was going in the right direction. (Pizca del Mundo, 20 October 2013)

Although this post focused on the process of growing coffee, it also alluded to the social issues afflicting the region. Thus, the context of coffee production, which was relevant from the producers' point of view, was revealed (see Hudson and Hudson, 2003).

Overall, the analysis allows it to be gauged that Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page presented an environment that was potentially conducive to the emergence of the voice of distant others. Producers were presented as embodied subjects with viewpoints and the narrative agency to articulate these views. Indeed, the voice of distant others resounded in three posts.

Two of the posts were similar to each other because they both featured the video of a female representative of a Southern producer association, one a crafts workshop offering additional employment for farmers with disabilities in Mombasa, Kenya<sup>80</sup>, and the other a coffee cooperative in Peru<sup>81</sup>. The representatives spoke about the goals and achievements of their organisations. The first video, originally posted by the Polish Fair Trade Association, was reposted by Pizca del Mundo without any comment, and the second video included only a short introduction of the speaker. I maintain that these posts offered a voice to distant others, because the accounts they formulated

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<sup>80</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/FairTrade.100.PSSH/videos/555165857864422> (accessed 24 January 2018).

<sup>81</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TILq9wAPM4> (accessed 24 January 2018).

corrected the Northern-centrism of the conventional fair trade discourses (see Dolan, 2008). Thus, through the mouth of their representative, the disabled Kenyan artisans spoke about themselves as empowered businesspeople, not grateful beneficiaries (see Berlan, 2008; Lekakis, 2013). In the second video, introducing a project in which consumers could directly support a cooperative of their choice, the Peruvian speaker used the term ‘shortening the distance’ in an unconventional reference not to the consumers who learnt about the life stories of producers, but primarily to the producers who appreciated an opportunity to ‘see the face of the consumer [as a person] with feelings and emotions’. Through these videos, the executives of the producer organisations effectively became the internal narrators of the story, speaking in their own words (Bal, 1997), and characters with names, faces and opinions. Importantly, their ability to speak was not restricted to talking about their organisations and personal experiences but also raised topics concerning Northern consumers as well as the broad problematics of politics and global trade: ‘To the European Parliament, I would tell them to also inculcate... policies concerning fair trade products. And they should be ambassadors for what fair trade is all about. Because we need to be fair, even as we do trade globally.’

In the third post, which contained the link to a cooperative’s website, a quote from this website and a comment by Pizca del Mundo (‘Get to know those who work for many months so that we... can enjoy the best coffee.’), the words of producers were confined to written text. According to the quote from the website,

The *Cooperativa* contributes to a better use of environmental, financial and human resources in order to improve the quality of life for our families and the quality of coffee produced in our region of Copan – actions that [conjointly support the development of our nation]. (Pizca del Mundo, 2 October 2013)

This self-representation cast a new light on the role of Southern producer organisations and in that contradicted Pizca del Mundo’s description. Rather than describing their work exclusively in terms of the provision of products for the Northern consumers’ pleasure, the producers emphasised that the production of quality coffee served to upgrade the living standards of their families and ultimately of the whole nation. Furthermore, by referring to the ‘better use’ of resources, the cooperative positioned itself as an able manager, thereby refuting the vision of fair trade producers as backward peasants (see Ramamurthy, 2012; Varul, 2008).

In sum, Pizca del Mundo not only presented Southern producers as agents who actively shaped their lives (discursive agency) but also provided them with the potential to influence the narration through the mediated representations of their daily lives (narrative agency) (see Touri, 2016). The narrative agency of the producers was manifest in actions that motivated the narration as well as in their gaze, which both captured the world around them and suggested

topics to be addressed. In addition, Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page offered the space for the voice of the producers to emerge on three occasions and to challenge the conventional Northern-centrism of fair trade discourses.

## **THE PROBLEMATICS OF PROPER DISTANCE IN FACEBOOK REPRESENTATIONS**

Considering the potential of the Internet to include distant and marginalised others (Madianou, 2013a, 2013b; Mitra, 2001, 2004), and to extend the telling of stories beyond the cardboard cube of a coffee or tea box, I analysed how Pizca del Mundo mediated the agency of Southern producers in the Facebook content they posted. In doing so, it is vital to contemplate the identified narrative from the perspective of proper distance (see Chouliaraki, 2011; Silverstone, 2003, 2007). As I previously argued, the commonly recognised failure of fair trade representations to shorten the distance results from the insufficient depiction of the similarities (agency) and/or the inadequate elaboration of the differences (circumstances shaping this agency) between producers and consumers.

Pizca del Mundo mediated the agency of producers through the discourse employed to tell stories about them as well as through offering them the possibility of participating in the narration. In effect, a considerable portion of the content curated by Pizca del Mundo related to the posts generated by producer organisations. Thus, the story was told largely from the perspective of insiders' experiences and perceptions. This was possible because Pizca del Mundo had access to these insider stories: primarily through a long record of personal contact with fair trade producers, but also through Facebook pages of producer organisations. Furthermore, in three posts, the representatives of producer organisations 'spoke' to consumers in their own voices.

These new possibilities for producers to represent themselves undoubtedly democratised the narrative, but they also problematised the preservation of proper distance. Proper distance requires a certain degree of mediation to ensure the representation of distant others in both their similarity, here conceptualized as agency, and difference, which is understood as the context that shapes this agency (Silverstone, 2003, 2007; see also Orgad, 2012). Pizca del Mundo usually translated or further elaborated the content generated by producer organisations, yet on two occasions they abstained from doing so to the detriment of proper distance. In the first case, the Southern producer appeared as a decontextualised prop: a photo of an exotic man smiling at the camera while performing an unidentifiable activity in the tropical nature of Ethiopia was shared in the middle of the Polish winter without any comment or description. The differences between the Ethiopian producer and Polish consumers were glaring but unexplained, and his agency was confounded by his smile and puzzling behaviour (see Ramamurthy, 2012). The unmediated distance disabled understanding. The second instance of refraining from mediation was an untranslated post in Spanish about a commercial fair in

Peru: the lack of context in conjunction with linguistic distance undermined the intended representation of Southern producers as empowered and skilful business people.

Hence, it appears to me that the inclusion of distant others in the process of narration is a double-edged sword. When self-representations are situated in a context understandable to the recipients, they can enhance the agency of Southern producers. However, without sufficient contextual mediation, self-representations can widen the gap between the audience and distant others. Endowing producers with the agency to represent and speak for themselves does not diminish the responsibility of Pizca del Mundo for the portrayal of the distant other (Silverstone, 2002). Instead, if distant others can 'speak' in the narrative (see Spivak, 1993), the responsibility for rendering their representation meaningful to the audience ultimately falls on fair trade organisation as mediator (see Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003). This, of course, rather than being a novel mode of representation that offers the 'subaltern' a genuine voice, is another way of 're-presenting' that seeks to strike a balance between the decontextualised self-representations and the 'speaking for' that effectively silences the producers.

## **CONCLUSION**

I used the narratological concepts of discursive agency, narrative agency and voice to analyse representations of Southern producers posted on Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page. In a brief conclusion, I would like to recapitulate the main theoretical and empirical arguments. Theoretically, I advocated a mode of fair trade representation predicated upon conveying the agency of distant others and revealing the quasi-colonial trade relationships that shape this agency. Such representations are in line with the imperative of proper distance to present distant others in both their shared humanity and difference (Silverstone, 2003, 2007). By introducing the concept of proper distance into the analysis of fair trade representations, I provided an empirical contribution to the literature on proper distance. I also qualified the idea of shortening the distance between producers and consumers, which both industry and academic discourses on fair trade appear to have taken for granted.

To fully situate this argument, I must acknowledge that representation is a highly contested 'genre' of fair trade communication. On the one hand, the dissemination of knowledge about, and representations of, Southern producers is considered vital in building consumer support for fair trade (Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003). On the other hand, there is little evidence to prove that it has any effect on purchasing decisions (see Levi and Linton, 2003; Low and Davenport, 2007). Because they are well aware of this limitation, Pizca del Mundo utilise the interactive and dialogical features of Facebook to establish a relationship between consumers and *themselves*, not between consumers and *producers*, through open questions, polls, competitions and so on (2015, personal communication). Although the effect

on consumers of the representations of Southern producers as active agents remains to be studied empirically, I posit that they are important not as a means of boosting sales but as an articulation of mediated familiarity that aims to establish affinity and render the predicament of distant others worthy of attention, emotion and action (Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b, 2013a; Hall, 1997b; Orgad, 2012; Silverstone, 2008).

Empirically, I considered the potential of Facebook to educate Northern publics about distant others. In the context of the discussion focused on non-interactive traditional media (e.g. Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008a, b, 2011; Frosh, 2011; Wright, 2011), social media remains overlooked, although it offers new ways of representing distant others from the proper distance, including the potential for their self-representation. On Facebook, distant others can exercise at least some control over their representations, whereas this possibility is absent in the traditional media (Wright, 2011). Furthermore, when Southern producers are endowed with narrative agency, Facebook can provide a steady flow of first-hand knowledge about producers and their lived realities to support the cumulative building of a moral relationship between the audience and distant others (Frosh, 2011).

Arguably, by granting producers the possibility of self-representation, Pizca del Mundo strove to stimulate the demand for fair trade products on the minuscule Polish market through retelling the stories that producers told about themselves, either during in-person meetings or on Facebook. On the one hand, such retelling served to bring the figure of an identifiable and known producer into consumers' minds, that is, to shorten the distance. On the other hand, it was aimed at reassuring consumers about the quality of Pizca del Mundo products, which – as we will see later – the firm considers to be the main reason for buying fair trade products in Poland. At the same time, as Aga explained in the interview (18 December 2015), this strategy was restricted by the – widely conceived – material conditions of producers' lives. Namely, the Internet access for many of the producer organisations was still limited and their technological competencies did not allow them to update their old-fashioned homepages; in Aga's words, they were still 'out of the [Internet] circulation'. This claim confirms the thesis about the superficiality of democratisation and decentralisation of voice afforded by digital media (Chouliaraki, 2011; Couldry, 2010; Madianou et al., 2015; Silverstone, 2007). And even those who had access and sufficient skills updated their Facebook pages rarely due to the enormous workload involved in agricultural production, which, predictably, was their primary concern.

### 5.3 BRANDED SOLIDARITY ON FACEBOOK<sup>82</sup>

In this section, I examine how the Facebook page of Pizca del Mundo is used to articulate solidarity with Southern producers. Here, I understand solidarity as a ‘morality of cooperation’ that brings together divergent groups in a joint effort to imagine and pursue a better future (Fenton, 2008: 49; see also Arce, 2009: 1040; Calhoun, 2002: 171; Kavada, 2014; Kurasawa, 2004: 249). Given its highly mediated character, solidarity articulated in the communication of fair trade firms can be termed ‘branded solidarity’ in that it imbues companies with the symbolic values of solidarity and care for distant producers (see Richey and Ponte, 2011: 173). It invests fair trade brands with the role of mediators between consumers and producers as well as, more figuratively, between consumers and the cause of economic justice that underpins fair trade. In other words, organisations act as agents of social change that are bestowed with the trust and purchasing power of consumers (Holzer, 2006). Adopting the holistic view of solidarity as a moral disposition rooted in the cognitive recognition of distant others, the analysis looks at the articulations of solidarity, and ponders who the actors involved in solidary relationships presented on Pizca del Mundo’s Facebook page are.

Zooming out to the global fair trade discourses, we see that the importance of solidarity is hotly debated and highly contested. Positioned as a practice of solidarity, fair trade appears as a more equitable and transparent alternative to both global capitalist trade and charity-based development aid (Dolan, 2008; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Reynolds, 2008). Yet, as the increasing presence of fair trade products in mainstream retail chains sharpens the tensions between the commercial pursuits and social objectives of fair trade (Doherty et al., 2012; Tallontire, 2000), both academics and fair trade practitioners raise the question of solidarity as a guiding principle of the movement (see Ahmed, 2000: 169; Berlan, 2008; Goodman, 2010: 105; Low and Davenport, 2005b; Varul, 2008). The mainstreaming of fair trade is viewed as encouraging consumers in the most advanced fair trade markets to buy fair trade products in, at times, ethically questionable supermarkets and in an unreflective and purely habitual manner (Doherty et al., 2012; Wheeler, 2012b). Therefore, mainstreaming is often suspected of hollowing out fair trade as an active practice of solidarity based on a sense of moral obligation towards distant others (see Huybrechts and Reed, 2010). To address this accusation in the Polish context, I attempt to tentatively answer an additional question: how does Pizca del Mundo manage the tensions between commercial and social principles in its communication?

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<sup>82</sup> This chapter is based on a published analysis of the Facebook communication of Pizca del Mundo and Pukka Herbs co-authored with Mervi Pantti (Polynczuk-Alenius and Pantti, 2017). It has, however, been substantially revised for the purposes of this dissertation.



## ARTICULATIONS OF SOLIDARITY

The analysis unveiled three major articulations of solidarity present on the Facebook page of Pizca del Mundo: (1) 'solidarity as legitimation', (2) 'solidarity as affinity', and (3) 'solidarity as lifestyle'. In short, *solidarity as legitimation* educated consumers about the Global South as a site of production, and portrayed both fair trade in general and Pizca del Mundo as agents of economic justice efficiently facilitating (a morality of) cooperation between producers and consumers (see Vestergaard, 2014). *Solidarity as affinity*, in turn, established the affective links between Northern consumers and Southern producers, the two key parties to the prospective morality of cooperation, mainly through representations of producers. Finally, *solidarity as lifestyle* proposed actions to be undertaken by consumers in the marketplace as practical realisations of solidarity.

### ***Solidarity as legitimation***

Solidarity was articulated as legitimation in the posts that educated consumers about the Global South as a site of fair trade production on the one hand (Lyon, 2006), and about fair trade as a measure to empower Southern producers on the other (Wheeler, 2012a). Thus, solidarity was articulated through bringing together elements such as quasi-geographical knowledge and organisational activities to legitimate the need for action and fair trade as a specific response. In this configuration, solidarity as a morality of cooperation enveloped Southern producers and the fair trade movement in an attempt to convince consumers to join in the legitimate effort.

Typically, the information about the Global South as a site of production revolved around crops sourced by Pizca del Mundo as well as the conditions of their cultivation: 'Yirgacheffe coffee is one of the most valued varieties in the world... originating from Ethiopia, the homeland of coffee. Yirgacheffe is cultivated high in the mountains, at an altitude of 1,770 m and 2,200 m above sea level.' Significantly, even when the hardships of manual labour performed at high altitude were addressed, the hands at work remain disembodied due to the passive voice used in these descriptions (see Ramamurthy, 2012; Wright, 2004). Plants, positioned as the grammatical subjects of these sentences, subsumed producers who grew and processed them (Wright, 2004). The emphasis on crops and production processes unfamiliar to the Global North positioned the South as a cognitively knowable quasi-geographical category. The people who populated this agricultural space were only implicated, represented by 'omission' (van Dijk, 1993), without engaging more emotional and moral elements.

The posts about fair trade as an efficient framework of empowering Southern producers and about the role of Pizca del Mundo as legitimate actors within this framework featured prominently on the Facebook page and were rather nuanced. Within this theme, the firm shared not only content prepared by various fair trade associations, but also own commonsensical

‘exegeses’ of the presented information, such as the following translation of the formal definition of fair trade into everyday language:

It is often said that FT is a social movement, something that each of us does (or does not) contribute to. [According to] another mental short cut, FT is an obligation, our obligation to treat fairly those who, in some way, work for us. In our opinion it can be expressed even more simply: FAIR TRADE IS TRADE, EXCEPT FAIR. (Pizca del Mundo, 18 August 2013)

As part of the introduction to, and legitimisation of, fair trade, Pizca del Mundo often praised the achievements of the system. A post that I have already mentioned earlier especially stood out from the collection of the standardised images testifying to the benefits of fair trade: the photo of an industrial hall owned by a Peruvian cooperative that housed huge coffee processing machines. The caption explained that ‘[t]hanks to the purchase of new machines (partly financed by the Fairtrade premium), the productivity of the processing plant has grown by 500 per cent’. In such posts the impact of fair trade appeared to be more tangible, thereby laying the foundations of trust in the movement (see Vestergaard, 2014; Wheeler, 2012a).

All in all, Pizca del Mundo attempted to equip consumers with sufficient knowledge to understand fair trade, its aims and principles. The firm assumed the part of an active promoter of fair trade through organising and advertising various initiatives whose aim was to popularise the scheme, such as movie screenings, Fairtrade schools and meetings with producer representatives. By presenting fair trade as the concerted effort of many institutional and individual agents cooperating in solidarity with producers, rather than a lonely quest of the firm, Pizca del Mundo highlighted the collective character of the movement.

### ***Solidarity as affinity***

The articulation of solidarity as affinity was aimed at establishing mediated familiarity between producers and consumers. It was conveyed through the representations of Southern producers, both visual and textual. This articulation ‘shortened the distance’ between producers and consumers in order to establish the – necessarily unidirectional and symbolic – affective links of empathy that precede ethics and cooperation (see Goodman, 2004; Lyon, 2006; Wright, 2004)<sup>83</sup>. Thus, the familiarity with, and agency of, producers as people ‘like us’ were introduced through three modes of representation to articulate solidarity as an anticipated morality of

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<sup>83</sup> Obviously, there is a good deal of overlap between the analysis of the articulation of solidarity as affinity and the investigation of mediated agency presented in the previous chapter. In fact, the identification of this articulation and its use of the content generated by the producer organisations prompted the more in-depth and more narrowly focused analysis of representations presented earlier.

cooperation based on consumers' identification with producers, *ignorant of their differences* (see Fenton, 2007; Kavada, 2014; Kurasawa, 2004).

In the first mode, Southern producers were represented visually in the photos pre-prepared by various fair trade organisations. Pizca del Mundo often shared the pre-prepared images that conventionally coupled personal testimonies of producers with their representations as humble and grateful peasants (Berlan, 2008; Lekakis, 2013; Varul, 2008; Wheeler, 2012a; Wright, 2004). Such imagery was encapsulated in the photo of a Colombian coffee farm worker, whose contentment was conveyed through laughter lines and the dynamics of his gestures. To make the reason for his happiness unambiguous, he sported a pink shirt, a cap and a badge with the Fair Trade Certified logo<sup>84</sup>. The testimony written into the photo read: 'I want people who drink our coffee to know that hard-working, but grateful farm workers were behind the cup of coffee they are enjoying'. As discussed earlier, such portrayals invited the romantic commodification of producers, which could, through the sentimental idea of aiding vulnerable others in faraway places, potentially incentivise consumers to act towards economic justice, albeit for reasons more self-centred than solidarity (Varul, 2008).

The second mode represented Southern producers textually. Such representations usually assimilated producers into the already familiar framework of work-related agency (see Dolan, 2008). The assimilation was particularly evident in the post that emphasised that 'fair trade is not charity', and that it rejected 'the vision of a benevolent white helping poor, hungry children in Africa' (see Dolan, 2008). The brand proposed that the view of beneficiaries as 'weepers' be corrected by the 'understanding that they are exactly the same as we are' and share our desires to 'live, work, love, study'. Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter, Pizca del Mundo shifted the portrayal of Southern producers from helpless victims dependent on charitable aid to the image of active agents who 'do not care about our mercy or gesture of goodwill', but 'want to make a living through their work, not alms' (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008). The objective of such posts had to do with laying the foundations for affective identification with producers.

Thirdly, the narrative agency afforded producers also served to encourage identification, despite Pizca del Mundo retaining the formal and ultimate control over the representations of Southern producers through content curation. This mainly concerned the photos of coffee plants and coffee fields, occasionally accompanied by information on the unfortunate spread of 'coffee rust', a fungus destroying the plants. Importantly, by discussing the predicament of producers as resulting from the adversities of nature, Pizca del Mundo made the case for solidarity without alienating consumers. In other words, consumers were not implicated as potential contributors to the hardships in the Global South. Moreover, the reposted updates about the technological development of the cooperative allowed consumers to revisit

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<sup>84</sup> Fair Trade Certified is a label managed by Fair Trade USA (see Section 2.3).

their possible preconceptions about Southern farming as crude and inefficient. Finally, by sharing personal content about the producers, such as photos of Christmas celebrations, Pizca del Mundo represented farmers as they saw themselves. Consequently, solidarity was articulated as emerging from the recognisable similarities and the agency of the producers (Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Goodman, 2004; Orgad and Seu, 2014b).

### ***Solidarity as lifestyle***

The articulation of solidarity as lifestyle suggested the actions that consumers could undertake to enact solidarity in the marketplace. As a result, solidarity – and, by extension, the goal of economic justice towards which this morality of cooperation is geared – was articulated as achievable through individual lifestyles and consumption practices (see Arce, 2009). At the heart of the articulation of solidarity as lifestyle is the idea that although lifestyles are routinised sets of habits and practices of everyday life adopted to fulfil utilitarian needs as well as to express self-identity, they are reflexive and open to change (Giddens, 1991: 81; Lury, 2011). Thus, Pizca del Mundo addressed consumers and encouraged them to cooperate with producers through purchasing ethical products (see Barnett et al., 2005a; Linton et al., 2004). Importantly, however, this articulation was by far the least common of the three, tentatively putting the relevance of the ‘mainstreamed’ modes of fair trade communication under question.

Consumption was envisaged as a viable way to support Southern producers in the image pre-prepared by the Polish Fairtrade Coalition that Pizca del Mundo shared on their Facebook page. The photo of a smiling black woman served as the background for the slogan, which urged consumers to ‘Be fair, buy fair, because your money shapes the world... and makes people smile more often!’ The work of this image was twofold. Verbally, it called for ‘voting with one’s pocket’ (Wheeler, 2012a). Visually, it offered an immediate gratification for doing so: the (grateful) smile of a racialised beneficiary (see Lekakis, 2013; Ramamurthy, 2012; Wheeler, 2012a).

A different post outlined the significance of every purchasing decision as a step towards permanently changing one’s lifestyle and, ultimately, the world: ‘It’s simple. Our every choice is meaningful. None of them will save the world, each of them changes the world. Every day we make tens of consumer choices. How about deciding differently once a day, once a week?’ While encouraging consumers to adopt fair trade as a part of their lifestyle, Pizca del Mundo themselves assumed, as discussed before, a more active and versatile role in the movement. In contrast to fair trade consumers to whom the pleasures of consumption were offered as a primary motivation and a model for enacting the morality of cooperation (see Soper, 2009), Pizca del Mundo asserted themselves as an actor committed to shaping and enlarging the fair trade movement in Poland. Thus, solidarity was articulated as a lifestyle option for consumers, whereas for the company it was the life and business ethos.

## **BRANDED SOLIDARITY AND FAIR TRADE MARKET-MAKING IN POLAND**

Fair trade brands mediate between consumers and moral causes through the provision of ethical products and via the articulation of ‘the contexts of consumer choice’ (Barnett et al., 2005a: 34; Linton et al., 2004). Therefore, the importance of Pizca del Mundo’s communication resides in the capacity to create a sense of solidarity among Northern consumers with the underprivileged producers from the Global South. In this study, I identified three articulations of solidarity.

Firstly, the articulation of solidarity as legitimation provided the rationale for fair trade as a morality of cooperation. It made the case based on the seemingly impartial accounts of the Global South as the site of production that had already been, and could continue to be, positively affected by fair trade (see Wheeler, 2012a). Consequently, it was also the only articulation of solidarity as already existing and operational – linking together Southern producers and fair trade organisations – and not merely anticipatory. In doing so, Pizca del Mundo positioned themselves as a trustworthy and effective actor in the movement. This articulation presented solidarity in its rational, cognitive aspect as enacted by fair trade organisations. As such, it shared some characteristics with the legitimation strategies of humanitarian organisations: in concentrating on rational justifications and striving for impartial accounts it corresponded to ‘legitimation by accountancy’, and in representing Pizca del Mundo as an active actor in the fair trade movement it paralleled ‘legitimation by institutionalisation’ (Vestergaard, 2014).

Secondly, articulated as affinity, solidarity centred on Southern producers as being party to the morality of cooperation through deploying their representations as active agents. This articulation resonated with the embodiment of fair trade as the ‘political ecological imaginary’ that provided a ‘thick description’ of the producers’ lives and realities (Goodman, 2010: 111). Furthermore, through the introduction of ‘personalised’ producers whose agency was emphasised, this articulation matched the style of positive humanitarian appeals identified by Chouliaraki (2013b).

Thirdly, the articulation of solidarity as lifestyle proposed concrete actions to be undertaken by Northern consumers to demonstrate solidarity with Southern producers. As such, it directly addressed consumers as potential participants in the morality of cooperation, encouraged to contribute in certain (limited) ways. In presenting economic justice as achievable through everyday purchasing decisions and related corrections in the lifestyles of individual consumers (Goodman, 2010), solidarity as lifestyle can be seen as a kind of post-cause solidarity, ingrained in the fabric of everyday life (see Chouliaraki, 2013b). Such a framing belonged to the genre of ‘lifestyle politics’ in that it built social and political significance around individual lifestyle values. In line with Bennett’s (2004: 102) proposition, this articulation of solidarity embraced a ‘lifestyle vocabulary’ revolving around consumer choice and responsibility to effectively articulate messages about global justice. In its

veiled moral character, this articulation might resonate with modern consumers, suspicious of openly moral appeals to solidarity (Chouliaraki, 2013b).

In what follows, I zoom out from the close reading of the material and try to situate the identified articulations of solidarity within the context of the Polish fair trade market. As I mentioned above, the prevalence of the articulations of solidarity as legitimation and affinity over the articulations of solidarity as lifestyle is enormous. In this, *Pizca del Mundo* differs from the brands operating in the more developed fair trade markets such as the UK (Polynczuk-Alenius and Pantti, 2017; see also Doherty et al., 2012; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Varul, 2009). Arguably, these differences can be attributed to two distinctive means of market-making: (1) awareness raising and (2) marketing strategies. While it is clear that fair trade brands as proponents of market-based economic justice must create a market to achieve their goal and provide the maximum financial benefit for Southern producers (Linton et al., 2004), the market-making has a very specific meaning for *Pizca del Mundo*. In the context of a nascent Polish fair trade market, they must first raise awareness of the injustices embedded in global trade and present consumers with products designed to address the issue (Barnett et al., 2005a; Linton et al., 2004). The time for self-promotion geared towards an incremental increase in sales of its fair trade products – as opposed to non-fair trade alternatives – is yet to come.

This strategy of market-making can be convincingly attributed to the context of the national fair trade market in which *Pizca del Mundo* operate. Having only a limited market at their disposal, the firm work within the ‘social economy value chain’ (Doherty et al., 2012), mainly distributing products through alternative channels, such as Internet stores and small shops supplying organic produce, with the aim of gaining consumer support to build and sustain strong relationships with Southern producers empowered through participation in the fair trade system (see Nicholls and Opal, 2005). Given the low level of mainstreaming, *Pizca del Mundo* need to compete neither with other fair trade brands nor with corporate retail actors who supply cheaper own-label fair trade products, potentially of a lower ethical standard (see Barrientos and Smith, 2007b). Thus, as of now, *Pizca del Mundo* escape the risks posed by the mainstreaming. Understood as reliance on supermarkets as a channel of distribution and cannibalistic competition between different fair trade products, mainstreaming is often viewed as potentially damaging to the reputation of fair trade (distribution through outlets whose ethical standing is often questionable) as well as detrimental to the ethics of solidarity, which might become subordinate to the commercial imperative of increasing sales (see Barrientos and Smith, 2007b; Varul, 2009).

Yet, it is important to stress here that *Pizca del Mundo* did not themselves overemphasise the tension between marketing tactics and the ethical underpinnings of fair trade. Comparing the fair trade movement in Britain with its German counterpart, Varul (2009: 188) states that ‘while British

fairtrade ethics may be under threat from an overcommercialization, German fairtrade ethics seem to suffer from undercommercialization'. By this he is referring, *inter alia*, to the fact that for British fair trade organisations there is no mismatch between ethical principles of fair trade and commercial imperatives. For German counterparts, on the other hand, staying true to the fair trade ethos demands that the commercial aspect of their operations is subordinate to the educational and development mission. During the interview, Aga positioned their approach 'midway' between German and British approaches with a slight inclination towards the latter. In more detail, she conceptualised the marketing strategy of Pizca del Mundo as 'using what is important in the German version, that is, the connection with producers, with [an explicit message] that these products need to be sold in order for them [the producers] to receive money'.

## CONCLUSION

I approached solidarity as a communication problem, i.e., as a morality of cooperation that Pizca del Mundo had to construct through their communication (see Chouliaraki, 2013b). Through the analysis of Pizca del Mundo's Facebook page, I identified three different articulations of solidarity in the context of fair trade: solidarity as legitimation, solidarity as affinity and solidarity as lifestyle. My main argument is that those articulations and their specific 'frequencies', lifestyle being by far the least common, can be attributed to the context of the Polish fair trade market. By primarily focusing on solidarity as legitimation and solidarity as affinity, Pizca del Mundo positioned themselves as consumer educators and actors active in introducing fair trade to Poland where the mainstream fair trade market is non-existent. Interestingly, these articulations concentrate on Southern producers and fair trade organisations, in particular Pizca del Mundo, as parties already participating in the morality of cooperation. Simultaneously, the role of consumers in solidary relationships is downplayed, anticipatory and limited to their capacity to purchase fair trade products. Thus, the epithet 'branded' aptly describes the understanding that Pizca del Mundo puts forth of solidarity as a relationship involving primarily Southern producers and fair trade organisations. I will return to this thread in the following section.

Based on the performative vision of communication (e.g., Carey, 2008), the way solidarity is articulated has consequences for the nature of this commitment. While the content that articulates solidarity as legitimation and affinity provides rational and cognitive resources for understanding fair trade and its role in advancing economic justice for already familiar producers, solidarity as lifestyle mobilises instant and short-term activities oriented towards the pleasures of consumption (see Chouliaraki, 2013b). In other words, the conflation of solidarity with lifestyle establishes consumption as a new form of agency, which challenges the traditional vision of solidarity that calls for sustained commitment to the cause. Instead, it proposes 'the

pleasures of the self as a more effective way of making a difference to distant others' (Chouliaraki, 2013b: 75). Thus, in fact, only the articulations of solidarity as legitimation and affinity serve to generate sustained commitment towards underprivileged producers as distant others (see Chouliaraki, 2006; Rantanen, 2004; Robertson, 2010; Silverstone, 2007; Tomlinson, 2011).

#### **5.4 DIALECTICS OF CARE IN CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF COMMUNICATION**

To reiterate, from the point of view of this research, the key aim of ethical trade is to reclaim trade as a mediated relationship between people, and not as an exchange between money and purchasable goods. Against the background of global commodity chains in which human labour figures only as an 'inanimate' aspect of production (Smith, 1998: 20), this reconceptualisation of trade would reincorporate the moral obligations that normally govern human relations (Hudson and Hudson, 2003; see also Fisher, 2007; Lyon, 2006; McEwan et al., 2017; Moberg and Lyon, 2010; Ramamurthy, 2012; Varul, 2008; Wright, 2004). Thus, ethical trade recognises the shortcomings of the North-South trade, which, predicated on the imperative of satisfying Northern consumers' perceived need for the lowest possible prices, drives Southern producers into ever-deeper poverty (see Miller, 2003). In response, ethical trade strives to incorporate into global trade a concern for the rights and needs of Southern producers as distant strangers, located beyond the realm of the personal, experienced and directly knowable (Corbridge, 1993). Such concern is captured in the concept of care understood as a genuine ethical and emotional concern for others (Smith, 1998; cf. Silk, 1998, 2000).

Theoretically drawing on Daniel Miller's (2001a) 'dialectics of shopping', I analyse the 'dialectics of care' in communicating fair trade. In Miller's opinion, care on the global scale advocated by fair trade is irreconcilable and incompatible with care on the micro-scale of the family. In other words, his diagnosis is that the dialectics of shopping can reach no resolution. Being more of an optimist myself, I will try to identify what *Pizca del Mundo* propose as a common ground on which consumers can reconcile their own interests and the interest of their family members with the interests of distant producers. In short, I intend to look at care as dialectics that reconfigures the relationship between the two. To do so, I pose two questions: (1) How do *Pizca del Mundo* negotiate between the interests of Southern producers and Polish consumers?; and (2) What constellation of relationships do they chart among themselves, Southern producers and the Polish society? Empirically, I focus on an interview conducted with Aga on 18 December 2015.



## TEETERING BETWEEN QUALITY AND CARE

For Pizca del Mundo, the dialectics of care expressed the ongoing negotiation between care for the self and/or family, and care for Southern producers as distant strangers. In this rendition, care for oneself and one's close ones was manifest in the strong emphasis on product quality, a discourse familiar to fair trade marketing (Levi and Linton, 2003; Low and Davenport, 2005a; Nicholls, 2002). Care for distant strangers, in turn, strongly departed from charity and was instead firmly situated in the business context of '[fair trade] as trade based on the fact that somebody produces and others buy... Not on a principle that somebody is better, somebody is worse, somebody is poorer, wealthier, whatever'. Thus, care was articulated as an inherent component of a just trading relationship between equal partners, not as benevolence extended towards objectified victims passively awaiting help and salvation (see Goodman, 2010).

Care was also described both as emanating from within the actors involved in fair trade, and as embedded in, and extended through, the certification schemes. That is, for Pizca del Mundo engagement in fair trade was at first neither conscious nor tied to any organised system. Rather, it was born out of their travelling experience, and the resulting familiarity with producers, as an intuitive approach ignorant of formal structures: 'When we were doing [fair trade] intuitively, we knew that it was something we wanted to do... But we did not know that somebody had named it already, that there were any functional solutions'. This point was reiterated in a short video that Fairtrade Polska produced about Pizca del Mundo as an example of a good business practice for a pan-European project on solidarity economy (see Section 1.3). In the clip, Aga conveyed it as follows:

Pizca del Mundo had begun long before we started our business. Pizca del Mundo and our involvement in fair trade had also started off before we even heard of fair trade. We were doing it already before, but we didn't know what it was called. We felt it intuitively. We knew this was the path we wanted to follow, but we didn't know someone had once named it 'fair trade'<sup>85</sup>.

Aga's lines were followed by Borys's point about the significance of fair trade certifications for Pizca del Mundo: 'We found out that fair trade was well known in Western countries and we decided to look into it. It's not the certificate or the logo that matters to us. What is important is that the certificate confirms what we are trying to achieve'. Indeed, with the growing network of trading partnerships with Southern suppliers, not all of which can be personal and intimate, Pizca del Mundo benefitted from the guarantee of 'institutionalised' care provided by formal certification schemes. In other words, according to Pizca del Mundo, fair trade labels testified – at least for

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<sup>85</sup> The video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZaUi8f2VKo> (accessed 22 February 2017).

the most part, given Borys's own research – to the fact that producer organisations adhered to the fair trade principles, thereby serving as institutionalised extensions of care (see Adams and Raisborough, 2011).

As mentioned above, the consumer demand for fair trade products in Poland is very low, and Pizca del Mundo are acutely aware of this. Hence, their primary strategy was to attract consumers from the growing 'speciality coffee' segment who might buy fair trade as a corollary of their interest in premium quality products (see Radziukiewicz, 2013):

I think that if someone chooses the products that we sell, it is because: (a) they are good quality, (b) they are organic, maybe (c) they are fair trade, and maybe even because they are pretty.... Certainly, [fair trade] is not the main criterion. (Interview, 18 December 2015)

In the pursuit of quality, the firm nevertheless pragmatically assessed the taste preferences and financial capacities of Polish consumers who still valued affordability more than superior quality (see Bołtomiuk, 2009; Radziukiewicz, 2013; Szubska-Włodarczyk and Paszko, 2012). Thus, the consumer attitude lagged behind the approach of fair trade coffee farmers for whom ever-higher quality was a primary ambition: 'The cooperatives very often use fair trade premium to hire engineers, technicians graduated from... agricultural schools or universities'. The fair trade scheme allowed Pizca del Mundo to buy products from those cooperative members whose coffee matched their expectations – dictated as they were by the preferences of the Polish consumers – best, without compromising the financial gain of other farmers.

Thus, a limit to quality was marked by the financial security and well-being of Southern producers to which Pizca del Mundo aimed to contribute. The limitations placed on the pursuit of quality by care for the producers' welfare were particularly palpable in the disregard for direct trade as an alternative to fair trade: 'If the only criterion we care about is that the coffee is very good, then [direct trade] is a neat solution, because you are not tied to a producer whose coffee might turn out worse in a given year'. In contrast to direct trade, one of the cardinal objectives of Pizca del Mundo was to support producers within stable and long-lasting partnerships. Thus, in the case of less successful crop, the provision of fair products takes precedence over the commercial imperative to sell. The potential resultant compromise in quality would, nevertheless, be quite painless insofar as Pizca del Mundo knew that certain deficiencies in quality could be mitigated through, for example, different roasting techniques.

Care for producers was also manifest in the special attentiveness to their most vital needs. Identified as the most essential necessity, the selling of products was communicatively prioritised over the conventional postulate of fair trade communication to 'shorten the distance' and sensitise consumers to the predicament of producers: 'Of course we can organise photo exhibitions, lectures and whatnot. But I know [the producers] *personally*, and they could

not care less whether we organise a meeting here, because they want to sell products.’ Hence, Pizca del Mundo cared for and attended to the conscious needs of known producers as business subjects, rather than to an unacknowledged need of anonymous Polish consumers to be educated and moralised (see Boenning, 2009; Koszewska, 2011; Kronenberg, 2010; Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014).

Even though care for producers was so deeply ingrained in the mission and everyday workings of Pizca del Mundo, it might also have limits that have not yet been reached or charted. Indeed, the uncompromised approach to the fair trade ethos has profound implications for the financial security of the firm. Hence, a slightly different dialectics of care was also present in Pizca del Mundo’s own business operations: while care for distant others placed a limit on the pursuit of quality, care for close ones – two home-schooled sons financially dependent on their parents – might place a hypothetical cap on care for Southern producers.

## **CHARTING OPPOSITIONS AND ALLIANCES**

In what follows, I will map out relationships and identities that Aga constructs in the dialectics of care that guides Pizca del Mundo’s communication. If the dialectics of care is regarded as a representation of fair trade, then underpinning it is a set of subject positions situated in relation to one another (see Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 278). Two relations that I consider particularly helpful can be provisionally termed ‘alliance’ and ‘opposition’. In the context of ethical trade, alliances are established through the ‘logic of equivalence’ whereby different identities are discursively brought together in a caring relationship (see Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008; Howarth, 1998). Forming such alliances, however, always involves the emergence of a different, negative identity (Torfing, 1999). Thus, the creation of a caring alliance entails the construction of an uncaring opposition.

The dialectics of care deployed by Pizca del Mundo clearly positioned the firm as a primary subject invested in caring for Southern producers (for similar findings in Hungarian fair trade organisations see Dombos, 2008). Care emanated from their moral commitment and was embedded in their fair trade work, which – similarly to the articulation of solidarity as legitimation discussed earlier – situated Pizca del Mundo in a close emotional and operational alliance with producers. The degree to which care for producers was personalised varied, depending on whether the relationship involved embodied knowledge of a cooperative or was mediated through certificates issued by fair trade labelling organisations. In any case, caring for the welfare of producers was materialised in the form of the fair prices they received from the company.

Pizca del Mundo performed care work in a more or less tight alliance with other Polish organisations. This alliance was characterised by the willingness of the organisations to compromise and, to an extent, overcome their

ideological differences in the name of their common objective. To illustrate the workings of this alliance, Aga described the setting up of the Fairtrade Coalition in 2009 in the following way: 'I found it very curious that devoted Catholics sat at the same table with leftist anarchists. And they were able to communicate somehow, but in the end, they did not reach an agreement... At the moment, however, we are cooperating.' The operations of the alliance were complemented by the presence on the Polish market of distributors and retailers of organic and premium products, some of which might also carry a fair trade certificate. The existence of such 'accidental' actors, not invested in the ideal of fair trade, allowed the firm to reaffirm its identity as a caring and ethical subject:

Maybe it is [about] different priorities, I do not know. I am under the impression that there is a world of these organisations and firms which are engaged in fair trade because it is ethically important to them. When it comes to selling, however, there are also companies primarily concerned with selling organic products who only incidentally sell fair trade products. Or they simply sell premium quality goods, and fair trade products only incidentally. (Interview, 18 December 2015)

Generally, the Polish fair trade market was described as being composed primarily of caring organisations, secondarily of 'accidental' sellers and thirdly of a rather random group of unintentional consumers interested solely in high-quality products. Through such a strong emphasis on their concern with quality and simultaneous downplaying of other possible motivations consumers were conceptualised as being indifferent to the predicament of Southern producers. Thus, the firm assigned to consumers an identity that was antithetical to their own caring identity (see Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008: 10), and excluded them from the fair trade 'caringscape' (see Raghuram et al., 2009).

In fact, it seemed to Pizca del Mundo that the only way to trigger consumers' interest in fair trade and in the predicament of Southern producers was through tactical 'trickery'. In other words, these issues had to be interwoven into topics that consumers were likely to see as more exciting (see Touri, 2016):

We conduct workshops about fair trade, but we have noticed that it is not a very sexy topic... Even when we talk about the [negative social] effects of our consumption, at the same time we tell people how chocolate is produced, and it might be interesting to them. Maybe even more interesting than the effects of consumption. (Interview, 18 December 2015)

This was a kind of pragmatic, marketing thinking, which also inspired the discourse of quality (see Nicholls, 2002). Given the competing interests of fair trade producers, i.e., the financial security partially guaranteed by a fair price, and of consumers who desired to pay the lowest possible price (Levi and Linton, 2003; Miller, 2003), quality appeared to be the only middle ground

where these hardly reconcilable stakes could be negotiated. To be specific, growing high-quality crops helped producers to secure demand for their products and sell them at a higher price, while premium quality potentially appealed to rational consumers as a compensation for a higher retail price. Hence, the appreciation of quality appeared to be a ‘common ground’ upon which an agonistic relationship between producers and consumers could potentially be built: even though their conflicting goals could never be fully reconciled, they were both recognised as legitimate (see Mouffe, 2005: 20). It is in this context that Aga conceptualised the role of Pizca del Mundo as a caring intermediary seeking to improve and secure the well-being of producers with whom they maintained strong personal ties<sup>86</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

I inquired how Pizca del Mundo negotiated care for Southern producers as distant strangers in the conceptualisations that underpinned their communication. Empirically, I conducted discourse-theoretical analysis of the unstructured, in-depth interview with the firm’s founder. Firstly, I discovered that Pizca del Mundo embedded care for Southern producers into the discourse of product quality. Secondly, I looked at this articulation of the dialectics of care through the prism of political identity theory entrenched in the discourse theory (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008). In doing so, I learnt that Pizca del Mundo positioned themselves as caring for and operating in alliance with Southern producers in order to establish product quality as a common ground on which the conflicting interests of producers and consumers could be legitimised and negotiated. As a result, consumers were presented as the opposition, excluded from participating in a ‘caringscape’ of fair trade. By conceptualising producers and consumers as inherently antagonistic parties, Pizca del Mundo precluded the possibility of the emergence of ‘radical democratic politics’ (Carpentier and Spinoy, 2008: 11–13). Had they imagined the chain of equivalence between Southern producers and Polish society, a common struggle could have been established against the oppression of global trade (see Polynczuk-Alenius, forthcoming; see also Brown, 1960: 49).

By way of conclusion, I will link these results to the subject position that Pizca del Mundo envisaged for an individual consumer. Dealing primarily with trade and sales, Pizca del Mundo treated the Polish public solely as a collection of self-interested individuals whose purchasing decisions were aimed at

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<sup>86</sup> Such strong ties are virtually absent from the relationship with individual consumers, most of whom are anonymous online shoppers or accidental participants in Pizca del Mundo’s workshops. The only exceptions are the ‘institutional’ customers, e.g. shops or cafés, that Pizca del Mundo supplies on a regular basis.

maximising the benefit for oneself and one's family<sup>87</sup>. As buying more expensive fair trade products was perceived as not being sufficiently justified by ethical reasons alone, consumers needed to be 'tricked' into supporting Southern producers through harmonising their gain with the benefit of producers. The firm regarded superior quality of products as a feature appealing to price-sensitive and self-concerned consumers (see Levi and Linton, 2003). Thus, the self-fulfilling prophecy of individualistic, but rational, consumers unintentionally contributing to the collective good would be realised (see Johnston, 2001; Slater, 1997). In short, consumers were envisaged as individuals pursuing their own private interests and indifferent to the predicament of producers, and hence currently incapable of caring for the plight of Southern producers (see Barnett and Land, 2007).

A similar view of fair trade activists heroically struggling against the parochialism and self-centrism of the society was previously identified in Hungary (Dombos, 2008). While in the Hungarian case the ethical trade movement was constantly haunted by the spectre of the 'West' as an ideal to pursue and long for, the interview with Aga was devoid of any such references<sup>88</sup>. However, I maintain that the discrepancy between the apparent 'Western' optimism and the Polish scepticism towards the possibility of selfless consumer support results from the deeply internalised image of the Polish society as being immature and still in 'transition' into a truly developed, caring society capable of looking beyond selfish, individual and parochial interests (see Dombos, 2008; Grzymski, 2010). I will return to this observation later.

## **5.5 THE FAIR TRADE LANDSCAPE IN PIZCA DEL MUNDO'S COMMUNICATION**

What we have so far in Pizca del Mundo's communication is a fair trade landscape in which Southern producers and commercial as well as non-governmental fair trade organisations, in particular the firm themselves, loomed as key figures. In this constellation, producers were represented as active agents who worked hard to sustain their living through participation in the global marketplace (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008; Luetchford, 2008). The fair trade system casts them as the masters of their own destiny who purposefully invest financial premium in the development of their communities (see Dolan, 2008; Tallontire, 2009). At the same time, the

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<sup>87</sup> This finding coincides with the trajectory of consumer activism in Poland that I discussed in Section 3.4, whereby the well-being of one's family was prioritised over the benefit of the (other members of) society. I will return to that thread in Chapter 7.

<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Pizca del Mundo's global education workshops in which I participated during my visit were designed precisely to show the students that Poland belonged much more closely to the 'West', particularly financially, than commonly held.

agency of producers and their current material deprivation were situated in the context of the structures of global trade (see Brown, 2007; Johnston, 2001; Raghuram et al., 2009; Smith, 2016). Making use of the interactive features of Facebook, most notably sharing, Pizca del Mundo represented producers as acting, looking and – to an extent – speaking agents whose experiences and opinions mattered. Such empowered producers were envisioned to cooperate with fair trade organisations. Placed in a solidary and caring relationship with producers, Pizca del Mundo appeared as a legitimate, trustworthy and effective actor in the nascent fair trade movement in Poland. As a result, Pizca del Mundo's conceptualisation of fair trade as a collective heroic struggle of producers and fair trade organisations against the oppressive structures of global trade left surprisingly little room for consumers as potential partners in the fair trade project. In the project that, to reiterate, is conventionally defined by the reliance on consumer support: 'Fairtrade is an alternative approach to conventional trade and is based on a partnership between producers and consumers' (Fairtrade International, 2011).

Indeed, as we have seen, Pizca del Mundo constructs for consumers a very specific and narrow subject position. It is worth recalling here the two major responsibilities that fair trade brands have towards consumers: (1) the provision of ethical products, and (2) the provision of information about the context of their buying decisions (Barnett et al., 2005a; Linton et al., 2004). With regard to the first obligation, the rare instances of articulation of solidarity as lifestyle encouraged consumers to enter into cooperation with producers through purchasing ethical products. 'Voting with their pockets' and, therefore, investing money into the responsible businesses of Pizca del Mundo was the only option presented to consumers for acting on the predicament of Southern producers (see Wheeler, 2012a). Other than that, consumers were to merely sit back and watch the firm act on their fully fledged ethical commitment to economic justice. Thus, for consumers, fair trade was projected in terms of pleasures derived from 'alternative' consumption (see Soper, 2009). These pleasures, in turn, were envisioned as emanating from the high quality of the product. Thus, Pizca del Mundo's communication addressed consumers as price-sensitive and family-oriented individuals who only unintentionally contributed to securing a fair remuneration for the hard-working producers (see Slater, 1997). This conceptualisation is at odds with the academic literature, which typically theorises the pleasures of consuming fair trade, at least partly, in terms of constituting oneself as an ethical subject who supports the unfortunate faraway producers (Goodman, 2010: 105; see also Ahmed, 2000: 169; Berlan, 2008; Soper, 2009; Varul, 2008).

As regards their responsibility to educate consumers, Pizca del Mundo invested a lot of time and effort into fulfilling this obligation, both on Facebook and offline. Nonetheless, they were somewhat sceptical about the efficiency of such an undertaking. For example, they operated on the assumption that consumers – given their lack of time, resources and family orientation – had to be 'tricked into' taking an interest in the situation of Southern producers

and in fair trade as a measure to act against their oppression. Thus, Pizca del Mundo's communication made most sense from the position of a casual, perhaps slightly voyeuristic, consumer interested in sensory pleasures delivered by quality products, and not from the point of view of a politically engaged citizen. Borys neatly summarised this discussion in tFairtrade Polska's video:

Fair trade products do sell in Poland but not because they are fair trade. That is, we sell them as such as a result of our own decision. But customers have only now started asking us about that. The idea is developing and in recent years it has grown quite a lot, but it is still a niche. We sell our products and our business grows because the product is good. Because if we manage to convince someone to try it, they usually like it and stick to that product. They agree to pay a little more for a product that is ecological, which is also important to us, and a product that is a fair trade product. However, quality is the biggest factor and this is what consumers seek<sup>89</sup>.

The figure of citizen-consumer familiar from fair trade discourses (Wheeler, 2012a, 2012b: 15; see also Banaji and Buckingham, 2009; Clarke et al., 2007a, b; Doherty et al., 2012; Johnston, 2008; Lekakis, 2013; Scammell, 2000; Wheeler, 2012a) was, then, absent from Pizca del Mundo's communication.

As the above analysis made clear, my investigation of Pizca del Mundo was not very much concerned with studying the reception of the firm's communication among the Polish public. Yet, it is worth bearing in mind that Pizca del Mundo's unfavourable picture of consumers might be rooted in an experience of problematic reception of fair trade communication in Polish society (see Balsiger, 2010; Clarke et al., 2007a). I tentatively contend that this problematic reception has to do with the inability of Poles to adequately assess their currently rather privileged position in the world, both financially and socially. Although a singular ethnographic observation clearly escapes generalisation, I will try to illustrate this claim using empirical material collected during a short ethnographic fieldwork.

As a part of my fieldwork with the firm, I participated in four global education workshops that Pizca del Mundo conducted with middle-schoolers, aged 13 to 16. The workshops were a part of a larger educational programme about responsible consumption and were aimed at illuminating the impact of *our* consumption habits on the people in the Global South. As Aga explained, the purpose of the workshops was different from the usual objectives of their communication in that they were fully divorced from the context of selling products. Instead, the workshops relocated trade into the realm of global education: 'The aim [of the workshop] was to make [the pupils] aware that we [in Poland] are not in the back of beyond, the poorest in the world'.

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<sup>89</sup> The video is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZaUi8f2VKo> (accessed 22 February 2017).



Each of the four workshops in which I participated was composed of two or three – out of the repertoire of four – exercises geared towards educating students about different aspects of global trade. In the first exercise, the pupils were supposed to determine whether the products displayed by the facilitators, all of which were readily available in Polish shops, were produced by Polish companies or not. The purpose was to demonstrate the near-hegemony on the global food market of a handful of transnational corporations, such as Nestlé, Unilever and Mondelez. In the second exercise, students were asked to guess where many of their everyday products, e.g., tea and chocolate, originated from and, subsequently, to identify these countries on the world map. Here the aim was to show the interconnections and interdependencies in contemporary global commodity chains. The third exercise, explicitly connected to the goal of the workshops as articulated above by Aga, revolved around the differences in wealth across the world. Most tangibly, pupils used golden beads to fill glass containers in such a way that the number of beads in each container visually represented the wealth of an average Ghanaian, Polish and American family as well as of Bill Gates. The fourth exercise, which was included in all four workshops, introduced the students to the workings of the production chain of chocolate. Following the presentation that outlined the workload and tasks performed by each link in the commodity chain of cocoa, the students were asked to divide a chocolate bar, taken to symbolise the retail price of the final product, to represent fair compensation for each party based on their input into the production process.

It seemed that the students found the exercise about the global wealth inequality the most problematic and puzzling. That is, as much as they did not face major difficulties in estimating the wealth of the Ghanaian and American families – or of Bill Gates for that matter – they were unable to accurately situate the Polish family between the two, routinely underestimating their financial standing. Similarly, when asked about the position of Poland as a country in the world in terms of wealth, the pupils tended to situate it in the bottom half<sup>90</sup>. According to Pizca del Mundo, however, Poland was in the top quarter<sup>91</sup>. I interpret the pupils' puzzlement as a reflection of the common and deep-seated conviction about the underdevelopment of Poland and the poverty corroding the society (see Grzymski, 2010; Zarycki, 2014). This opinion is often founded on the internalised imaginary of Poland as a victim of continuous oppression by powerful neighbours, starting with the 'partitions' of the eighteenth century, through being located at the epicentre of both world wars, to the imposition of communism by the Soviet Union (see Misztal, 2009;

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<sup>90</sup> One out of approximately ten groups participating in the whole project, including the sessions that I did not observe, answered the question correctly.

<sup>91</sup> 'Wealth' was explained as 'income' as well as 'purchasing power parity'. I assume that this referred to the gross domestic product (GDP) adjusted for relative purchasing power parity (PPP). In terms of national GDP at PPP Poland is ranked 24 or 25, depending on the source. In terms of GDP at PPP per capita Poland drops to 45<sup>th</sup>–48<sup>th</sup> position, albeit still preserving its position within the richest quarter.

Sowa, 2011). I will return to this issue in Chapter 7, but for now suffice to say that the distorted self-perception of the Polish society has powerful ramifications for the way fair trade is communicated in Poland and, indeed, for the possibility of it taking root in the society.

## 6 EETTI (PRO ETHICAL TRADE FINLAND)

This chapter, divided into four sections, dissects how Eetti mediates between Southern producers and Finnish consumers. Firstly, it discusses how the idea of ‘shared responsibility’ (Young, 2003, 2004, 2006) figured in moral education carried out by Eetti. Subsequently, the chapter zooms in on the theoretical subject position of citizen-consumer and analyses how Eetti construed this position in their communication. The penultimate section presents two rough portraits of the most committed Eetti Helsinki volunteers and the intricate ways in which they ensconced themselves in the subject position of citizen-consumer furnished for them by Eetti. The final section, in turn, attempts to tie the threads together in the nexus of mediated trade relationships as they figured in Eetti’s communication. Before moving on to the analysis, let us briefly pause at Eetti’s conceptualisation of ethical trade.

In the introductory interview that I conducted on 24 June 2015 and that dealt with the general workings of the organisation, Lotta, the executive director, and Anna H, the local coordinator of the Europe-wide campaigns Clean Clothes Campaign and Change Your Shoes, described Eetti as follows:

Lotta: [E]etti is a grass-roots organisation that promotes fair trade. And maybe at this stage I can add that we speak about fair trade more widely than [the] specific Fairtrade brand as such. We speak about global trade related [the] clothing industry, electronics industry and quite broadly all issues related to global trade.

Anna H: Well, we also do promote responsible consumerism. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

As the only organisation in Finland dealing with the whole constellation of political and structural issues constituting and surrounding global trade, Eetti’s mission is twofold. Firstly, they aim to raise awareness in the Finnish society of the human rights and labour rights violations in the global production of goods available on the Finnish market. This is carried out through global education, participation in a variety of national and European projects and campaigns as well as through the production and dissemination of informational materials for Finnish consumers and companies. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly given the already high awareness of the Finnish society, Eetti hopes to encourage consumers to act on this knowledge.

Eetti’s understanding of trade encapsulates international trade governance as well as all transactions carried out within this framework. With that in mind, Lotta’s definition of ethical trade clearly echoed the scholarly emphasis on its always already political character (see Carrier, 2012; Lewis and Potter, 2011):

When I talk about fair trade I’m also talking about the international rules governing all trade relations. I guess this part of Eetti’s work is maybe not

so... active at the moment, which is true probably for all NGOs working on trade issues, because the WTO [negotiations are] stranded... and there's been an explosion of bilateral trade negotiations. [A]nd it's extremely difficult to even get information about these negotiations and also influenc[ing] them is quite difficult, especially since Finland is not a part in itself in the negotiations, but it's the EU who negotiates trade agreements... Even though we feel it's an important issue, we don't really have the resources needed to follow and influence these discussions... Which means our focus has shifted more towards... corporate social responsibility and responsible consumerism and also [towards] how people as citizens can influence the way Finnish companies work or act in the Global South. So that's why we're talking more about CSR and working conditions nowadays. We also look at CSR as a wider topic, including paying taxes. So we look at like tax havens and also try to influence policymakers to... make sure taxes are paid where they are due. So the actors are both companies and political decision-makers, and also kind of *consumers slash citizens*.... We do speak about consumers and consumer activism, but we also want to underline that we feel that citizens have also the possibility... to influence political decision-making processes. That would be important. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

This lengthy quote signals many critical issues, two of which will be at the heart of the subsequent analysis: the notions of responsibility and 'consumers slash citizens' that underpin Eetti's communication. These emic notions tie back to the theoretical idea of mediation as moral education in that responsibility was an overarching disposition – which also incorporated certain aspects of what I call in this dissertation 'solidarity' and 'care' – proposed as a guideline for all consumption-related practices of 'consumers/citizens'. Thus, I adopt the concept of responsibility as the main theoretical gateway into analysing Eetti's communication as moral education. The etic term 'moral education' appeared in the empirical material as 'global education' (in the context of school visits), and 'information work' or 'awareness raising' (in the context of communicating with adults). In what follows, the etic and emic terminology will be used interchangeably.

## 6.1 RELOCATING RESPONSIBILITY

In this section, I will look at how Eetti articulated responsibility as a mediated moral relationship that encased Southern producers, Northern consumers and the organisation itself, as well as brand corporations and political decision-makers. In doing so, I will examine the conceptualisations of responsibility couched by Eetti's employees in the in-depth interviews as well as the everyday articulations of responsibility in the actual communicative events organised by Eetti. Given the quagmire that lurks behind the notion of responsibility,

there is a need to clearly locate responsibility in relation to both the orthodox envisioning of global trade and a more progressive discourse of ethical consumption. On the one hand, the orthodox vision of global trade has it that the market forces are single-handedly responsible for the arrangement of the processes of production, exchange and consumption (see Allen, 2008; James and Patomäki, 2006; Young, 2006). In that setting, the responsibility of consumers and commercial companies alike is to maximise their own benefit (see Slater, 1997). On the other hand, the common narrative of ethical consumption, which acknowledges the inability of market forces to address the inequalities embedded in global trade, culls from advanced liberalism the idea of individualisation of responsibility, which assigns consumers with the central position in addressing and remedying the problems (e.g., Johnston, 2008; Lekakis, 2013; Maniates, 2002; MacTier, 2008; Thomas, 2009).

In relation to the above, one of the main arguments of this chapter is that Eetti's communication, echoing the broader anti-sweatshop movement analysed by Young (2003), attempted to circumvent the idea of privatised responsibility and instead strove to relocate responsibility within a constellation of actors. The different location of responsibility clearly illustrates the disparity between the usually favoured notion of 'ethical consumption' – carried out through individual choice and private consumption – and my preferred term 'ethical trade', which I consider more cognisant of the structures and processes behind the predicament of Southern producers and workers. Based on this theorisation of responsibility in the context of ethical trade, in what follows I will try to answer the following question: how did Eetti conceptualise and articulate responsibility in their communication?

## **MORALITY BEYOND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MARKET**

[It's] a normal thing that you want to buy things that you can't make yourself. In itself, it's not a bad thing, even if sometimes [in] NGOs when you talk about trade, especially from a developing country's point of view, quite often you focus on negative issues and what's wrong with trade politics. But, of course, trade in itself can be a very good thing for many people. (Lotta, 17 October 2015)

I decided to open the analysis with the above quote, because it clearly showed that Eetti regarded participation in global trade and consumption as a morally neutral and possibly even positive development. In its current incarnation, however, global trade is certainly ridden with the systemic oppression of Southern producers and workers, which must be addressed. According to Eetti, the best way to do that would be for Southern producers themselves – through locally organised trade unions – to negotiate workable solutions with factory owners and, possibly, brand companies that place orders (see Young, 2003). This possibility, however, was unattainable due to the often

unregulated, or simply illegal, status of trade unions in the producing countries and the repression of those who decided to unionise (see Young, 2006). In these circumstances, as Anna H asked, ‘What to do with all of this, who is responsible?’ (17 October 2015). As I discussed earlier, there are two conventional answers to this question: the market alone – effectively dissolving the responsibility (Allen, 2008: 17) – or the individual consumer (see Carvalho, 2005; Lekakis, 2013; MacTier, 2008; Maniates, 2002; Thomas, 2009). In what follows, I will attempt to show that neither of these answers adequately describes Eetti’s vision of ethical trade as a mediated relationship.

On one occasion, I empirically encountered the rather abstract, theoretical argument about the sole responsibility of autonomous market forces. During the annual World Village Festival<sup>92</sup> (*Maailma kylässä*) on 25 May 2015, I was made aware that the ‘almighty’ conception of the market was actually present among Finnish society. One of the visitors to the Eetti stand – which that year concentrated on promoting the Make Chocolate Fair! campaign – argued that fair trade was a misdirected tool. While he claimed to support a ‘fair price’ for Southern producers, in his opinion it could only have been achieved through the unperturbed workings of the market, freed from subsidies, tariffs and any other interventions.

Given the deep-seated conviction about the self-regulatory powers of the market, Eetti often introduced the idea of shared responsibility through the simultaneous denaturalisation of the notion of ‘free’ global trade as independent of human beings. The representation of global trade as a historically produced and politically influenced construct, of the kind that Bowles (1991) talks about, was the focal point of Lotta’s presentation on the ‘essentials of global trade’ in the training session on ‘Global trade, CSR and shoes’<sup>93</sup>:

[W]hy I want to bring in the historical perspective is to say that actually [the global] production chain that we take for granted today has not been around for that long... [W]hat really made a difference [in the organisation of production] was political decisions. We’re still living in the era where free trade and free market is very much emphasised as the only

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<sup>92</sup> The World Village Festival is a free, family-friendly and open-air event that celebrates and provides a window into diverse cultures through music, entertainment and film screenings as well as panel discussions and lectures. It aims to offer space for ‘tolerant multiculturalism, development cooperation, global issues and expanding one’s possibilities for affecting everyday life’ (see <http://www.maailmakylassa.fi/english/info>). The festival is one of the most important outreach events in Eetti’s annual calendar. Apart from their own stall that displays the main ongoing campaign and provides general information about the organisation, Eetti also runs a Fairtrade Café, which is one of their core fund-raising activities.

<sup>93</sup> During my fieldwork, the most important outright educational event open to the general public was the ‘Global trade, CSR and shoes’ training in which the foundations of global trade, such as Ricardo’s theory of comparative advantage, were revealed and expounded. The training took place on 17 October 2015.

way to have prosperity and economic growth, both in the Western world and in the Global South... [E]ven if you can hear a lot of nice talk about free trade and how wonderful it is for everyone, maybe if you take one thing from my presentation today, it could be the fact that [trade] is very political (Lotta, 17 October 2015)

In the context of the repoliticisation of the global market, Eetti's general understanding of responsibility was located at the intersection of moral underpinnings, political obligations, global processes and structural conditions. In that, it came very close to Young's (2004: 372–3) definition of responsibility as rooted in participation in the same processes with distant others. In the words of Anna YA:

[I]n a way we're facing the same problems and we are part of the same process. We would like people to see themselves as citizens of the planet... and also to take responsibility for the planet and its people as global citizens. (Interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016)

Eetti articulated responsibility as both a moral framework and a knot of political obligations. Roughly speaking, the moral underpinnings of responsibility corresponded to the oft-invoked cosmopolitan vision of a human community of equally worthy individuals, dwelling on the same earth and sharing resources (e.g., Massey, 2004). Politically, responsibility advocated by Eetti rested on the connection between producers and consumers by virtue of participating in the same planetary structures and processes of exchange (Young, 2003, 2004, 2006).

The cosmopolitan foundations of responsibility – residing in the assumption of the artificiality of the division between 'us' (consumers in the industrialised North) and 'them' (producers in the South) (interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016), and in the recognition of the equal worthiness of all human lives (interview with Rosa, 23 February 2016) – ran under the surface of Eetti's moral education, rarely explicitly acknowledged or articulated. Most tangibly, cosmopolitanism shone through the idea of global citizenship that guided Eetti's global education efforts. Global citizenship encouraged individuals to reimagine their belonging beyond the limits of nation states and within the context of the 'globe as the one globe that we share' (Anna YA, 9 March 2016). Despite its rare articulations, Eetti's cosmopolitanism had a pragmatic communicational function. It served as a loom on which the elaborate tapestry of trade relationships, structures and processes could be overspread, made visible, dissected and, ultimately, reimaged. Thus, cosmopolitan sensibility was an indispensable moral precondition for accepting Eetti's communication. Theoretically, Rantanen (2004) observed that the foundation of moral cosmopolitanism needs to be constructed and nourished as a precondition for engagement with structures, which was Eetti's preferred approach to mending global trade. In practice, it was impossible to explain to people 'why the [trade] system doesn't work', if they assumed that some other people 'are worth less' (Rosa, 23 February 2016).

## **NEXUS OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY**

Moralisation and politicisation of trade helped Eetti to extend responsibility for the predicament of Southern producers beyond dehumanised, autonomous market forces (Allen, 2008). As indicated above, the other typical model – associated with the governmentality of advanced liberalism – assigns responsibility for resolving economic inequalities to individuals qua consumers (e.g., Brown, 2015; Burchell, 1996; Carvalho, 2005; Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Kelly, 2001; MacTier 2008). In what follows, I will try to show that even though Eetti recognised the responsibility of any and every individual consumer for creating and sustaining the injustices of global trade, by no means did it locate the ultimate responsibility for solving the issues with an individual.

In line with Young's (2003: 42) insight into the anti-sweatshop movement, Eetti attached responsibility to participation in the 'normal' processes and structures of trade that they toiled to reveal and denaturalise. As Lotta made clear in the interview excerpt cited at the beginning of this chapter, responsibility was shared by a web of actors, including 'both companies and political decision-makers, and also consumers slash citizens'. Below, I will discuss in more detail how different actors figured in this broadly sketched constellation of responsibility. The analysis will be organised using Young's (2003: 42–3) framework of different degrees and kinds of responsibility. In that model, an actor is assigned responsibility based on their connection with distant others influenced by an unjust process, the power they exercise over the process and the privilege they derive from the reproduction of injustice. The discussion will proceed along the gradation of responsibility, from consumers to national governments and transnational organisations, and to brand companies and corporations.

### **Consumers**

In the network of actors in global trade, consumers were perceived as the least powerful, privileged and, therefore, the least responsible agents. In Lotta's words: '[W]e don't want to put the blame on the consumer, and [we] also try to shift the focus towards companies and political decision-makers who really have the kind of power to take responsibility more seriously' (interview, 24 June 2015). The major benefit consumers derived from the unequal trading relationship was the opportunity to obtain cheap goods, and their connection to the violations of human rights in the Southern factories was considered the most diffused by a long production chain.

Despite emphasising the power of consumers 'to change things' (Anna H, 17 October 2015), Eetti explicitly acknowledged the futility of strictly consumerist solutions to the problems generated by global trade and consumption. This had to do with insufficient financial and time resources on the part of many consumers and the unavailability of ethical options in all product categories, but also with the impossibility of obtaining perfect



knowledge about goods produced within the ever more complex supply chains (see Newholm and Shaw, 2007):

[W]hat are your chances actually, in real life, to make sure that you get a shirt that is made really ethically and... by the standards that you would want to work yourself? [That] human rights and environment were respected in the process? What are your actual chances to do that? They might not be very high. (Interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016)

[I]t might be very hard for us to know how a certain product has been made, so it's hard for us to make a decision. Basically, the companies don't have to expose any of their trade secrets, they don't have to say where the product was made, they don't have to say how the product was made, so it's very hard for us to do anything about our consumption choices, even if we wanted to. (Anna H, 17 October 2015)

In this context, consumer choice emerged as an ambiguous device whose meaning differed from an unproblematised understanding of choice as an ultimate right and the expression of freedom. For Eetti, it was harmful, obviously to producers, but in a more convoluted way also to consumers, who were burdened with undue guilt and responsibility. Anna H eloquently articulated this sentiment:

I think it's very absurd that we even have the choice, that we can go to a shop and decide on two different products, [one] of which has been made very unethically, and someone might have died because of that product, and the other one has been made ethically... [W]e shouldn't have that choice. (Anna H, 17 October 2015)

Thus, effectively, Eetti advocated limiting consumers' freedom of choice, which was the organisation's core, but also perhaps the most radical, proposition. Curiously, such curbing of choice, conventionally considered unbeneficial to, and unwanted by, consumers, was to be achieved through consumers' own actions directed at political decision-makers and brand companies. Individuals were to '[b]e active as citizens and as consumers' (Anna H, 17 October 2015.). To do so, they were encouraged to consider consumption choices they made, to demand that the Finnish government devise laws that prevented companies selling products on the Finnish market from committing human rights violations, and to pressure firms for information and transparency – a tactic also proposed by Sassatelli (2006).

### ***National governments and intergovernmental organisations***

The second location of responsibility was with national governments and intergovernmental organisations. Ideally, the primary responsibility for preventing human rights violations in overseas factories would lie with the governments of producing countries. However, Eetti understood that the Southern governments were entrapped in the 'race to the bottom', whereby the

production costs were continuously driven lower in the competition for Northern orders that pitted multiple factories across different countries in the Global South against each other (Anna H, 17 October 2015). While the governments could theoretically increase the minimum wage, the production cost hike would daunt foreign brands. The withdrawal of Northern orders would be a huge blow to the economies of countries dependent on imports of textile or consumer electronics for the lion's share of their GDP. In this configuration, the role of governments in the home countries of the brands as well as of intergovernmental organisations, such as the EU and UN, was particularly accentuated. Eetti identified their responsibility as an obligation to legally mandate the 'due diligence' instrument:

One thing we always talk about at Eetti and always ask [companies] about is the mandatory due diligence. Due diligence means that the companies need to take care as best as they can that there are no human rights violations happening in their production chains. So, they need to do evaluations of what the big risks in their production chains are, and to plan on how to avoid those risks. (Anna H, 17 October 2015)

### ***Multinational corporations and brand companies***

The currently voluntary due diligence instrument brings us to the final layer in Eetti's conception of responsibility that enveloped brand companies and corporations. The firms were regarded as being in the most immediate relationship with the oppressed Southern workers whose work they ordered and paid for. They also gained the most from the unequal trading relationships, particularly in terms of maximising the shareholders' financial benefit. Thus, similarly to Blowfield (1999: 755), Eetti viewed the position of brand companies in global trade as particularly powerful, necessitating a strong emphasis on corporate social responsibility:

[W]hat has happened due to this liberalisation trend is that actually 60 per cent of all global trade today takes place within companies, which is also maybe why we don't speak so much about international trade between nations. We talk about global trade, because it's actually a global phenomenon in the way that it's not just two countries trading with each other, but actually nowadays you have a lot of companies going very very very big. If you look at the 100 biggest economies in the world, you'll find that a lot of them are actually companies... [A]s companies are growing bigger and are growing more powerful and the trade situation is kind of scattered, we feel like we need to really try to focus also on influencing the behaviour of companies. (Lotta, 17 October 2015)

In addition to ensuring due diligence, Eetti held brand corporations responsible for the harmful purchasing policies that drove producers' incomes ever lower. The 'race to the bottom' caused a decrease in wages and the tightening of delivery schedules, often leading to violations of labour rights

and safety regulations. Brand companies could enact their responsibility towards subcontractors' employees by introducing positive changes, such as a living wage, of their own accord. Acting on their responsibility to consumers, in turn, brand corporations could make their sourcing practices more transparent and openly inform consumers about the origins and conditions of production of their goods.

Finally, unlike other actors, the gargantuan corporations were explicitly assigned a certain degree of blame for the injustices embedded in global trade. Eetti considered it necessary to bring this blame to light and make it public in order to mobilise brand companies to implement changes in their purchasing policy. As Lotta put it: '[T]here is all kinds of shaming and blaming and naming [of the companies] that needs to be done before we can get the result we want' (interview, 24 June 2015). At the same time, the public 'shaming' had to be carried out in a constructive manner so as not to foreclose the possibility of cooperation:

Anna H: What we did last year, we tried to push [the companies] by bringing publicity to these issues and specify[ing] what they are doing [wrong]. But also... we want to talk to them. We had a round table where we talked about what they could do... So, I think our approach to them is multi-levelled. So, we want to get publicity and do want to show the people what they are doing, but not in a way that would maybe close the door to negotiations with them... [I]t's a good way... to push companies into doing something, because they are very worried about their brand image.... [S]ome said that they have done more after our report<sup>94</sup> that showed that they are maybe not doing enough, because they are afraid of such publicity. That's a good way to push them, but we just have to do it subtly and you have to do it... in a constructive way. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

## **NOTION OF RESPONSIBILITY IN EETTI'S COMMUNICATION**

Tying together the different threads, we arrive at a very complex and all-encompassing notion of responsibility in Eetti's vision of ethical trade as a mediated moral relationship between producers and consumers. Generally, this notion came very close to the 'political responsibility' identified by Young (2003) in the anti-sweatshop movement. Firstly, responsibility was a two-legged commitment that hooked political obligations, based on participation

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<sup>94</sup> Anna H referred to the report titled 'Responsible Clothes? Human Rights in the Production Chains of Finnish Clothing Companies' published in 2014. In a nutshell, while appreciating the increased emphasis on corporate responsibility in the investigated firms, the report pointed out the many shortcomings in the sourcing and purchasing policies that concerned the protection of human and labour rights at the subcontracted factories in the Global South. The whole report can be accessed online in Finnish ([http://www.eetti.fi/sites/default/files/vastuullisia\\_vaatteita\\_060614\\_final\\_korjatu.pdf](http://www.eetti.fi/sites/default/files/vastuullisia_vaatteita_060614_final_korjatu.pdf); accessed 4 May 2017), and a brief summary in English is available from Eetti.

in the same processes, in the cosmopolitan moral outlook that recognised the equal worthiness of all humans. Secondly, responsibility was a complicated nexus of mediated relationships enveloping multiple actors in both the Global South and Global North, including producers and consumers, governments of producing and importing countries, intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations and brand companies. The emphasis on the responsibility and, hence, agency of Southern workers and their national governments chimed well with the postcolonial rereading of responsibility as agency shared by both the oppressed and those who benefit from this oppression (see Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram et al., 2009; Young, 2003). Thirdly, and relatedly, Eetti posited that the responsibility for the injustices of global trade was shared by the constellation of actors, meaning that no party was solely responsible for the inequality, but that every agent was personally responsible for contributing to it (see Young, 2004: 380). Following from that, and doubling back on itself, was the recognition of responsibility as cooperation whereby only the concerted actions of all involved parties could produce the desired changes. Understood as such, responsibility conceptualised by Eetti starkly resembled the idea used in this dissertation of solidarity as a ‘morality of cooperation’ (Fenton, 2008: 49).

In that configuration, consumers were to realise their responsibility through pressuring the brands into improving their purchasing policies. They were also to ask the Northern political decision-makers to, on the one hand, construct adequate legal frameworks that would mandate and police the ethical corporate conduct, and, on the other hand, use bilateral trade agreements to force the Southern governments to protect the human rights of workers in their countries. Free to unionise and place collective demands, Southern workers would then negotiate their working conditions with factory owners as well as brand companies. Finally, Northern firms were expected to enact their responsibility by implementing changes in their sourcing policies of their own accord. Given the role of consumers as the trigger for changes, in the following sections I will zoom in on the details of the subject position of ‘citizen-consumer’ construed by Eetti.

## **6.2 CONSTITUTING THE CITIZEN-CONSUMER**

This section will consider what subject position Eetti’s communication constructed for its recipients and how (for a seminal study on constructing the consumer as a subject of advertising and marketing see Miller and Rose, 1997; for other examinations of constructing the consumer as a responsabilised subject of legal regulations and public campaigns see, for example, Everson and Joerges, 2008; Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Larner, 1997; Slocum, 2004; Wheeler, 2012a). To briefly reiterate, one of the cornerstones of the Foucauldian approach to discourse is an observation that every discourse produces a position for the recipient from where the meaning and knowledge

contained in this discourse make the most sense (Foucault, 1982b: 781; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 226; Hall, 1997b: 56). Although individuals are encouraged to identify themselves with the subject positions constructed by the discourse, they are not bound to do so (Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007: 268; see also Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Foucault, 1982b; Hall, 1997b; Kelly, 2009; Törrönen, 2001).

Drawing on the vocabulary of ethical trade literature, I conceptualised the subject position constructed by Eetti as that of ‘citizen-consumer’ (Wheeler, 2012a, 2012b: 15; see also Banaji and Buckingham, 2009; Clarke et al., 2007a, b; Lekakis, 2013; Scammell, 2000; Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010; hyphenation adopted after the literature). This choice was all the more justified in that it was literally echoed in the empirical material. In the interview, Lotta talked about one of the intended recipient groups of Eetti’s communication as ‘consumers slash citizens’ who could not only vote with their wallets, but also had the possibility of ‘influenc[ing] the political decision-making process’ (interview, 24 June 2015) (see Wheeler, 2012a). Echoing Lotta’s quote, Eetti leaned on consumer/citizen activists to promote ethical trade and to pressurise both brands and politicians into improving the situation of the underprivileged workers in the Global South. Dependent as it is on the support and actions of citizen-consumers for realising its mission, Eetti must discursively furnish this subject position.

In what follows, I retrace the possibilities conceptualised by Eetti for becoming a ‘citizen-consumer’. To that end, I begin by presenting the present state of affairs, that is, a vision of the Finnish society as not-yet citizen-consumers. Subsequently, I look at two ways through which Eetti morally educated prospective citizen-consumers. Firstly, I briefly present Eetti’s outlook on global education, in a narrow sense of cooperation with schools, as a way of priming a new generation of citizen-consumers. Secondly, I discuss how Eetti understood its role as a ‘platform’ for the already blooming citizen-consumers to vent their energies and harness their engagement. In doing so, I introduce concrete examples of how Eetti attempted to enrol prospective citizen-consumers to support their cause, including through social media, and also shed light on the obstacles that Eetti faced in mobilising individuals not only as consumers, but also citizens.

## **NOT-YET CITIZEN-CONSUMERS**

Throughout its organisational history, Eetti has rested on citizen-consumers from top to bottom. This means that Eetti was established by a group of activists, and that it still relies on volunteers to contribute to making global trade more ethical through securing better working conditions and living wages for the producers of goods available on the Finnish and European markets. Generally speaking, the process of morally educating citizen-consumers has to do with encouraging Finnish society to become ‘global citizens’ who would not see themselves

as nations that are interacting with each other or then like two opposites on the globe. Because, actually, there are these very different countries that are at very different stages of development – if you can talk about development. And they have very different characteristics and their own specific slots in the world trade system, so to say. So, in that way, we don't want to think that we are like 'us' and 'them', but we want to think that we are citizens of the planet who are all facing the same kind of issues from a slightly different point of view... [W]e are not just consumers, but the actual citizens of the globe. (Interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016)

Echoing Eetti's twofold understanding of responsibility, as both moral and political commitment, Anna YA spotlighted the frequently overlooked moral component in the usually politicised figure of the citizen-consumer. In this quote, she articulated the fundamental postcolonial belief in global interconnectedness (Raghuram et al., 2009), coupled with the conditional use of the Eurocentric notion of linear 'development'. In doing so, Anna YA attached importance to cooperation between producers and consumers, a move that theorists often emphasise as a precondition for mitigating the negative consequences of economic globalisation (see Mouffe, 2005; Noxolo et al., 2012). Here again, ethical trade was not a solitary endeavour by heroic organisations or individualised citizen-consumers, but systematic work on structures of global trade.

Stressing the political and civic dimensions of Eetti's work, Lotta pointed out that the original interest of Eetti was precisely in the structures, processes and regulations that governed global trade. With that area more difficult to access due to the combination of WTO negotiations being in limbo, the explosion of the complex web of bilateral trade agreements and the increasing secrecy at the EU level – as in the case of the controversial Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)<sup>95</sup> and EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) – Eetti shifted its focus to 'corporate social responsibility and responsible consumerism and how people as citizens can influence the way Finnish companies work or act in the Global South' (Lotta, interview, 24 June 2015). While Eetti clearly acknowledged the significance of responsible consumption as a means of influencing global trade, unlike many ethical trade organisations that explicitly focus on responsible consumption (see Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2008; Micheletti, 2003; Scammell, 2000) they nevertheless prioritised civic and collective action. This preference was reflected in the carefully considered terminology that the organisation used to address their members and prospective members:

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<sup>95</sup> The TTIP, which Eetti – like other similarly profiled organisations – fiercely opposed, was a hot issue during my fieldwork. It was a topic of a presentation during the Christmas get-together for volunteers in 2015 and of an open breakfast meeting in April 2016. In addition, it frequently emerged spontaneously during meetings and training sessions that focused on other issues.

Anna H: We don't want people to think that they are just consumers or just citizens, but [that] they can influence being kind of both... We don't want them to influence just with their wallets, but also by participating actively in the society, such as voting... but a lot more than voting also. So, we've had that discussion also on which terms to use. And I personally often use 'people' or then I put 'citizens AND consumers'. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

Here shone through an in-depth understanding of the process of individual subjectification and the profound role that language played in constructing citizen-consumers (e.g., Foucault, 1982b; Hall, 1997b; Larner, 1997; Slocum, 2004). This awareness also had consequences for the language choices in Eetti's communication in general: despite its membership base being composed primarily of urban and well-educated women (see Lockie, 2009; Wheeler, 2012b), they opted for 'normal' language that people could relate to, rather than for using 'academic language' that could potentially alienate people with a lower level of education or from a less privileged background. Importantly, to counter the critique of 'ethical consumer' as an elitist position reserved for financially affluent urbanites (e.g., Johnston, 2008; Littler, 2008), the figure of citizen-consumer constructed by Eetti was a more inclusive positioning: collective action, after all, did not necessarily require monetary resources<sup>96</sup>. In addition, inclusivity consisted in reaching out to the populations outside the big urban centres through, for example, organising workshops and training outside the Capital Region, and establishing local groups in other cities and towns.

The reason why deliberate *subjectification* preoccupied Eetti more than just raising awareness was because they considered Finnish society to be already well aware of ethical problems in global trade (see Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). However, the cognitive knowledge did not always go hand in hand with practical action (see Hilton, 2008; Korhonen and Seppala, 2005; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). Lotta speculated that,

if you went out into the street and asked almost anyone if they knew that clothing factories in Asia often had bad working conditions, they would say yes, they know. Does this influence you buying a T-shirt? I think they would say: no, it won't. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

Lotta and Anna H linked the reluctance to take action in relation to the injustices embedded in global trade to the perceived 'mental landscape' of

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<sup>96</sup> Of course, other resources – such as time – are nevertheless necessary. Thus, even though the volunteers are not compensated, Eetti always tries to minimise the costs of participation. This is done, for example, by reimbursing travel expenses and paying a per diem allowance to those who attend their training and workshops, and providing at least some food and drinks at shorter events, such as Eetti Helsinki meetings (the servings always include tea, coffee, some sandwiches, fruits and vegetables at the minimum). Moreover, the topic of whom we can reasonably ask to become an ethical consumer was actively and reflectively taken up on numerous occasions by both Eetti's employees and volunteers.

Finnish people. Three features emerged as preventing Finns from becoming citizen-consumers. Firstly, there was a supposedly inborn scepticism about their ability to make a difference in the world (see Autio et al., 2009; Korhonen and Seppala, 2005; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004; similar scepticism rooted in the British society is dissected in Littler et al., 2005). Secondly, and relatedly, Finns were perceived as lacking a sense of entitlement to demand change from other individuals, but especially governments and corporations. Thirdly, organisational engagement was thwarted by a deep-seated mistrust towards those who acted otherwise and shamelessly demanded change. Curious, although perhaps not altogether unexpected, in this context was the comparison between Finns and Swedes, with the latter being regarded as feeling more 'entitled to demanding change or demanding information from companies', and wanting 'to be progressive and make change in the world' (Lotta, interview, 24 June 2015; for a more detailed analysis of fair trade consumers in Sweden see Wheeler, 2012b).

In a nutshell, then, Eetti regarded the majority of Finns as not-yet citizen-consumers. This diagnosis was based on, and attributed to, some peculiar features of the Finnish 'national character'. As the society seemed knowledgeable about ethical problems that corroded global trade, the key to increasing the ranks of citizen-consumers lay not as much in raising awareness and spreading information as in offering Finns a new subject position, that of a citizen-consumer, in a bid to 'say that you can make a difference' (Lotta, interview, 24 June 2015).

The construction of citizen-consumers performed by Eetti was moral education in the precise sense that instead of simply dictating choices to be made by consumers in the marketplace, it aimed – in line with Massey's (2006) recommendations – to cultivate cosmopolitan disposition as well as encouraging civic actions. As highlighted earlier, moral education encompassed both the provision of new and credible knowledge about working conditions in the Global South for a wider public, but also acting as 'a platform for people who want to become active to promote [ethical] trade', and communicating 'to this narrower group of people who are already interested in these issues and get[ting] them more involved' (Lotta, interview, 24 June 2015). Enrolling citizen-consumers in collective, politically oriented actions was the ultimate goal of Eetti as a platform. The citizen-consumers were encouraged to get involved in the movement, volunteer, and plan the current and forthcoming Eetti campaigns. The role of Eetti as a platform was commonly articulated during the Eetti Helsinki meetings as supporting activists' own interests. In fact, volunteers often suggested topics to be discussed, speakers to be invited and actions to be undertaken, while Eetti provided the institutional and financial backing. Thus, the crucial task of Eetti's communication was to enrol individuals, especially one-off random participants of the bigger events, in supporting ethical trade in a sustained



manner<sup>97</sup>. Below, I will discuss three specific elements of Eetti's repertoire of communication that sought to educate, empower and enrol citizen-consumers as moral subjects: (1) social media campaigns; (2) global education of children through school visits; and (3) 'offline' events aimed at the general public.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA AS A PLAYING FIELD FOR CITIZEN-CONSUMERS**

As already said, Eetti perceived the overall number of already formed citizen-consumers in Finland to be very limited. In this context, Lotta spoke about a 'division of labour' between Fairtrade Finland and Eetti – alluded to by the communications officer of the former organisation in an interview on 2 June 2015 – in that

[Fairtrade Finland] take care of people perhaps happy with doing just a little bit something, posting a photo on Facebook or something. And Eetti tries to really get to all those people who want to get more involved and want to see bigger changes perhaps. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

Besides situating Eetti in the ethical trade movement in Finland, this quote hints at the secondary role of social media in Eetti's moral education project. In other words, Lotta recognised social media as a tentative and weak form of engagement with the cause ('a little bit something'). In Eetti's repertoire of communication (see Mattoni, 2013), social media figured primarily as Facebook (the general fan page liked by over 5,000 users, the Eetti Helsinki group with nearly 150 members, and a private group for members and volunteers), but also – to a lesser extent – Twitter and a guest writer blog hosted on their own domain.

Despite social media's tendency to foster weak forms of engagement, it has grown to be an integral, although rarely a stand-alone, component of Eetti's communication: '[I]t's kind of hard to draw a line between a social media campaign and other campaigns. So, it is just like social media is used in almost all or all the campaigns nowadays' (Anna YA, interview, 23 February 2016). Thus, there was a synergy between different channels of communication, such as personal and direct communication, traditional media and social media. Compared to traditional media, social media was considered more accessible to ethical trade as a non-mainstream cause, corroborating the assessment

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<sup>97</sup> The participants of thematic meetings organised by the Eetti Helsinki volunteer group usually had previous interest in the issues at hand, frequently sparked by their studies or professional tasks. The notable exception was the preparations for the Fairtrade Chocolate Café organised in November 2015 within the framework of the Restaurant Day. Among some 12 volunteers who offered to bake chocolate goodies and sell them in an event that finalised the collection of signatures under the Make Chocolate Fair! petition about a third were one-off volunteers who participated for fun. In any case, the overall tendency was for more people to get engaged in activities that included some tangible activity, such as baking cakes or selling shoes, compared to most of the events whose format leaned towards a discussion.

commonly found in the academic literature (see, for example, Poell and van Dijck, 2015; Stein, 2009; Uldam and Askanius, 2013: 162). However, as I have already mentioned in Chapter 1, Eetti managed to attract the attention of traditional media as well, in relation to their newly launched reports or campaigns tackling issues that had not been discussed in Finland previously, such as the ethical conduct of Finnish clothing brands or the supply chain transparency in grocery trading.

In line with their mission to activate consumers, Eetti's social media usage was not only aimed at exposing the problems corroding global trade, but also attempted to convey the 'positive and encouraging [message] for people that... you can make a difference' (Lotta, interview, 24 June 2015). The reception of these two kinds of messages, however, varied significantly. While the content pertaining to something more 'shocking' or 'scandalous' tended to receive more likes and shares, information about the offline events in which social media followers could get involved was less likely to receive a response. Anna H also recognised the visual economy of Facebook that supported more pictorial modes of conveying information:

I do remember last year one of our most shared [posts] was... the infographics on how... much each agent... in the production chain of a T-shirt gets out of the... wholesale value of that T-shirt. We had like this nice infographic for it. And that was one of the most shared and seen posts of Eetti from the last year, I remember. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

How did this critical appraisal of social media play out in the actual communication practices of Eetti? Let us map two aspects of Eetti's social media usage – organisational communication and social media activism – in turn. Firstly, Eetti employed social media as a tool of both inter- and intra-organisational communication. The former related to the use of social media as a communication platform within international networks and projects. Through these, for example, Asian organisations and trade unions could inform their European partners about violations and accidents at local factories as the events unfolded. Eetti could subsequently share this knowledge with its fans and followers. By intra-organisational communication, in turn, I understand the use of Facebook as a tool for mobilising members and volunteers. This was usually done by advertising offline events and activities or, more rarely, by inviting followers to participate in actions happening in social media itself. Initially, there were a few attempts to use the Facebook group of Eetti Helsinki as a discussion platform for English-speaking volunteers, too, but in the light of a rather low engagement this idea seemed to have subsided quickly.

Secondly, social media was considered as a potential site for consumer activism. This potential was quoted several times by the participants in open events and discussions, for instance during a brief discussion following a screening of *The True Cost*, a documentary film about ethical issues in the

garment industry. Anna YA corroborated this view on social media as a powerful site for gaining visibility for ethical trade issues and pressurising brands and companies to address these problems:

We have posted, for example, I think it was... this Finnish company that makes chocolate and stuff like this. We were posting on their Facebook site about fair chocolate at some point... [A]ctually, it is quite effective, because nowadays the companies feel that they have to reply to their social media posts quite soon... So then, if we tweet to companies or post on their Facebook sites, then we might actually get quite a lot of attention. And then, if 20 people do that during the same day, it already [generates] a lot of attention, because [the brands] have lots of followers. So, thousands of people are gonna see it... [I] think there's sort of potential in that. Because then you get publicity for free. (Interview with Anna YA, 23 February 2016)

The potential of public action that singled out a specific firm as its target was exploited in the first coordinated social media campaign in which Eetti joined forces with Finnwatch and the Finnish chapter of Changemaker to demand more transparency in Lidl's supply chain. As the only foreign grocery chain with substantial presence on the Finnish market, Lidl was seen as wilfully withholding information and, therefore, not complying with the local standards of transparency<sup>98</sup>. The goal of the campaign was to demonstrate the interest in the issue on the part of the civil society that went beyond a few NGOs. In order to do so, they launched a hashtag '#lidlpinäkyväksi' (#more transparent Lidl) and a Tumblr account, which served as a visual petition that one was supposed to 'sign' with a photograph of their local Lidl store:

There are 147 [Lidl stores] in Finland and our ambitious goal was to get pictures of all of those to present to Lidl as a petition for more transparency. And then we launched it... on Facebook and Twitter and just saw what was happening. And just expected people to spread the message. And then, a couple of weeks ago, we handed out the pictures to Lidl in Finland and they promised to take them to Germany as well... It's like a petition, it's almost the same thing as if you sign something. But then, taking a picture is slightly more active, so it means that these people are actually very interested in the issue and then of course taking pictures is like something a bit different because signing a petition is such an everyday thing, so we wanted to do something different. (Interview with Anna YA, 23 February 2016)

This campaign added another layer to the earlier comment by Lotta where she classified posting photos on Facebook as a form of engagement that Eetti did not specifically promote among their volunteers. Anna YA's divergent

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<sup>98</sup> The ethical standing of Lidl was considered somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, the chain had the best selection of certified chocolates on the Finnish market (some of which it donated for Eetti Helsinki's Chocolate Café). On the other hand, its transparency standards were called into question.

valuation can, perhaps, be interpreted in two ways – either as a gradation of the generally weak forms of engagement in social media with a self-taken photo articulating stronger commitment than an automatised electronic signature, or as a (semi-)public campaign targeting a general audience whose threshold for participation should not be too high.

Even though the campaign was not intensively promoted by the organisations and the goal of 147 photos was far away from being achieved with only some 40 images received, it was nevertheless quite successful. Besides creating some media buzz, Anna YA appreciated that the campaign had shown that the cause enjoyed a wider societal interest and support, which are perceived as indispensable for an organisation's legitimacy and efficacy (see Clarke et al., 2007a, 2007b; Vestergaard, 2014):

[W]e think that it worked in the sense that we gave them the message that it's not only Finnwatch or us who is interested... I think we managed to show that this is of more general interest to the public, even though we didn't get all the [Lidl stores photographed]. But at least we showed that there are more people who actually want to know where their products are coming from. (Interview with Anna YA, 23 February 2016)

In that campaign, social media was used as a novel tool for intensifying usually rather weak forms of social media activism. Thus, it sought to activate its followers. By harnessing the visual affordances of social media in the context of a more accountable and public mode of communication, the campaign generated substantial pressure on the corporation and pushed it into implementing at least some changes in its conduct<sup>99</sup>.

Despite the indisputable advantages of social media as a channel for ethical trade communication, there was no replaceability between social media and personal communication. In fact, Anna YA clearly acknowledged that 'unmediated' communication constituted the immutable backbone of Eetti's operations: '[W]e still have to do other stuff... we still have to meet people and we have to organise events' (interview, 23 February 2016). The indispensability of personal communication was further augmented by the recognition of the limitations of social media. Firstly, and similarly to Pizca del Mundo, Eetti were aware that their content was highly unlikely to penetrate the echo chambers that Facebook algorithms designed for its users (see Colleoni et al., 2014). With that in mind, and acting on their mission to provide a platform for already formed citizen-consumers, the organisation tailored their content to further educate those social media users who had had a prior interest in global trade and ethical consumption:

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<sup>99</sup> In fact, in May 2016 Lidl launched an advertising campaign about its wide range of locally produced foodstuffs. Moreover, in January 2017 a list of garment and shoe suppliers was published on Lidl's website. Even though I do not have any foolproof evidence, it is reasonable to infer that the #lidllapinäkvyäksi campaign might have contributed to these developments.

Lotta: [F]irst of all, we want to spread to a wider public information about working conditions in the Global South, what people can do about them. But we also want to specifically communicate [with] this narrower group of people who are already interested in these issues and kind of get them more involved. (Interview with Lotta and Anna H, 24 June 2015)

Secondly, the pressure to be actively present and heard in social media placed a strain on the already overstretched human and time resources available to Eetti. In other words, the growing indispensability of social media for organisational communication was perceived as a double-edged phenomenon that entailed not only benefits, but also costs:

[Social media] is helpful in a way, because you can easily spread more information to a vast group of people that you wouldn't meet in the street... And then, of course, it's good that you can spread the word that you are an active organisation, you're doing stuff. But then, to do that you would have to be on social media almost all the time and then you'd always have to remember to appoint someone to take pictures and post them regularly, and encourage people to make their professional profiles [on] Twitter that are connected to Eetti's profile. And, then, [none] of us has the time to do that really. I haven't even done that. I promised to do that some time ago, but I still haven't. So, in a way, it is a burden as well, because if you're not on social media, you don't exist. And then you would have to have these professionals to plan the new innovative social media campaigns that we don't have, so we just do it when we have the time. (Interview with Anna YA, 23 February 2016)

Thirdly, by participating in social media, not only did Eetti built a platform to unveil and target unethical corporate practices, but they also opened their own operations to criticism and discussion. While the organisation generally welcomed and valued the conversation and deliberation with and among the society as a form of activism, the issue proved more tangled in social media; that is, social media was considered to amplify the loudest and most active voices, thereby problematising the drawing of a line at the point where an acceptable discussion ended:

[I]t's good to have that conversation [about our themes and operations] in public as well. So, we're happy that [social media] are providing [with the space] to do so. But then, when it gets very aggressive or when you can see it's clearly no discussion anymore, but it's just insisting on one point of view and not a very civilised discussion anymore, then it's the bad side in social media that they actually do get so much attention... Because I thought that [social media] should be open and democratic, but then I realised that it is not necessarily open and democratic, if only the people who have the loudest voice and the rudest words are getting the attention. (Interview with Anna YA, 23 February 2016)

What we have thus far is an organisation with a rather nuanced understanding of social media, cognisant of both its benefits and limitations; an organisation that has some experience in successful social media campaigns, but that has too few resources to implement them continuously; an organisation for whom social media is a way to complement their mission of activating ‘consumers/citizens’. And that mission is inextricably connected to the offline actions of which personal and direct communication is a bedrock. In what follows, I will zoom in on two ways in which Eetti employed personal, embodied communication to morally educate and politically activate prospective citizen-consumers.

### **PRIMING A NEW GENERATION OF CITIZEN-CONSUMERS THROUGH GLOBAL EDUCATION**

Global education in a ‘narrow sense’ of cooperation with schools and youth groups, such as scouts, is one of the pillars of Eetti’s communication as moral education, one which is, moreover, highly valued and appreciated<sup>100</sup>. Anna YA explained Eetti’s approach to global education thus:

We have different themes that we work on, that we campaign on, for example textile production and electronics production and fair trade, that when we get materials, the information and some ideas for action we also utilise them in ‘global education’ as we call it... And what we do with them is [that] we think of how the education system and education plans in Finland are supportive of our goals and... how we could utilise our expertise to the advantage of teachers, mostly on subjects like global citizenship and sustainable consumption, things that have come up in the past few years in education plans and [curricula]. And what we do in practice is [that] we might organise workshops or lectures even.

(Interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016)

Even though ‘global education’ is not a school subject in and of itself, the themes that Eetti presents to students fit within the scope of several different courses, including geography, history, Finnish language, media literacy, social studies, philosophy, ethics and religious education. The 40 to 50 workshops per year, each lasting between 75 and 90 minutes, are conducted either by the employees or purposefully trained volunteers, reaching an estimated 1,500–2,000 students. About half of the workshops take place in the Capital Region where some 1.2 million people, or about a fifth of Finland’s population, live. Although Eetti have the ambition of ‘going everywhere’ with their global education, this is in practice limited by several factors, such as the location of

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<sup>100</sup> As of spring 2017, the future, at least short-term, of Eetti’s global education projects is, however, up in the air after the Ministry for Foreign Affairs decided not to provide Eetti with funding for the school year 2017/2018. In 2017, Eetti’s global education activities were temporarily moved under the umbrella of Kepa.

trained volunteers, the long distances between the dispersed population and resource limitations. In this context, besides the volunteers who are firstly educated and then educate in the programme, the teachers inclined towards global education also have a substantial role to play.

In the school year 2015/2016 that coincided with my fieldwork the emphasis was on workshops on subvertising and the cotton industry. The latter in particular, devised with the help of a professional drama instructor, employed the ‘softened’ drama techniques associated with critical pedagogy and Paulo Freire’s methodologies. This approach served specifically to engage students’ subjectivities:

We think that all the students are actors by themselves and not just [objects] of this education or information that we’re going to give them. But through these interactive methods we want to give them the sort of... ‘subjectivity’... They are not objects, but they are subjects themselves who are actually consumers and citizens and active people who can be active members of the society. And we’re trying to strengthen... [w]hat they can do as consumers, but not just as consumers, but as citizens as well... So, we’re trying to give them tools and means to act, and for ourselves [drama pedagogy] is a tool to get them more engaged in the action. But the goal itself is not so much to engage them, but maybe like empower them and see them as independent actors and give them that identity. (Interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016)

In this quote, Anna YA spontaneously and explicitly spelled out the idea of ethical trade as moral education as the construction of a moral citizen-consumer subject. The students, usually aged 12 to 16, were encouraged to see themselves as fully fledged acting subjects capable of having an impact on the world around them. Once the possibility of viewing a young self as always already a moral agent (which, according to Barnett et al., 2005b, every consumer is) was established, the young people were offered concrete positions as active social actors in their capacity as consumers and citizens. As citizen-consumers, they were also provided with some tools to help them to act in the world to morally address the injustices in global trade. Through opening up subjectivity as a malleable concept, the role-playing exercise emboldened students to empathise with different people involved in the production chain of cotton<sup>101</sup>. In line with the dictum that in global trade there are many more ethical questions than solid answers and workable solutions (Lotta, 24 June 2015), the explicit goal of the drama workshop was not to equip students with new knowledge, but to engage them in moral reflection and contemplation –

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<sup>101</sup> Each role was taken on by more than one student. Depending on the group, there were four to six roles, including a cotton farmer from Burkina Faso, an American cotton farmer, an under-age factory worker from China, an Indian garment factory owner, a human rights activist from Uzbekistan and a Finnish clothing shop assistant. Each role was developed based on the interviews with a person who actually occupied such a position in their everyday life.

the objective set in the literature as the ultimate goal of ethical trade as moral education (see Barnett et al., 2005b; Massey, 2006; Noddings, 1984). These methods, requiring students to think beyond the binary of right and wrong answers usually prescribed by the educational system, did not resonate with all the students, some of whom considered the approach ‘hippie’ or infantilising.

Asked about the usual reception of workshops among the students, Anna YA responded that the themes presented by Eetti were considered well accepted, generally uncontroversial and reasonably familiar to the students – particularly in comparison to the situation 5 to 10 years earlier – although the precise extent of knowledge, of course, still varied from group to group. Yet, she claimed that the schools whose students had the least factual knowledge and the smallest capacity to engage in moral deliberation and introspection were the schools that needed global education the most:

I think, in a way, maybe it has made them think about the issue in general. And, in a way, I think many of these youths are from families or surroundings where you have to be really tough and where you have to say bad things... and it’s good for them just to see that somebody else disagrees and not all the world is like that. Youth might not be brave enough themselves at that point to see that. I think it’s some kind of self-protection or some kind of learnt way of surviving maybe in the surroundings they are. Because the atmosphere is like that and then they sort of have to follow. But I think in some way some part of the message must have gone through just by them... attending the workshop and seeing that somebody else thinks the other way. (Interview with Anna YA, 9 March 2016)

What we can grasp about Eetti’s global education thus far is that it is a very conscious and methodical attempt to influence subjectivities of the incoming generation of consumers. This was done through play and (discursive) drama exercises furnished with a subject position of citizen-consumer as a moral agent whose actions had real consequences for the world and its people. In a sense, then, through its global education workshops at schools Eetti enacted moral education as subjectification par excellence. Curiously, even though the possession of knowledge and information is often quoted as a prerequisite for the emergence of ethical consumption attitudes (e.g., Adams and Raisborough, 2010; Barnett et al., 2005a, b; Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Le Velly, 2007), the priming of children as potential citizen-consumers, to the best of my knowledge, has not been studied or theorised. Rather, adults – with more substantial sums of money at their disposal and, supposedly, better formed ‘rationality’ – are usually considered primary prospective candidates for citizen-consumers. Yet, both Eetti and Pizca del Mundo prized the interactions with children. They acted on the principle that, colloquially speaking, what youth is used to, age remembers.



## **(MIS)RECOGNISING CITIZEN-CONSUMERS IN OFFLINE COMMUNICATION**

Besides cooperation with schools, global education carried out by Eetti might also have a broader meaning of moral education through raising awareness, explained by Anna YA as ‘all the information work we’re doing for citizens’ (interview, 9 March 2016). Critical here is the use of the subject position of citizen, once again emphasising the ‘political’ and structural as the main terrains for Eetti’s activity. In this section, I look at some examples of how the organisation strove through events and happenings organised for the general public to morally educate and politically enrol consumers to support ethical trade. In addition, I contemplate why the task of calling citizen-consumers into being might have proved consistently difficult.

In the current historical moment when consumer is taken to be a default and generally accepted subject position (see Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Everson and Joerges, 2008; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Larner, 1997; Lockie, 2009; Slocum, 2004; Soper, 2004), the possibility of addressing individuals as citizens rests on the assumption of the coexistence of ‘citizen’ and ‘consumer’ in one body and their co-presence at all times (see Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Hilton, 2008). One attempt to tangibly infuse buying with civic concerns was a shoe-selling event organised by Eetti in partnership with SASK (Trade Union Solidarity Centre) as a part of the pan-European project entitled ‘Change your shoes’<sup>102</sup>. The campaign was aimed at raising ‘the awareness on the dangers of using chromium in leather tanning and on the bad working conditions in tanneries and production sites’, and at encouraging ‘the shoe brands and retailers to demonstrate allegiance to more sustainable practices through the supply chain’<sup>103</sup>. One of the main tools of the campaign was a mobile pedometer application that collected 59,000,000 steps in a symbolic march of ‘citizens all over Europe’ to Brussels that demanded transparency in the shoe supply chain<sup>104</sup>.

Eetti’s campaign-related happening took place on a Saturday in September 2015 at one of the main squares in Helsinki. The goal of the event was to make passers-by realise the plight of shoe producers in the Global South in a very material and tangible way. In order to do so, the donated second-hand shoes were to be sold at a price equal to the beggarly earnings of an Indian homemaker involved in shoe production, which at the time amounted to 0.14€ per pair. Eetti carefully determined the focus of the happening to be on the inadequate remuneration of shoe producers in the Global South, at the

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<sup>102</sup> Anna H, who acted at Eetti as the campaign coordinator, expressed reservations about the unfortunate name, which might have misleadingly encouraged people to buy new, more ethical shoes and discard their old ones, unintentionally tying into the trend of overconsumption.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Change your shoes’ campaign website. Available at <http://changeyourshoes-bg.org/> (accessed 20 April 2017).

<sup>104</sup> ‘Welcome to Brussels’. Available at <http://changeyourshoes-bg.org/blog/welcome-to-brussels> (accessed 20 April 2017).

expense of other focal points of the campaign such as violations of labour rights or health hazards posed by the leather tanning processes. The rationale was to avoid overwhelming the passers-by, which would have run the risk of discouraging and disempowering them, rather than providing an intended call to action (see McDonagh, 2002: 656).

The sales took place in a tent filled with tables on which some 200 pairs of shoes were displayed. Among the shoes, informational materials were generously spread in the form of stands and leaflets. While the passers-by were invited in by a poster that emphasised the astonishing price and by the volunteers who paced the square advertising the bargain, those who entered the tent were deluged with knowledge about issues in the global shoe production. They immediately learnt that a homeworker in Indonesia received an average of 0.29€ per pair, that the total earnings of all the Chinese factory workers (usually at least five people) equalled 2.5€ for a pair of shoes whose retail price was 120€ and that the biggest beneficiaries of the global shoe production were the retailers whose earnings amounted to about a third of the price. The information was conveyed textually, but also displayed visually through, for example, a sneaker-shaped jigsaw puzzle that illustrated the breakdown of the retail price of a pair of shoes. Moreover, the well-informed volunteers were quick to explain the hidden meaning of the shockingly low price. Surely, the idea was to capture the interest of passers-by as consumers in order to involve them in a conversation and moral reflection that had a civic undertone. Ideally, that would encourage the passers-by to partake (quasi-)politically in two ways: individually, through asking shoe brands under what conditions their shoes were made, and collectively, through gathering virtual steps in the symbolic march to demand more transparency in the footwear industry.

There are a few things to say about the figure of citizen-consumer that emerged in the event. Firstly, a rather substantial number of volunteers, around 15, who showed up during the weekend to raise awareness of ethical trade testified to Eetti having some base of committed and informed citizen-consumers. These activists exceeded the modest scholarly definition of citizen-consumers as, essentially, consumers who ingrain some social and environmental concerns into their buying decisions (see Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2008; Micheletti, 2003; Scammell, 2000; Trentmann, 2006). Instead, they appeared as politically motivated and socially oriented citizens for whom consumption was yet another terrain of collective public life where the interlocking political and moral concerns could be legitimately addressed.

Secondly, a sizeable portion of passers-by could be regarded as 'ordinary' citizen-consumers, conscious of the intersections of consumption, morality and politics. They usually had some prior interest in, and knowledge of, global trade. For example, many were aware that Southern workers' wages constituted the smallest piece of the product price and could identify retailers and brands as the biggest beneficiaries of global shoe production. What

marked them as citizen-consumers was their expressed willingness to pay more for the product to provide producers with a living wage. In the end, many of those people decided not to buy the 0.14€ shoes, some perhaps put off by the harsh reality behind this low price. Surprisingly, in the light of Eetti's conception of shared responsibility in global trade, during that event the idea of delegating a small part of the brand or retailer's profit towards increasing the wages of Southern producers did not figure as an alternative to rising consumer prices.

Thirdly, and as is always the case with public actions aimed at involving random people, there were some passers-by with whom the campaign message did not resonate at all. Most of these people simply ignored and walked past the volunteers who tried to engage them as they were crossing the busy square, many perhaps immersed in the humdrum of everyday life. However, there was one case when a person actively rejected the message. It involved an elderly woman who claimed to have worked in the Finnish shoe industry. After a long and interesting discussion with one of the volunteers, she stated that she would rather not know from where her shoes had come.

Fourthly, some of the visitors to the stall, attracted by the possibility of buying extraordinarily cheap shoes, expressed no interest in learning what the price really stood for. Instead, they preoccupied themselves with trying on and purchasing multiple pairs. While these passers-by failed to engage with the event in their capacity as citizens and misrecognised themselves solely as consumers (see Larner, 1997; Slocum, 2004), this did not worry Eetti all that much: the general response was considered satisfactory and many of the citizen-consumers praised the idea of making the abstract issues of global trade tangible. And on an environmental note, in the end, there were 200 pairs of shoes to dispose of.

As alluded to above, the difficulties in enrolling new citizen-consumers resulted from individuals sometimes misrecognising themselves as consumers when Eetti tried to address them as citizens (as we remember, subjects are not bound to adopt the positions constructed for them by a discourse; see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Carpentier and De Cleen, 2007; Foucault, 1982b; Hall, 1997b; Kelly, 2009). This misrecognition manifested itself most clearly in the fact that Eetti was commonly expected to provide simple answers and straightforward consumerist scripts for addressing the ethical questions of global trade. Yet, Eetti were unable, or perhaps unwilling, to do that, due to their appreciation of the complexity of inequalities involved in global trade. Instead, their routine answer was for citizen-consumers to get involved in political, civic, public and collective action, and figure out the solution together. This approach was consistent with Eetti's awareness, shared by Maniates (2002), of the impossibility of resolving the structural inequalities embedded in global trade through private consumption, personal choice and individualised responsibility.

The glaring mismatch between the expectations of (some of) the audience and the measures offered by Eetti was revealed in the aftermath of the film

screening. A short and unplanned discussion ensued following the documentary film about the garment industry and its ethical problems, such as unfair cotton subsidies in the US that limited the market for Southern farmers, the sweating of the factory workers in the Global South and the global environmental problems stemming from fast fashion. The discussion was prompted by a question about what one could do to mitigate these issues. The recommendations offered by Eetti typically revolved around widely conceived activism that ranged from consumer activism in relation to brand companies and retailers, to civic deliberation within the Eetti Helsinki group, to informed political participation in the elections that would lead to the assuming of office by the politicians ready to push for legislation warranting justice and transparency in global trade relations. The mismatch between these loose guidelines and the expectations of, at least some, prospective citizen-consumers was laid bare in a comment under the Facebook post that announced the screening. The author reiterated his original question of what could be done and elaborated on the viability of suggested solutions in his everyday life in the following way:

Just by chance I stayed to watch this [film] and it was really eye-opening. I don't buy many clothes myself, but I try to live ethically and ecologically otherwise. [The film] left only one thing missing, which we discussed with the organisers: a concrete call to action. The documentary raises issues and provokes reflection, but it doesn't answer the question of what I can do. If yours truly, not-[haute]-couture-victim, walks into [a variety store] to buy new trousers, what should I look for on the made in label? What ethical consumer choices can I make? Yeah, the question is not easy, because an unethically produced garment can always be brought [for the finishing touches] to another country and made in such a way that it receives the 'Made in EU' [tag] or something. This, however, sinks a bit into a quagmire of relativism – perfect is always the enemy of good. It would be enough to throw in some sketchy advice about how you might be able to avoid the worst problems. Awakening the pain of the world alone doesn't help on the practical level. I can't stress enough that it's worthwhile to give companies moderate and justified feedback. In the current era of social media, firms indeed often react quickly. In particular, boycotts should not happen without explaining why you boycott – the decision not to buy is then interpreted to mean that the product is too expensive, a seller is not interested in showcasing the product [to a customer], [the product is] not well marketed and so on –the marketing department cannot know that the purchase was withheld for ethical reasons \*unless you tell them\*. (5 September 2015)

In addition to illustrating the need for feasible instructions to guide everyday consumer choices, this lengthy comment captured – and, subsequently, downplayed – the abstract nature of trade and consumption as an ever-extending web of ethical quandaries to which there were no simple solutions.

As already mentioned, Eetti considered unveiling new problems as a core component of their mission. The novelty and complexity of the detected issues, however, rendered them difficult to communicate and mobilise people around, especially compared to the very familiar Fairtrade system whose primary message was that ‘we are the solution’ (Lotta, interview, 24 June 2015). The detailed accounts of how loopholes in global trade regulations paved the way for unethical and misleading production practices – for example, the possibility of marking a piece of clothing as ‘made in Europe’ when only the finishing touches, such as stitching the ‘made in’ label itself, were in fact performed in the EU – seemed to drive prospective citizen-consumers into a moral cul-de-sac (for brief examples of moral dilemmas involved in consumption choices see Barnett et al., 2005b; Massey, 2006). Therefore, as with humanitarian action (see Chouliaraki, 2013b: 75), the solutions most desirable to the public appeared to be those that could be enacted through informed consumer choice in the marketplace. Of course, it is reasonable to expect to solve the problems within the same processes that first generated them. Despite the seeming failure to provide interim practical guidelines, Eetti’s approach had a forward-looking merit. After all, the importance of ethical trade communication as moral education resides not only in altering individuals’ ordinary consumption choices, but also in educating citizen-consumers as moral subjects to ethically encounter distant others (see Barnett et al., 2005b; Massey, 2006).

In this section, I examined how the partly theoretical subject position of citizen-consumer figured in ethical trade communication. Empirically, I looked at Eetti’s communication as an effort to educate citizen-consumers willing to support ethical trade through integrating their civic concerns and consumption practices. Even though Eetti considered the knowledge of the ethical issues in global trade sufficient in Finnish society, the information itself was believed not to have much influence on the actual buying decisions of the not-yet citizen-consumers. In this context, moral education – encompassing social media campaigns, school workshops and personal communication – served to activate individuals as independent agents, entitled to demand change, capable of moral reflection and decision-making, and ready to participate in collective political actions. As we have seen, however, Eetti faced a whole host of problems in conveying their complex moral and political message. Most notably, the demanding and open-ended guidelines offered by the organisation were often misunderstood by the recipients, who were accustomed to straightforward consumerist scripts.

### **6.3 TWO PORTRAITS OF CITIZEN-CONSUMERS**

Having analysed the new constellation of responsibility charted by Eetti and the subject position of citizen-consumer that this rearticulation furnished, here I examine in detail how one can successfully internalise this subject

position. To reiterate, the conventional definition of citizen-consumer accentuates the interfusion between civic concerns and consumption, with the latter essentially informed by some social and environmental concerns (see Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Gabriel and Lang, 1995; Johnston, 2008; Micheletti, 2003; Scammell, 2000; Trentmann, 2006). Empirically, I examine the in-depth interviews with two most committed Eetti Helsinki volunteers to retrace their conceptualisations of the position of citizen-consumers. This is important because each citizen-consumer is unique in their 'combination of shared practices, the level of integration of these practices, and the story-lines that he or she connects to those practices' (Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010: 1895; see also Dombos, 2012; Massey, 2006). Methodologically, I am much more interested in the discursive articulations and appropriations of the position than in its practical enactments. Thus, I did not complement the interviews with observations of the activists' actual consumer behaviours beyond the context of Eetti. Consequently, when I quote the descriptions of their practices in contexts to which I did not have direct access, I approach them as emic understandings of what it meant to be a citizen-consumer and how one was supposed to act.

### **ROSA: A KNOWLEDGE-BASED MORAL COMMITMENT**

I met Rosa<sup>105</sup> at the very first meeting of Eetti Helsinki that I attended in April 2015, at which point she said she had been involved with Eetti for about a year. She actively participated in most of the subsequent monthly meetings of Eetti Helsinki as well as in many of the events and training sessions organised by Eetti. Rosa is in her mid-30s. Vocational business education has led her to a series of assistant positions at various national and international companies operating in the Finnish private sector. Over some 15 years of professional experience she has dealt primarily with marketing and procurement. At the time of the interview, which took place on 23 February 2016, Rosa had recently started a new job, switching from the small-sized office of a Nordic medical supply firm to a newly started micro-branch of another company in the same sector. Her previous positions had been in importing and retailing jewellery, including diamonds, and in industrial electronics. Being intimately engaged in global sourcing and international trade, Rosa became aware of the problems it entailed and developed a keen interest in finding solutions to pressing social and environmental issues, with broadly conceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) as her main concern.

Rosa's life situation can be considered stable, both professionally and privately, which chimed with the – arguably somewhat reductionist (see Adams and Raisborough, 2008) – picture of ethical consumers as rather affluent (e.g., Goodman, 2004; Linton et al., 2004; Littler, 2008; Tallontire et

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<sup>105</sup> This is a pseudonym. She requested anonymity as significant parts of the interview pertained to her current and previous workplaces.

al., 2001). As she said, these favourable conditions had enabled her to actively support a variety of causes: 'Because I feel like my life is quite good right now and I feel like can I do something [so] that even more people could have a good life'. The causes she supported included, but were not limited to, fair and ethical trade, organic farming and food production, protection of the Baltic Sea and conservation of green areas in Helsinki, and child sponsorship in Africa. In her grocery shopping, Rosa relied on labels and certification schemes, such as Fairtrade and organic, and on local produce. She also experimented with food cooperatives and community-supported agriculture. Summing up her rich activist record, Rosa confessed that 'maybe I'm a little bit more active than most people, but these kinds of things are my hobbies'. As was clear during the interview and throughout our acquaintanceship, 'hobbies' were for her not activities performed for pure enjoyment, but serious commitments enacted in free time to quench her thirst for knowledge and a better understanding of the world. Participating in after-work meetings dedicated to the problematics of global trade and weekend training sessions on CSR were one path along which her quest for knowledge proceeded. Actually, the CSR-related 'hobbies' started to spill over into her professional life, with social compliance certificates influencing her workplace choices and ethical concerns becoming a defining feature of her identity as an employee:

When I was trying to get this [new] job I got, I was very open about my hobbies. Because they asked about my hobbies, I said that these CSR issues are really important to me and I'm a member of Eetti, and I put my Instagram account in [the application], [so that] they can see everything I do. Because I wanted them to know that I'm into these issues, so if you have a problem with it, then don't hire me. (23 February 2016)

Rosa regarded CSR as a way of taming the inherent greediness of private firms that she observed throughout her work life and that, according to her, prevented fair financial redistribution within the production and supply chain. This concern over redistribution also shone through her definition of ethical trade as governance (see Hughes et al., 2008):

For me, [ethical trade is] that every party gets what they deserve. And there's not just one party who is getting 90 per cent of it, and then somebody gets a scrap. I think that everybody should get as much money as they need to get a decent life and not need to worry about food or shelter, and that their kids can go to school and don't need to work. (23 February 2016)

Despite her deep interest in ethical trade, Rosa was not able to pinpoint its specific source: 'Actually, it's really hard to say when it started and why. Somehow I just started to *care*' (my italics). Asked, in turn, about the beginning of her involvement with Eetti, Rosa confidently pointed to the training on fair trade co-organised by Eetti and Fairtrade Finland as she had not been familiar with the former organisation beforehand. She had learnt about the training from Fairtrade Finland's Facebook fan page, which she

started to follow around that time. Rosa was immediately drawn to Eetti as an organisation that worked ‘to make the world a better place’, and that provided a community of like-minded people that she had been longing for. Her involvement with the organisation was also instrumental in her quest for knowledge: ‘One reason I’m in Eetti is because I want to know more about these things, they provide a lot of training and information that I find very interesting.’ In fact, Rosa made it perfectly clear in the course of the interview that she connected dedication to ethical trade with acquisition of knowledge about the lived realities and structural workings of global trade:

Some people need the knowledge and then they start to want to make changes. And some people need more like feeling-based things... [For me it was] maybe knowledge, 80 per cent, and feelings, 20. Because I feel for people, but I also want the facts. I usually tend to make decisions based on facts and I want to know everything before I make a decision. (23 February 2016)

Even though she acknowledged that ‘feelings’ constituted a legitimate basis for some people to support ethical trade, at different points in our conversation Rosa expressed an explicit conviction that presenting others with the correct facts had the potential of engaging them with the cause. In that, she echoed the fair trade literature that regards knowledge and information as critical resources in garnering public support for the cause (see, for example, Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Le Velly, 2007). Rosa claimed that in everyday life marked, on the one hand, by a spate of mundane responsibilities and, on the other, by consumption frenzy, people tended to forget that at the beginning of the production chain there were human beings, too. The revealing of the actual ‘people with their own lives and feelings and friends’, Rosa argued, would prompt at least some people to consume more ethical goods in a more measured manner. In that, her argument echoed what academic literature calls ‘defetishisation of commodities’ (see Fridell, 2006; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Slater, 1997). However, Rosa was acutely aware of some limitations of defetishisation as a project aimed at reintroducing moral obligations into global trade relations.

Like other interviewees, Rosa diagnosed a problem of mistrust that underpinned the (mis)understanding of fair trade in Finnish society (see Korhonen and Seppala, 2005). As a particularly vivid example, she cited an anecdote from her new workplace where she was trying to convince her boss to consider switching the office coffee to a Fairtrade-certified option. When Rosa first introduced the idea by referring to the fact that many of the firm’s customers were Fairtrade towns, he dismissed the suggestion on the grounds that he did not like certification schemes, because they only served to make money for the coordinating organisation. Assuming that his animosity resulted from the misrecognition of Fairtrade as a workplace certification that the office would need to pay for obtaining, Rosa became annoyed by his ignorance: ‘I hate it when people have opinions without having the right facts.’



However, she was ready to nudge him further towards the possibility of holding a presentation about Fairtrade, again manifesting the conviction that adequate knowledge can change people's attitudes. She was determined to have the office foodstuffs switched to Fairtrade-certified alternatives, although she realised that it would need to start from a product that was less 'personal' than coffee. In the previous November, Rosa participated in a meeting facilitated by Eetti with the CEO of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC), at which I was also present. The guest's testimony of the improvements that Fairtrade had brought in the bargaining power and business skills of underprivileged producers equipped Rosa with a new argument against those to whom '[Fairtrade] doesn't matter and it doesn't make a difference, and it's just some kind of scam'.

In addition, Rosa recognised some of the more deep-seated moral barriers that prevented fellow consumers from adopting ethical conduct. For some, the pursuit of their own benefit seemed to disenable them from caring for others – in line with the vision of a self-interested and egoistic consumer offered by the critics of consumerism (see, for example, Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Scammell, 2000; Slater, 1997; Soper, 2004, 2007). More fundamentally and less explicitly, Rosa connected ethical consumption to accepting, at least some, culpability for the plight of Southern producers and workers, whose misfortune is conventionally considered to be the result of their insufficiently entrepreneurial conduct (see Dean, 1999):

[M]ostly, I think, [Finnish] people think of [Southern producers and workers] as just poor and stupid, and [that] they can't do better, and that's why they're poor still. And they don't understand the whole system, how it works with the big companies and the taxation and all this. And it's a pity, because I think that if people understand that it's not the people's fault in these poor countries, but it's actually the West who is doing it to them. Yeah, I feel that people should know more about it and maybe they should bring up this in schools more. About the whole world economy and how it works, yeah. That's one thing I've learnt and I'm happy that I've learnt it, even though it makes me sad and I get anxious knowing about it. But still, I feel like one needs to know these things to understand the big picture. (23 February 2016)

It is worth quoting Rosa at length here, because this excerpt shows how she seamlessly plugged the knowledge about global trade – which she explicitly acknowledged as a crucial factor in her becoming an ethical consumer – into morality. In that, she explicated the possible consequences of an encounter between reliable information and the appropriately attuned individual moral compass (for a similar observation made by a Hungarian ethical consumer see Dombos, 2012: 131–2). While she mentioned that knowing about dreadful things in the world gave her a 'hard time sleeping at night', Rosa was aware that this was not the case with everybody. She recounted once again the heated

discussion with her boss about Fairtrade coffee, when he derided her concerns, by stating that if he had thought about the misery of producers halfway across the world, he would not even have been able to buy any clothes. Rosa regarded this ‘everything or nothing’ attitude as particularly futile, because – in her words – ‘if you just change one small thing, it really matters’. Thus, although Rosa tried to live ethically and she felt guilty about making some less ethical choices, she was at times ready for moral trade-offs:

Maybe I’m a little bit black and white with this thing. But I don’t have a good feeling thinking about [having bought] this TV. I just read an article about a lady who lost her hands in a factory that made the flat screen TVs, because they haven’t got any training about safety issues, and they were working too long hours, and there was too much rush. And then the machine cut off her hands just because I’m gonna get this really cheap TV. And everybody already has a TV, but everybody needs to buy a new TV every year. So, I don’t know, it doesn’t feel good. I bought a TV anyway, but I get this thing in my heart when I think about it that actually there’s this person who made it. It just didn’t appear here [out of nowhere] and it has consequences. (23 February 2016)

Rosa was acutely aware that in buying a new TV – like her boss who ‘wanted to be fair to himself’ by drinking the coffee he liked – she had put her own needs before the direr needs of others. In a way, then, she diagnosed in her behaviour the internalised model of moral obligations that Massey (2004: 9) describes as a ‘nested set of Russian dolls’ whereby those close and dear, starting perhaps from oneself, are prioritised, with the obligations fading away outwards<sup>106</sup>. At the same time, however, Rosa was at pains to convince herself that she could not ‘give up everything to be fair’ and that she did many other things right. Rosa had previously engaged in a similar moral management of consumption during the documentary screening that I mentioned in the previous section. Before the film started, she showed me the purchases she had made at the design market: a basket produced by a WFTO-certified company that designed in Finland and wove in Kenya using traditional techniques and recycled materials, and an upcycled blouse made by a Finnish company from a second-hand scarf. Following the screening of the documentary, which, among other things, criticised consumerism and fast fashion, Rosa assured me, apparently ashamed by her alleged shopping frenzy, that she only bought ‘stuff’ when she really needed it.

Rosa’s moral compass attuned to the injustices of global trade firmly interlocked consumption and shopping with guilt and shame. Simultaneously, however, Rosa felt compelled to consume, either to meet social standards – e.g., in terms of clothing appropriate for an office job – or to provide herself and her close ones with some degree of comfort, as was the case with

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<sup>106</sup> Similar dynamics, of course, underpins Miller’s (2001a) ‘dialectics of shopping’ as well as the ‘dialectics of care’ in Pizca del Mundo’s communication analysed in Section 5.4 of this dissertation.

purchasing a new TV. In a sense, consuming was for Rosa a moral obligation: '[W]e have to consume at some level to keep this system that we have built going' and to allow producers in the South to sustain their livelihoods. This approach is, as we have seen, congruent with moral education carried out by Eetti that neither demonises consumption nor assigns the main responsibility for 'changing the world' to consumers.

To complement her sometimes compromised ethical consumption, Rosa invested considerable resources in mundane advocacy of ethical trade. One such effort, which I have already mentioned, was her self-appointed mission to introduce Fairtrade coffee to two consecutive workplaces. Rosa's everyday lobbying, however, transpired not only in her professional spaces, but also in private social circles: '[Q]uite often I talk to my friends, even though they might not be so interested... I'm sure that my friends have learnt a lot by listening to my stories about different things.' In doing so, she shared information acquired about specific cases of firms and products, but also tried to convey a very fundamental message that individual actions, even ostensibly trivial ones, could make a difference, especially if many such acts coalesced:

Sometimes I try to make some people more aware, just spread the information that just by doing really small things, you can actually make a difference, if we all start to care. By sending just one email every year to a company, if everyone does that, we actually can make a difference and make the companies realise that people care about workers, and where the stuff comes from that they buy, and so on. (23 February 2016)

In this excerpt, Rosa mentioned the essential form of advocacy that Eetti promoted: contacting brands in order to request information about their production chains, demand transparency and provide feedback about their practices in the Global South, be it positive or negative. Rosa made such behaviour, termed by Micheletti and Stolle (2008: 753) 'discursive political consumerism', a habit plaited into the fabric of her everyday life. In person, she would talk to shop clerks and managers as well as market sellers to inquire about specific products. Using technology-mediated communication, she would ask brands about their general codes of conduct and possible subcontracting practices in the Global South. She would visit company websites and conduct extensive online research before opting for a specific non-food product. And even if sometimes Rosa decided to buy a product that did not exactly meet her ethical standards, she believed that she had at least let the company know that somebody was keeping a watchful eye on their practices.

Besides thoroughly doing her bit as a citizen-consumer, Rosa maintained – echoing Eetti's position – that ethical trade would only be warranted if an adequate legal framework were in place. Her stand differed from the usual justifications offered by Eetti in that Rosa drew a link between instituting legislation to prevent unethical production and trade practices, and preserving

truly fair market competition through establishing the ‘level playing fields’ (Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010: 1894) for ethical products:

Of course I think that there should be legislation. The European Union and all these other organisations should actually make it impossible to do things [unethically]. Because otherwise it will be hard for companies to compete with each other. If there’s a company who tries to do things better and pay the workers better, then it makes them not do so good in the market, because their products will be more expensive. So that’s why the legislation should [stipulate that] everybody has to do it and then, therefore, everybody’s on the same line. So then that’s why I think it’s stupid that companies can choose if they do the good way or the bad way, because of course they don’t want to do it [ethically], because they want to do well in the market. (23 February 2016)

With this argument, Rosa located ethical trade firmly within the framework of the current capitalist market economy. In this model, the legally imposed preservation of the level playing field would incentivise firms and corporations to ‘internalise’ some of the currently externalised social and environmental costs of their operations. At the same time as she linked her argument to the ideal of fair competition in market economy, Rosa poked – yet again echoing Eetti quite literally – at another pillar of late-capitalist economy: sovereign choice. Indeed, she argued that choice should be limited and policed politically, so that unethical products would be removed from the supermarkets:

[I]t’s quite absurd that actually you can go to a store and choose if you buy this [Fairtrade] thing, and then this thing [made by] illegal migrants who don’t have anything and they’re like slaves. And how is it even possible to have this system? How did we let this situation go so far that it’s possible that we have people working as slaves in 2015? So, I really think that we need to get these laws obviously to be more strict. (23 February 2016)

Naturally, for stricter trade regulations to be passed and enforced, politicians in office must sympathise with the cause and commit to it. Thus, before casting her vote in the general election of 2015, Rosa attended a meeting with a prominent left-wing candidate to ensure that the issues to do with ethical trade figured on his agenda (see Wheeler, 2012b). Here again, her main motivation was to let the politician know that ‘people cared’.

In conclusion, this portrait is of a mature citizen-consumer whose engagement in ethical trade goes well beyond the academic requirement of sprinkling certain civic concerns over inevitably compromised consumption choices. Although Rosa was sure of her power to influence the unjust arrangement of global trade, she appreciated that the more people acted on behalf of the movement, the greater the impact. Thus, to enact responsibility she relentlessly – in line with Young’s (2004: 383) prescription – tried to recruit other people to support the cause, both in her professional and private life. Knowledge and information were the main resource that she pursued, a

sizeable portion of it obtained through her involvement in Eetti. Knowledge helped Rosa to exercise informed choice, but also to convince others about the merit and significance of ethical trade in general and Fairtrade in particular. She also deeply internalised and enacted in her everyday life the tactics and methods proposed by Eetti to little by little advance ethical trade.

While consciously prioritising knowledge and information, Rosa engaged in a nuanced moral deliberation on another level. Mindful of the diverse and competing interests driving consumer choice – which Miller (2001a) captured in his nuanced analysis of the ‘dialectics of shopping’ – she accepted and bore the moral consequences entailed by her decisions. The guilt that haunted her following ethical trade-offs testified to her view of consumption as a moral undertaking, not only rational enterprise. In the philosophical typology expounded by Barnett et al. (2005b: 13), Rosa’s inclination to buy goods whose production did not induce harm can be interpreted as a manifestation of deontological ethics of consumption: ‘I try to make such choices that don’t affect people on the other side of the world in a bad way’. This principle rested on an explicitly acknowledged equal worthiness of all people (‘[T]hey’re being forced to use chemicals without protection and I can’t see why their lives would be worth less than ours in some way’). As a result, in her consumption choices Rosa prioritised ethical options or withheld her purchasing power altogether.

On the other hand, Rosa’s decisions to at times compromise this principle and buy products that did not pass the ethical litmus test might be taken as utilitarian: not only did she pursue her own benefit, but also the viability of income for those in the Global South whose livelihoods depended on the global trade system (see Barnett et al., 2005b: 16). In addition, her commitment to ethical trade was predicated on a wish to live a good and ethical life in which she could pass on at least some of the good fortune that she had received. Barnett et al. (2005b) link this approach to virtue ethics.

Taken together, the complex interplay of the three ethical outlooks – deontological, utilitarian and virtue-related – testifies to the potential of ethical trade not only in ‘enabling people to change their consumption practices, although this is important, but also [in] facilitating more widespread public participation in debates and decisions about the meanings, objectives and responsibilities involved in contemporary consumption’ (Barnett et al., 2005b; see also Massey, 2006: 93). Rosa, then, wilfully and dutifully adopted the subject position of citizen-consumer constructed by Eetti’s communication. In doing so, she successfully brought together three distinct domains: consumption, citizenship and morality – the third one often overlooked in the theoretical literature and empirical investigations of citizen-consumers.

## **MELISSA: AN INTELLECTUAL PROJECT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

Melissa is a student in her mid-20s. Having previously obtained a bachelor's degree in business and administration from a university of applied science (*ammattikorkeakoulu*), she is currently enrolled in the bachelor's programme in social and public policy at the University of Helsinki. At the time of the interview, which took place on 1 September 2015, Melissa was also employed in the global education department of a Finnish non-profit second-hand chain. She described her job as follows: '[W]e go and speak about human rights to children, play with them, and through playing or doing t-shirts we raise the awareness [of] what are human rights and environmental values [and] that you have to protect nature'. The main mission of the chain is to fund development cooperation projects in the Global South, primarily through selling clothes. Domestically, the organisation is also engaged in recycling garments. Melissa first joined the chain as a shop assistant after leaving her previous job on the Baltic Sea cruise ship. Unlike cruises, which she considered environmentally harmful, the job in the second-hand chain fully aligned with her values.

These values, which clustered around the broadly conceived notion of sustainable development, were also supported and enacted 'in practice' through her volunteer work at Eetti. At the time of the interview, she had been involved with Eetti for over three years, including half a year as a coordinator of the Eetti Helsinki local group. In this capacity, Melissa cooperated closely with Eetti's employees in organising a series of events that educated participants about the themes on which Eetti were currently working and incentivised them to support these campaigns. To that end, she was also involved in numerous outreach activities, such as bringing the Eetti stall to various thematically relevant fairs that targeted particularly those who had previous interest in globalisation, development, trade, consumption and the like. This was a significant difference compared to Rosa's *modus operandi*, which was aimed at introducing ethical trade and consumption to spaces and people without any (obvious) prior concern for the consequences of economic globalisation. Melissa's strategy supported Eetti's role as a platform for activating the already formed citizen-consumers. More specifically, she aimed to assemble a sizeable community of like-minded people who would support one another in building a more sustainable lifestyle and, ultimately, 'make the government support [such a] lifestyle'.

Retrospectively, Melissa located the beginning of her interest in sustainability and ethical trade, which for her were inextricably bound together, in the development of 'critical thinking' that pushed her to question the 'big picture' and the hegemonic imperative of economic growth. This happened when she was still treading the path of a business student that she had inherited from her parents:

I got a lot from parents, I would say. It was like a suggested path... I think they have... ideas [of the older] generation and I was kind of [following]

the path given [by] that generation, but it doesn't really apply to our generation and our times anymore so well. It was maybe a good idea to study some business in the 80s. (1 September 2015)

Melissa attributed the change in her attitude to some 'big moments', two of which stood out as especially crucial. Firstly, soon after commencing her business studies, she walked the Camino de Santiago pilgrim way in Spain. That ascetic backpacking experience taught her that 'less is more' and steered her towards a more minimalistic lifestyle. In a way, then, it ruptured the consumerist frenzy and showed that a less materialistic way of life was possible and even enriching. Perhaps, theoretically speaking, the experience of winding through St. James's Way sensitised Melissa to the allure of 'alternative hedonism', that is, the 'motives for changing consumption practice that derive from the more negative aspects for consumers themselves of their... materialistic lifestyle, and are fed by a sense that important pleasures and sources of gratification are being lost or unrealized as a consequence' (Soper, 2007: 211). What was lost for Melissa in her former consumerist lifestyle was the romanticised connection to nature, which she identified as an important trope from her childhood. Growing up in a smaller municipality bordering the Capital Region to the west, Melissa said that she had spent her childhood 'quite in the woods'. Living in the city centre of Helsinki, she realised that 'humans need to reconnect to nature to feel good and if we lose that, it's [such a] big lack [in] our well-being'.

The second formative moment was her 1.5-year-long student exchange in a south-western state of Germany governed by the Green party, Baden-Württemberg. Done as a part of her business studies, the exchange allowed Melissa to situate her alternative-hedonist sensibility within the wider framework of sustainable development where economic growth and environmental betterment were supposed to interlock with the concern for social development and more just redistribution of resources:

Well, [sustainable development] is kind of planning for the future. I feel that there is kind of a clock ticking and a really complex problem ahead. For the resources, for the environment... And not only for myself, but [for] the next generations. [I'm interested in sustainability] to do something about it. And that comes from the idea that I respect my own life [and] what I have had. And I am thankful that I have been [living] in such good conditions that I feel that I have to give it back to those who haven't had the chance. (1 September 2015)

She came back to Finland inspired by the, seemingly, universally shared social commitment to the environment that she had encountered in Germany, among the locals as well as her fellow international students. Motivated to act on her pledge to sustainability and to 'use these business studies for a good cause', Melissa joined Eetti.

As a part of Melissa's effort to lead a more sustainable life and imagine a more sustainable world, ethical trade was, to a great extent, an intellectual

project. For Melissa – accustomed to ‘applied sciences’, practical projects and pragmatic solutions – the deliberative manner of Eetti, where the previously taken-for-granted practices were questioned to identify and contemplate ethical problems, rendered the organisation an ‘interesting place to gain knowledge’. Melissa’s newly found critical attitude necessitated an extensive research into the idea of ethical trade – and especially Fairtrade – as a prelude to making an informed choice about joining Eetti:

[When] I was at Maailma Kylässä, this same festival where I [first] saw Eetti, I also bought the book about the criticism of Fairtrade... And I went to read that to make myself sure that there’s nothing so critical that I wouldn’t overcome or couldn’t understand... Then I was reading the book and understood also that this whole certificate is in the process. It can’t start from the ideal [version of] fair trade, but it can get better... But the story was that, actually, I’ve started with the hardest criticism to [decide] do I support this? (1 September 2015)

Like Rosa, Melissa firmly believed that ‘critical thinking’ infused with the awareness of problems and accurate information prompted consumers to make more ethical decisions (for an academic articulation of this argument see, for example, Goodman, 2010; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Le Velly, 2007). Thus, she set off to educate herself as an advocate of ethical trade, capable of recruiting other citizen-consumers. To practise what she preached, after completing her degree in business and administration Melissa began another study programme, this time in social and public policy. This decision was dictated, at least in part, by her commitment to sustainability and ethical trade. A range of courses included in her studies allowed her to expand her general knowledge about global trade, but also to delve into particularly interesting issues that she often chose for investigation in the final assignments. As Melissa admitted, the extent of knowledge that she had acquired significantly complicated her everyday consumption choices:

That’s really hard when you read so much about it and then you go to [the] supermarket and carry all the moral problems on your shoulders... And I had times that it was really hard for me to get a lot of information and then try to apply it to my own life. And then you kind of lose your own life to panic or something. Yeah, I’ve learnt that you don’t have to do everything so radical[ly], but some choices I’ve made, like not eating meat or chicken. But I still eat fish, [be]cause I’m fishing. I try to make some logical [choices] that when I can kill the animal, then I’m also allowed to eat it. But then [my lifestyle] doesn’t make any sense when I still eat eggs, because [they] come from the same farms and animals are still used. But I also feel [that there would be a] need for more community support for that kind of lifestyle. (1 September 2015)

The thorough dissection of her lifestyle as a series of (il)logical choices attested to the intellectual and analytical nature of her involvement in ethical trade and sustainability. Given the recognition of the impossibility of fully ethical and



'logical' consumption, the knowledge Melissa obtained did not so much dictate her consumption choices, even though that function was important as well, as inform her vision of a better, more sustainable world. This vision hinged on Melissa's appreciation of sustainability and ethical trade as a collective effort, rather than an individualistic consumerist quest. Situating ethical trade as a shared undertaking within the wider framework of sustainable development also suggested legislation and working 'on the structures' as the preferred way of realising this vision in which case advocacy and awareness raising were paramount to individual ethical consumption. In line with Eetti's reasoning, Melissa viewed her responsibility as a (citizen-)consumer in a constellation with the responsibilities of other actors (see Young, 2003: 40):

[E]verybody can do something, not everything. And it has to come from many parties, not only from consumers. It has to come from the brands, from the producers, from the governments, different institutions... So then also responsibilities spread to many institutions... The best [way to control global trade that] I know is legislation. [It has] the biggest influence, but it needs people [to support it]. (1 September 2015)

Even though Melissa generally sympathised with environmentalist and green movements, in the context of globalisation and global trade the retreat to self-sufficient households and communities, promoted by certain varieties of green movement, was not a viable path to sustainability. A more politically regulated and 'humane' global economy, which would consider social welfare and environmental protection, was. If such legislation were to be introduced and unethical products rolled back from the market, the ideas of ethical consumer choice and responsibility exercised through shopping would become obsolete. Thus, intuitively echoing the sentiment expressed by Young (2004: 380), Melissa nurtured a strong belief in shared political responsibility and worldwide legislation, mediated through state and transnational institutions, as the informed and feasible paths to a more sustainable and just world.

On that note, some two weeks after our interview, she sent me a message about a panel discussion that frustrated her, because the panellists disregarded political means for achieving sustainable fashion. Instead, they advocated consumerist solutions, which Melissa found problematic for two reasons. Firstly, they unevenly distributed responsibility with consumers bearing more of it than commercial companies: '[P]oor working conditions came up, but [the] solutions were [loaded onto] consumers' shoulders. [One panellist] said that everyone should learn about materials... and the companies should make their production [chains and practices] more transparent.' Secondly, Melissa identified the commonly raised issue of inequality that consumerist solutions to ethical problems generated (see, for example, Johnston, 2001; Littler, 2008): '[W]hile only the rich can afford ethical and ecological things, [the] poor remain unethical.'

What differentiated Melissa's casting of ethical trade within the framework of sustainability from Rosa's account of difficult choices and their implications

was the shifted moral weight of the cause. Where for Rosa being a citizen-consumer signified continuous moral deliberation, struggle and occasional guilt, for Melissa the morality of ethical trade resided in enacting political responsibility shared to a different extent among various actors (see Young, 2003). In fact, the only moral code that Melissa recounted during the interview was that ‘you have to do what you feel is right’. This guideline reverberated in her observation on the relative character of moral values and the related claim that whatever could be done to address the ethical problems of global trade had to be a ‘satisfying compromise’. Even though Melissa acknowledged the inevitability of moral compromises, the unpredictability of an outcome did not absolve her of the responsibility to act towards a more just world:

But with money comes responsibility, that’s what I believe. And if you have a lot of money, you also have more responsibility to use it better, and better for the common good and not only for yourself... [T]here is some small responsibility, not big, but small, small responsibility for everyone. (1 September 2015)

Taken together, these excerpts show that while Melissa believed in the importance of individual enactments of responsibility, including through ethical consumption, she located their true force in reforging them into a collective political action. For that reason, she invested all her efforts into assembling a community of like-minded people who could together exercise pressure and lobby for political solutions and legislation. Melissa carried out this community-building primarily as a coordinator of Eetti Helsinki, but also among her like-minded friends and fellow university students.

Tying all the threads together, a portrait of Melissa as a committed citizen-consumer emerges. Incited by the ‘alternative hedonist’ longing for a less consumerist and more sustainable life (see Soper, 2007), she ensconced herself in a subject position of citizen-consumer furnished for her by Eetti. In doing so, however, Melissa became a citizen-consumer of a slightly different kind than those usually imagined in the academic literature. While she relinquished choice as the main technology of impacting on global trade, viewing it as an always already imperfect moral compromise, Melissa turned to activist and community involvement geared towards political ends. Thus, her approach shifted the usually assumed vector of influence between citizenship and consumption: rather than implanting some civic concerns into consumption as a separate domain in life, she reimagined consumption as a political playing field. The prominence of sustainable development as an overarching framework within which ethical trade was situated in its capacity to ensure social equality – the notion present only in the background of Eetti’s communication – brought Melissa’s version of a citizen-consumer closer to the theoretical construct of ‘environmental citizenship’ (Dobson, 2007; Lockie, 2009; Seyfang, 2005, 2006; Spaargaren and Oosterveer, 2010).

In a nutshell, environmental citizenship inhabits an intersection between environmental protection and the deterritorialised concern for the well-being

of other people (Lockie, 2009: 195). Environmental citizens are expected to accept 'environmental responsibility on a planetary scale' in reducing the negative impact of their routines on proximate as well as distant others (Seyfang, 2006: 384). In that, the idea of environmental citizenship proves helpful in articulating the interlocking goals of the environmental and social betterment that underpinned Melissa's reiteration of ethical trade (see Dobson, 2007; Seyfang, 2005). The original concept of environmental citizenship might be problematic theoretically in that it overemphasises the self-regulation of individual lifestyles (Lockie, 2009; Valencia Sáiz, 2005), which for Melissa was secondary to collective political activities. More pertinently to Melissa's subjectivity as an environmental citizen(-consumer), Spaargaren and Oosterveer (2010: 1891) reorient the notion towards political participation in the public discourses on sustainable development whereby the rights and duties of citizens are deliberated.

### **AGENCY IN BECOMING A CITIZEN-CONSUMER**

By way of a conclusion to this section, I will make a brief methodological point. According to the Foucauldian theory of subjectification, subjects are discursively produced through the 'dividing practices' that either split them inside or divide them from others (Foucault, 1982b: 778). While Eetti's discourse of ethical trade seemingly consolidated individuals internally by tying the supposedly separate positions of 'citizen' and 'consumer' together, it sectioned the already formed 'citizen-consumers' off from the rest of the society defined by a shared 'mental landscape' unsupportive of ethical trade (for similar findings see Dombos, 2012; Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004). As we have seen, Eetti's moral education was aimed at constructing the citizen-consumer: an active social actor supporting ethical trade as a way to reduce injustices of global trade through engagement in Eetti's campaigns and activities and, to a lesser extent, through their consumption. People exposed to Eetti's discourse did not always adopt the thus furnished subject position and, at times, misrecognised themselves as unidimensional consumers.

The portraits of Rosa and Melissa, however, showed that the subject position of citizen-consumer could be embraced. Even though both internalised the same discourse and similar techniques to those promoted by Eetti, their particular conceptualisations of the role of citizen-consumers varied. While Rosa's commitment to ethical trade was predicated on her personal moral compass, for Melissa it hinged on shared political responsibility. While for Rosa ethical trade existed as a practicable 'hobby' alongside her other commitments, Melissa viewed it as a part of a larger intellectual project to imagine a more sustainable world. While for Rosa an informed consumer choice and individual small-scale mundane advocacy were the primary tools for advancing the cause of ethical trade little by little, Melissa's goal was a bold collective action geared towards politically

guaranteeing a more sustainable world. Hence, as Wheeler (2012a) argues, rather than being a figure set in stone, citizen-consumer is a shifting and malleable position.

As these variations illustrate, there is a space for individual agency in ensconcing oneself in the subject positions furnished by any discourse. Indeed, according to Foucault (1982b), subject positions constructed by discourses are neither determined nor determining. In this empirical case, the subject positions were clearly produced through an ongoing interplay between the agency of individuals, the performative power of ethical trade discourse and the structures of a consumerist society and global economy (see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003). Thus, this section provided a situated account of how individuals adopted and creatively reconceptualised the subject position of citizen-consumer offered by Eetti's communication. Certainly, although Rosa and Melissa carried the thus reinvented subject position of citizen-consumer through their daily lives, by no means did it constitute a 'master identity'. Rather, it was retrieved from the inventory of subject positions in contexts akin to consumption and trade (see Davies, 1991). On the one hand, in paying attention to the micro-level of individual reiterations and articulations of the subject position of citizen-consumer, I tried to avoid the trap of assuming automatic identification (Törrönen, 2001: 315). With the noteworthy exception of Autio and colleagues' (2009) investigation of 'green' subjectivities among young Finnish consumers, this agentic aspect of taking up the subject position on offer has been thus far largely overlooked in the empirical investigations of citizen-consumers, which usually stopped at identifying the discursive acts that helped authorities and campaigners (see Everson and Joerges, 2008; Giesler and Veresiu, 2014; Lerner, 1997; Slocum, 2004; Wheeler, 2012a) or commercial entities (see Johnston, 2008) to construct the desired subject positions. In other words, the relevant research was rarely interested in how these discursive subject positions served individuals in the process of subjectification (for a notable exception see Dombos, 2012). On the other hand, by situating the accounts of micro-level enactments of the subject position of citizen-consumers in the broader context of ethical trade communication, I committed to the view of subject positions not as ad hoc identifications disassociated from the social context and produced independently in the conversational setting, but as positionings influenced by available discursive repositories as well as social and material circumstances (Butler, 2001; Davies, 1991).

## **6.4 LANDSCAPE OF GLOBAL TRADE IN EETTI'S COMMUNICATION**

In this empirical chapter, I set off to investigate how Eetti mediated between producers and consumers. The analysis proceeded in three moves. Firstly, I examined the rearticulation of responsibility in Eetti's moral education,

relocated both from the autonomous market forces implicated in the orthodox formulations of free trade and from the responsabilised individual of advanced liberalism. Instead, responsibility figured in Eetti's communication as a shared moral and political commitment hooked in the participation in the unjust global trade (see Young, 2003, 2004, 2006). As such, responsibility enveloped a web of actors that included producers, consumers, brand companies, national and transnational political decision-makers and intergovernmental organisations. Only cooperation between these different actors could ensure that the inequalities corroding global trade would be resolved (see Fenton, 2008; Young, 2006). In this constellation, the responsibility of each agent varied in kind and degree. As the main addressees of Eetti's communication, consumers were encouraged to consider their everyday consumption choices. However, the key concern for Eetti was to embolden consumers to ask the Finnish government to devise appropriate legislation, and to pressure firms for information about, and transparency in, their production chains (see Sassatelli, 2006). This rearticulation of responsibility necessitated the construction of a new consumer subject ready to take it up.

In the second move, I studied how the new subject position of citizen-consumer, focused on the collective and political dimension of ethical trade, was conceptualised and realised in Eetti's communication as moral education. Eetti considered the 'mental landscape' of Finland, characterised by mistrust in organisations and reluctance to demand change, of being inhabited by well-informed, but indolent and idle, not-yet citizen-consumers. In this setting, moral education – social media campaigns, school workshops as well as all the 'information work' performed by Eetti – served to activate individuals as citizen-consumers, imagined as independent agents entitled to demand change, capable of moral reflection and decision-making, and ready to participate in collective political actions. Breaking through the deeply entrenched consumer subjectivity was, as Törrönen (2001) emphasises, not automatic and involved a whole host of difficulties.

Thirdly, based primarily on in-depth interviews with the most committed Eetti Helsinki volunteers, I investigated how the subject position of citizen-consumer might be successfully internalised. In doing so, I focused on the rearticulations and appropriations of the 'original' Eetti' discourse of ethical trade. While both Rosa and Melissa clearly echoed Eetti's discourse, I found that they located their commitment to ethical trade in divergent frameworks. On the one hand, for Rosa ethical trade was both a component and consequence of her moral compass, guiding her everyday consumption choices as well as micro-political undertakings geared towards advancing the cause. On the other hand, Melissa situated ethical trade in the grand narrative of sustainable development. For her, consumption and other micro-practices were decidedly subservient to the bold political project of imagining and working towards a better world. As such, these rearticulations of the position of citizen-consumer emphasised two different pillars of responsibility: while

Rosa spotlighted the cosmopolitan moral disposition, Melissa turned to the full-on political commitment.

What we have in Eetti's moral education, then, is a new landscape of global trade, one in which Eetti redrew the connections between the two ends of the supply chain, clearly implicated organisers of, and mediators in, global trade, and brought them all together in a complex nexus of responsibility. In this landscape, most of the space was occupied by consumers who were perceived as the least responsible actors, but whose collective political power was seen as an indispensable impetus for change. Hence, Eetti's core role was that of a platform, bringing together citizen-consumers and supporting them in exerting their political influence.

Conspicuously, especially compared to Pizca del Mundo's communication, representations of Southern producers and workers were absent from this moral landscape. Indeed, Eetti represented Southern producers not with their faces and life stories, but through their location in the structures and processes of global trade. These processes and structures, which to a high degree determined the material conditions of producers' existence, were at the same time the locus of, and the condition for, responsibility. Such formulation diverted attention from the peculiarities and details of the predicament of individual producers, implicating the structures and process as the primary target for change. Altering the frameworks would, in turn, enable producers to improve their situation by their own means and on their own terms. In taking seriously the producers' agency and responsibility in changing the situation (see Noxolo et al., 2012; Raghuram et al., 2009; Young, 2003, 2004), Eetti did not seek to represent them, either through portraying them or acting on their behalf. Instead, the organisation strove to bring the representatives of Southern producers and workers to Finland in order to afford them the possibility of self-representation and expression. During my fieldwork, they succeeded twice. In October 2015, a Congolese-Italian peace activist, who had walked across Europe to raise awareness about conflict minerals in Congo, delivered a short speech at Eetti's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, and subsequently took part in the international trade game organised as a monthly meeting of Eetti Helsinki. In November 2015, the CEO of the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC) talked during the open breakfast meeting about the positive impact of Fairtrade on the farmers in her organisation. She also met up informally with several Eetti Helsinki volunteers. The laudable efforts to physically bring producers and consumers into the same (European) space continue to be, however, often thwarted by the harsh immigration policies that, ironically, lead to rejection of the visa applications of the Southern activists and disadvantaged producers on economic grounds.

Arguably, this discursively reimagined landscape of global trade facilitated the emergence and cultivation of a certain disposition towards distant others. This morally, but also politically, charged attitude was the most clearly embodied by Rosa and was manifest in her never-ending moral deliberations

that weighted her own interests and those of her close ones against the interests of distant others (for theoretical contemplations on the moral dilemmas involved in consumption see Massey, 2004; Miller, 2001a). Predicated on the extensive factual knowledge coupled with the awareness of conflicting interests and the acceptance of the impossibility of perfect moral choices, this disposition was exhibited in the conscious prioritisations, trade-offs and compromises that were fully cognisant of their moral and material implications. Massey (2006: 93) describes this attitude as 'outwardlookingness', that is, diving head-first 'into an awareness of the planet-wide configuration of trajectories, lives, practices... into which we are set and through which we are made. With this wider awareness, it is then possible to prioritise'. In a similar vein, Barnett et al. (2005b: 16) write about the development of dispositions 'that enable consumers to juggle what are often equally compelling ethical imperatives in a reasonable fashion' as an important function of ethical consumption. Using the terminology adopted in this dissertation, the ensconcing of consumers in the moral outlook that hinges on cosmopolitanism and sensitivity towards the predicament of distant others is the ultimate triumph of ethical trade communication as moral education.

## **7 UNIVERSALISTIC DISCOURSES, SITUATED MORALITIES: ETHICAL TRADE COMMUNICATION IN CONTEXT**

At its broadest, this dissertation is curious about how ethical trade is communicated in Poland and Finland. Ethical trade encases a wide set of projects that are aimed at reconstructing global trade as a web of more just and equitable relationships. Mindful of the internal diversity of the movement, I approach ethical trade as an intervention in global trade governance that recognises trade as a mediated moral relationship between people, specifically between producers in the ‘Global South’ and consumers in the ‘Global North’ (see Goodman, 2004; McEwan et al., 2017). Thus formulated, ethical trade stops being merely a set of consumption-related practices or production-oriented propositions, and instead becomes a communication problem: it relies on a moral disposition that, rather than being intrinsic to some people and not to others, must be constructed by ethical trade organisations through careful mediation. Following Silverstone’s (1999, 2002, 2007) take on mediation, I view ethical trade communication as an ethically charged process in which values, meanings and social reality itself are constructed (see also Carey, 2008). Within this conceptualisation, my research was particularly interested in how ethical trade communication could function as moral education geared towards constructing consumers who considered the impact of their everyday buying decisions on distant others (e.g., Barnett et al., 2005; Massey, 2006).

Empirically, I investigated *how* two ethical trade organisations, *Pizca del Mundo* in Poland and *Eetti* in Finland, mediated between producers and consumers in order to construct among consumers a moral disposition premised on solidarity, care and responsibility. The outcomes of these empirical excursions were presented in Chapters 5 and 6. In this chapter, I ponder *why* *Pizca del Mundo* and *Eetti* mediated between producers and consumers in the way they did. Here, the core argument is that ethical trade organisations mediate not only between producers and consumers, but also between universalistic moral discourses and situated moralities of consumers. In practice, this chapter strives to situate *Pizca del Mundo*’s and *Eetti*’s communication in a wider societal context.

The remainder of this chapter proceeds as follows. Firstly, I reveal the disjuncture between the conventional discourses of ethical trade that originate from the Anglosphere, specifically the consumer-centred moral economy and the North-South metageography, and their rearticulations in *Pizca del Mundo*’s and *Eetti*’s communication. Secondly, I argue that these rearticulations are anchored in, and accountable to, the ‘situated moralities’ of local societies. I also illuminate certain aspects of these situated moralities,



especially with regard to historical, economic and cultural conditions and the local discursive understandings of these conditions. Finally, I discuss how the notion of situated moralities contributes to the understanding of moral education.

## 7.1 COMMUNICATIONAL DISJUNCTURES

As previously mentioned, the key argument of this chapter is that there is a disjuncture between the universalistic moral discourses that ethical trade communication relies on, such as the consumer-centred moral economy and the North-South metageography, and the socially produced situated moralities of the recipients. This disjuncture is akin to Arthur Kleinman's distinction between 'ethical discourses' and individual 'moral experiences'. He defines ethical discourse as 'an abstract articulation and debate over codified values... conducted by elites, both local and global' (Kleinman, 1999: 363). In stark contrast to that, moral experiences are always local, situated and positioned views and practices. Although I opt for describing the discourses as moral – in that they relate to moral education – rather than ethical, the distinction proposed by Kleinman is instructive.

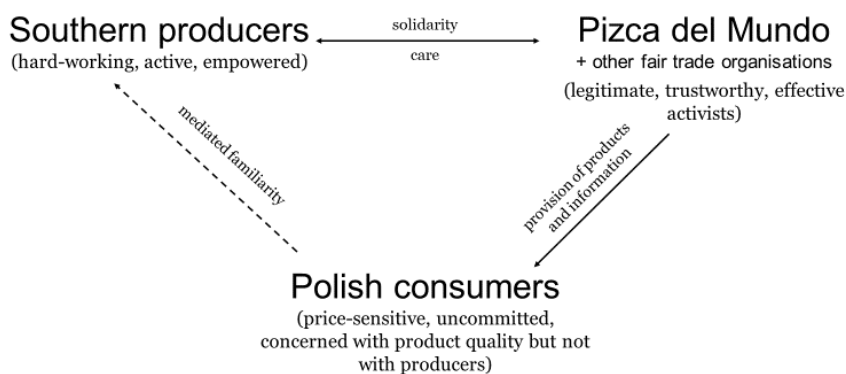
Following Kleinman, McEwan and colleagues (2017) describe the disjuncture in the Fairtrade certification scheme between the 'ethical discourses' produced in the North (Fairtrade standards) and the lived 'moral experience' of the producers. The unequal distribution of power within the Fairtrade system positions producers as 'passive recipients and adherents of Northern moralities' (McEwan et al., 2017: 576). In what follows, I will argue that McEwan and colleagues' spot-on observations still paint the picture with too broad a brush. That is, in assuming the existence of universal – although plural – 'Northern moralities', they obscure the dramatic differences in the moral attitudes and material circumstances in various countries conventionally termed 'Northern'. Adams and Raisborough (2008) come quite close to my viewpoint when they argue for a situated and nuanced understanding of self-reflexivity in the context of fair trade. Yet, their 'classed' reading of fair trade – as siding fair trade consumers with the underprivileged but deserving distant producers, while amplifying their contempt for the local 'undeserving' underclass – remains within the national British frame.

The presumption of a 'universal' (be it 'Northern' or global) morality is, in fact, symptomatic of the current research on ethical trade. With its heavy focus on the Anglosphere, and the UK and US in particular (for a literature review that proves this point see Andorfer and Liebe, 2012), the relevant academic literature creates the impression of a universal consumer morality. Yet, despite its pretences to universality, this morality hinges on a very peculiar historical, economic and cultural record, with the colonial past and postcolonial guilt as some constituents thereof (see Dolan, 2005, 2007; Trentmann, 2007; Varul, 2011). The skin-deep universalisation of the very particular morality resembles

the process of intellectual imperialism bitingly described by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999). Certainly, I do not suspect research on ethical trade of the cunning and ill-willed moral imperialism. Rather, I consider it more of a function of an adopted epistemological position: an objective ‘god’s-eye view’ that not only fails to situate *itself* (Grosfoguel, 2007; Haraway, 1988), but also abstracts consumers and organisations, the subjects under study, from their everyday setting. Put in strongly normative terms, the academic discourse on ethical trade erases and renders invisible the moral contexts beyond the ‘West’ (for similar contemplations on the notion of ‘cosmopolitanism’ see Spasić, 2011).

Although ethical trade undoubtedly is a global phenomenon, it nevertheless pans out differently in various local contexts (see Sassen, 2010), not least because of the local moral experiences and situated moralities (see Ong, 2014, 2015). These local differences are, in turn, reflected in the communication of ethical trade organisations. Thus, the remainder of this section will look at two cornerstones of ethical trade – namely, moral economy and the North-South metageography with the Anglosphere at its heart – and how they figured in Pizca del Mundo’s and Eetti’s communication. In that, I echo anthropological research on ethical consumption that stresses the importance of taking account of local context. As Orlando (2012: 158) puts it, ‘[t]hough [ethical consumption] may seem as a transnational phenomenon, one should not gloss over its differences in different places, even while recognising the commonalities that exist’ (see also Dombos, 2012; Vramo, 2012: 88; and for the same point made by a sociologist see Varul, 2009).

## MORAL ECONOMIES IN PIZCA DEL MUNDO'S AND EETTI'S COMMUNICATION



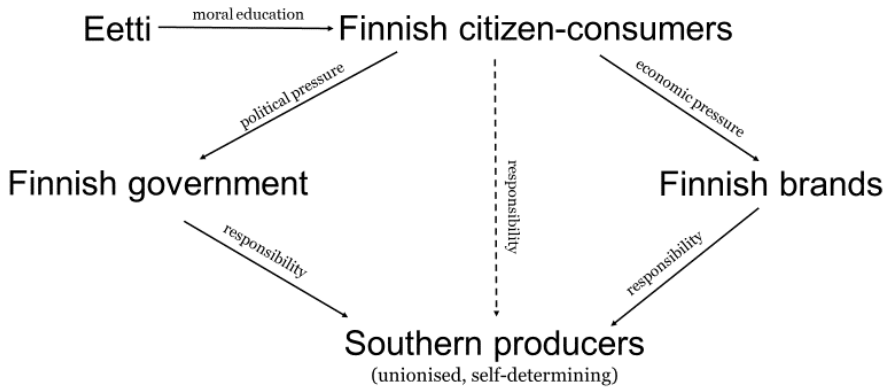
**Figure 3** Moral economy in Pizca del Mundo's communication.

'Moral economy' refers to the latent moral relationships, sentiments and obligations that interact with, and impinge upon, economic behaviour (Sayer, 2003). The moral economy of fair trade in Poland projected by Pizca del Mundo is presented in Figure 3. In Pizca del Mundo's communication, producers and the firm themselves and, to a somewhat lesser extent, other organisations figured as the key fair trade actors.

In line with the fair trade ethos (see, for example, Dolan, 2008), Southern producers were represented as active, empowered and hard-working businesspeople trying to sustain their living through the global marketplace whose structures, in turn, shaped their agency and contributed to their current material deprivation (see Brown, 2007; Johnston, 2001; Raghuram et al., 2009; Smith, 2016). Through the interactive features of Facebook, Pizca del Mundo represented producers as acting, looking and – to an extent – speaking agents whose experiences and opinions were of consequence. These representations were situated within a wider effort of linking fair trade with solidarity, understood as a 'morality of cooperation' (Fenton, 2008: 49). In this context, solidarity was articulated in three ways: as (1) legitimation, (2) affinity, and (3) lifestyle. The first articulation, solidarity as legitimation, concentrated on Pizca del Mundo and their efforts as legitimate, trustworthy and effective fair trade *activists*. Thus, the role the firm assigned themselves exceeded the modest position of mediator conventionally prescribed by the moral economy of fair trade (see Chapter 2). The second articulation of solidarity, as affinity, echoed the representations of Southern producers

described above in that it strove to portray producers as active fair trade agents. Curiously, only in the sporadic references to the articulation of solidarity as lifestyle were consumers addressed as potential partners in the fair trade project. Similarly, care – identified as a disposition underlying Pizca del Mundo's involvement in fair trade – encased the firm and Southern producers that they personally knew.

The subject position constructed for Polish consumers was, therefore, outside of the solidary and caring partnership. Based on their experience of the problematic reception of moral messages in Polish society, Pizca del Mundo approached consumers cautiously as casual and uncommitted financial contributors to fair trade. Indeed, they perceived Polish consumers as price-sensitive, but increasingly receptive to quality, individuals who had to be tricked into supporting the Southern producers. In other words, Pizca del Mundo did not feel that they could rely on Polish consumers as the primary moral agents in realising their mission to support Southern producers in a sustainable, long-lasting and substantial manner. Instead, the firm feared a consumer backlash caused by overtly moral messages and appeals. Polish consumers were, though, invited to familiarise themselves with the representations of Southern producers. Hence, the primary mode of mediation used in Pizca del Mundo's communication was *mediated familiarity*, which intended to establish a representation-anchored cognitive connection between consumers and producers. Here, concurring with Clarke et al. (2007a), it is crucial to bear in mind that the choice of mediated familiarity as a mediation strategy was dictated by material conditions and structural limitations present in Polish society, some of which will be discussed later in this chapter. Pizca del Mundo prioritised in their communication the fulfilment of the obligation to ensure financial support for Southern producers, which I recognise as a fully acceptable enactment of commitment to those who are personally known and whose needs are, at the same time, most immediate.



**Figure 4** Moral economy in Eetti's communication.

The moral economy contained in Eetti's communication, presented in Figure 4, centred on the notion of responsibility, commonly used by the organisation and its members. In rearticulating responsibility as a shared moral and political commitment tied to participation in the unequal global trade (see Young, 2003, 2004, 2006), Eetti relocated it from the market as well as from the individual. Instead, such responsibility engulfed a nexus of agents, ranging from producers and consumers to political decision-makers and brand corporations, whose concerted actions could address current injustices and abuses (see Young, 2006).

In the moral landscape of Finland, Eetti's communication was aimed at morally educating citizen-consumers, imagined as independent and active agents entitled to demand change, capable of moral reflection and decision-making, and ready to participate in collective political actions. The analysis of two interviews with the most dedicated Eetti Helsinki volunteers proved that it was in fact possible for individuals to internalise the subject position offered by Eetti through linking it either to a private moral compass and cosmopolitan disposition or to a political project of reimagining a more sustainable world. This ensconcing of consumers in the subject position that hinged on cosmopolitanism and sensitivity towards the predicament of distant others testified to some success of Eetti's communication as moral education.

Clearly, then, Eetti's moral economy of ethical trade rested on citizen-consumers whose collective action was an indispensable impetus for change. Morally educated through Eetti's mediation, citizen-consumers felt responsible for the lot of distant producers, who figured in Eetti's communication more as an abstract lynchpin in the responsibility nexus than

as representations of concrete individuals. Citizen-consumers were also ready to act on this mediated responsibility through both ethical consumption, and exerting pressure on legislators and brand companies. In contrast to Pizca del Mundo, Eetti played down their own role in ethical trade. That is to say, Eetti fashioned themselves as a platform for citizen-consumers, whom they strove to provide with new and reliable information, and with resources for action. Although the onus was, of course, on the nominal employees, their work obtained legitimacy and gravity only through the material support and engagement of citizen-consumers (see Clarke et al., 2007a, 2007b; Vestergaard, 2014). This moral economy presented ethical trade as a movement led by citizen-consumers qua activists, which was a mirror image of the conventional view of fair trade as a consumer-dependent movement spearheaded by organisations (see Goodman, 2004).

Without any doubt, there were glaring discrepancies between the moral economies that underpinned the communication practices of each organisation and between the subject positions that they constructed. These divergences can, of course, be explained by the different statuses of the organisations: a commercial business that dealt primarily in trade and sales vis-à-vis a non-profit NGO concerned with education and advocacy. What is more striking, however, are the conspicuous discords between the identified moral economies – particularly the one constructed by Pizca del Mundo – and the conventional moral economy of fair trade, discussed in Chapter 2. These discrepancies, I posit, lay bare the limitations of analysing ethical trade as a universal phenomenon. Before I begin to spell out the peculiarities of the Polish and Finnish contexts that impinge on ethical trade communication, let me firstly zoom out to see how ethical trade imagines the world.

## **METAGEOGRAPHICAL INADEQUACY**

How deeply ethical trade is entrenched in a concrete spatial imaginary is evident in my thus far uncritical use of terms such as ‘North’ and ‘South’. Now, however, I will try to unsettle this appealing but unduly simplified projection. In doing so, I will rely on the notion of ‘metageography’ familiar from Chapter 2. Lewis and Wigen (1997: ix) offered the concept of metageography to denote ‘the set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world’. Metageography is a discourse, because it constructs the world of which it speaks. I employ metageography as a useful descriptive shorthand for ‘mental maps’ that group people and places into quasi-geographical categories on the basis of arbitrarily selected criteria, even though I am mindful of the shortcomings of Lewis and Wigen’s analysis (for a fierce critique see Blaut, 1999; for a sympathetic one see Taylor, 1999). I choose metageography over the similar notion of ‘imaginative geography’ (Said, 1978: 54) because metageography can be value-neutral and non-hierarchical, at least theoretically.

Following development studies and postcolonial theory, ethical trade projects a division along the equator between the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’ (see Popow, 2015a). This horizontally split world collapses what is known as the ‘first world’, including Finland, with what used to be known as the ‘second world’, which included Poland. The ‘South’, in turn, is composed of the ‘developing’ countries spread across Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. In socio-economic terms, the North is imagined as a homogeneous hemisphere of consumption, wealth and privilege, while the South figures as a hemisphere of production, poverty and deprivation (see Chouliaraki, 2006, 2008b; Popow, 2015a).

While largely unchallenged due to a visual simplicity and the powerful moral message it offers, the North-South metageography is a vista on the world shaped by particular historical, economic, cultural and political conditions. From that vantage point, the prosperity in the North justifies the moral obligations of Northern consumers towards Southern producers to ameliorate their predicament. The acceptance of these obligations is, however, dependent on consumers’ approval of the vision of the world that locates them in the Global North and construes for them a subject position of a benevolent and privileged actor. And, as Foucault (1982b) emphasised, individuals are not bound to do so, especially if the proposed ‘ethical discourses’ are at odds with their lived ‘moral experiences’.

With that in mind, I argue that the North-South metageography is out of tune with how different ‘Northern’ societies situate themselves in the world and perceive the obligations that such a position entails. While the ‘Northern’ positioning is relatively widely accepted in Finland, it does not necessarily chime with Polish consumers. It is also out of tune with the subject position that Pizca del Mundo constructed for consumers in response to the experienced and anticipated reception of moral messages. This discrepancy illustrates the disjuncture between universalistic moral discourses put forward by ethical trade and the *situated moralities* of the recipients of those discourses. Arguably, while drawing on the former, ethical trade communication is nevertheless anchored in the latter.

## 7.2 SITUATED MORALITIES

This section directly, although tentatively, tackles the theorising question of *why* ethical trade was communicated in the way it was in Poland and Finland. As we have already seen, Pizca del Mundo’s organisation-centred and Eetti’s citizen-consumer-centred moral economies deviated from the usually assumed consumer-centred moral economy of fair trade. In what follows, I will probe this disjuncture by situating, in line with my philosophical outlook and methodological approach, the discursive micro-practices of ethical trade communication in the material and structural contexts within which the organisations operated (see Kendall and Wickham, 1999; Olssen, 2003).

I understand situated morality as a social moral repository on which individuals draw in making moral choices, including consumption decisions. Situated morality is rooted in the widely conceived material conditions (see Trentmann, 2007: 1097). It is also grounded in the local discourses used to make sense of, and give meaning to, these material conditions. One especially powerful such discourse is metageography, through which societies imagine their collective place in the world. Situated morality builds on metageography in that it prompts the ways in which socially embedded individuals morally are to respond to their own position as well as to others relative to whom they are positioned. Situated morality is, then, a metageographically anchored moral habitus, a 'set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways' (Thompson, 1991: 12; italics removed; see also Bourdieu, 1989). While akin in its longevity to 'tenacious mental structures' (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002: 215), situated morality is not stabilised or fixed. Instead, situated morality is a discourse and, therefore, individuals can reject it, act otherwise and, ultimately, change it (see Bevir and Trentmann, 2008; Hilton, 2008: 93).

In what follows, I interrogate some of the historical, economic, cultural and political conditions of Poland and Finland that might impinge upon local attitudes towards ethical trade. I also ruminate on how those might play out on the micro-level of Pizca del Mundo's and Eetti's communication. The discussion examines Poland in greater detail than Finland, because of its larger deviation from the UK, which is a baseline for research on ethical trade (see Andorfer and Liebe, 2012; Newholm and Shaw, 2007). Here, I choose the UK as a reference point at the expense of the US, which is an equally often dissected ethical trade setting due to the recognition common in the literature that ethical trade in the US is much more commercialised than in (the supposedly uniform) Europe (see Bennett et al., 2011 and Hughes et al., 2008 for an overview of differences between the UK and US, and Varul, 2009 for a discussion of differences between the UK and Germany that unsettles a view of a uniform *European* fair trade).

Structural similarities between the UK and Finland are numerous. For example, Stolle and Micheletti's (2013) quantitative cross-country comparison conducted in the spirit of political science clustered the UK and Finland together in a category of 'Western democracies'. These countries are characterised by, among other things, socio-economic affluence, a high educational level, and well-developed civil and political rights, all of which Stolle and Micheletti link to an uninterrupted democratic trajectory following World War II. Apparently, these features are also conducive to 'political consumerist' behaviours in the society. Predictably, these qualities are absent from Southern and Eastern European societies, such as Poland, Hungary, Greece or Spain (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Before I embark on deepening this reductionist, albeit quite correct, diagnosis of Poland, let us pause at the similarities between the UK, as an ethical trade baseline, and Finland in terms of economy and trade.



In terms of economy, the situation in both countries is similar: their GDP per capita is quadruple the world average<sup>107</sup> and approximately 110 per cent that of the EU average<sup>108</sup>. Crucially, for both the UK and Finland international trade constitutes a central economic activity, thereby granting them the status of open economies. The UK, as the heir to the colonial Empire, is a pioneer of global trade (Brown, 1993). Currently, in terms of trade volumes and especially in the area of commercial services (WTO, 2015), the UK remains a global trade champion, although with an increasingly negative trade balance<sup>109</sup>.

Finland's international trade record is, of course, shorter and not burdened by colonialism. The country's geographical location – then within the Russian Empire – made it an outpost for trade with Russia as early as in the 1840s, providing an impetus for a delayed industrialisation (Hjerppe, 2008; Kaukiainen, 2006). Subsequently, Finland became one of the European leaders in the production and export of forestry products with large volumes leaving the country westbound (Kaukiainen, 2006). Presently, Finland is running a positive trade balance, with most of its exchanges happening within Europe<sup>110</sup>. Trade accounts for a third of Finland's GDP, with the secondary production oriented towards exporting specialised forest and chemical industry products as well as electronics<sup>111</sup>. At the same time, its higher reliance on foreign trade than in other EU countries renders Finland more vulnerable to the changeable trends in global economy (see Eloranta et al., 2006; Hjerppe, 2008).

In terms of ethical trade, both societies are intimately familiar with the Fairtrade scheme (e.g., European Commission, 2012; Krier, 2008). Relatedly, even though the UK might have pioneered mainstreaming (Wheeler, 2012b), fair and ethical products arrived in the Finnish supermarket chains as early as in 1999, enabling a consistent growth in sales (Reilu kauppa ry, 2012). Moreover, both Finnish and British societies have a strong record in consumer activism, operationalised as boycotting and buycotting, although Finland's is more exemplary (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013: 97). Stolle and Micheletti (2013: 104) associate the high level of consumer activism with the 'postmaterialist' values of the two societies – whose presence among the Finnish youth is disputed by Autio and Heinonen (2004: 142) – that is, with concerns for

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<sup>107</sup> IMF, World Economic Outlook Database. Available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/01/weodata/index.aspx> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>108</sup> Eurostat, National Accounts and GDP. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/National\\_accounts\\_and\\_GDP](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/National_accounts_and_GDP) (accessed 6 October 2017).

<sup>109</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity: United Kingdom. Available at <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/gbr> (accessed 6 October 2017).

<sup>110</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity: Finland. Available at <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/fin> (accessed 6 October 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Statistics Finland, Finland in figures 2017. Available at [http://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yyti\\_fif\\_201700\\_2017\\_17862\\_net.pdf](http://www.stat.fi/tup/julkaisut/tiedostot/julkaisuluettelo/yyti_fif_201700_2017_17862_net.pdf) (accessed 12 July 2017).

quality of life and self-expression. The emergence of postmaterialism is, in turn, facilitated by socio-economic affluence and high educational achievements.

Yet, despite the many similarities, there are also significant discrepancies between the UK and Finland that might impinge on ethical trade communication in both countries. These primarily have to do with the already mentioned lack of a colonial past (although rarely discussed traces of ‘colonial complicity’ might be detected in Finnish history; see Rastas, 2016), the more recent formation of the Western identity, and the persistence of a welfare state and egalitarian society in Finland (see Eloranta et al., 2006). I will discuss some of these peculiarities in more detail below. However, as I have already mentioned, the crux of the forthcoming sections is the expounding of the situation in Poland as a case divergent from the typically analysed ethical trade contexts.

## **SITUATED HISTORIES OF CONSUMPTION**

On the institutional plane, ethical trade seeks to contribute to eliminating poverty among Southern producers through altering the rules of global trade. On the individual plane, ethical trade attempts to promote an ethos of concerned and responsible consumption in the ‘North’. This message might find fertile ground among consumers in Finland in that it resonates with a long-standing puritan tradition that has endorsed prudent and restrained consumption, both on economic and moral grounds (Autio and Heinonen, 2004). When the country caught up with the Western standard of living and consumption during the Cold War (Hjerpe, 2008; Meinander, 2002; Roos and Sicinski, 1987), the puritan ethos was relaxed and integrated into the consumer culture founded on enjoyment *as well as* responsibility (Autio and Heinonen, 2004). Currently, the affluent Finnish society is poised between consumerist desires and pursuits on the one hand, and the ‘postmaterialist’ values, high environmental awareness and responsibility on the other hand (Autio and Heinonen, 2004; Autio et al., 2009).

The ethos of restrained consumption, however, becomes unexpectedly twisted when addressed at a society that has not yet recovered from the experience of material depravation, scarcity and shortage. Poland is a case in point. Indeed, nearly five decades of material deficiencies suffered under the communist command economy and the ensuing ‘shock therapy’ transition to a market economy led to the development of specific moralities of consumption (Burrell, 2011; Hilton, 2009; Mazurek, 2012; Mróz, 2009, 2010; Romaniszyn, 2011; for similar observations in other post-socialist Eastern European states see Culiberg, 2015; Dombos, 2008; Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi, 2012; Ger and Belk, 1999). Although empty shelves in the shops are already more of an anecdote than a living memory, and although the old attitudes are gradually fading away among both older and younger

generations, the reminiscence of yesteryear might thwart the possibility of ethical trade taking root in Poland.

In economic terms, the cumbersome command economy of the communist period could not accommodate private consumption needs and desires (Mróz, 2009). To tackle this challenge ideologically, the communist regime demonised consumption as part and parcel of an amoral, individualistic and narcissistic petite-bourgeoisie lifestyle whose concern was exclusively with personal benefit and not with the collective good (Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi, 2012). Thus, the official discourse encouraged ascetic and moderate lifestyles focused on work – production – and socialist development (Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi, 2012; Hilton, 2009; Mróz, 2009). Neither the continuous supply shortages nor the official propaganda, however, managed to convince the socialist societies to abandon their material pursuits. Instead, individuals invented ways to circumvent the official economy, particularly through the informal – that is, illegal – market (Culiberg, 2015; Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi, 2012; Mazurek, 2012).

The society coped with the consumption difficulties generated by the command economy through ‘resourcefulness’, which encompassed the immediate everyday strategies deployed to obtain scarce goods and maintain the standard of living (Mazurek, 2012: 301). Resourcefulness, which remains an important signpost for the economic activity in Polish society, impinges on the possibility of ethical trade taking root in Poland in that it discourages purchasing more expensive ethical goods unless they enhance the consumer’s personal benefit. More generally, the experience of communism taught Polish society to blame the authorities for the problems of production and consumption, thereby encouraging them to shrug off personal responsibility (see Culiberg, 2015). And, to reiterate, personal responsibility constitutes a *sine qua non* of ethical trade and consumption (Middlemiss, 2010; Young, 2003, 2004, 2006). Consequently, people were blinded to the role that their actions played in augmenting the shortage economy and the cumbersomeness of the redistribution system. They viewed their resourcefulness unproblematically as a rational response to the inefficient supply policies introduced by the communist government to oppress the society (Mazurek, 2012; see also Culiberg, 2015; Dombos and Pellandini-Simanyi, 2012).

The role of consumption in social life is difficult to overestimate. Arguably, the limitations placed on private consumption by a chronic supply deficiency coupled with insufficient financial resources contributed to the destabilisation of the communist system in Poland and led to its ultimate rejection in the referendum of June 1989 (Landsman, 2005; Romaniszyn, 2011). A painful transformation ensued that engendered phenomena such as permanent unemployment and poverty (see Mazurek, 2012). Yet, it did not upset the dominant belief in the market forces as a solution to social problems and the (only) road to prosperity (Berend, 2009).

Only during the first decade of the twenty-first century did Poles immerse themselves in the consumer lifestyles familiar to them from Western societies

(Mróz, 2010). In this context, the call for measured, considerate and careful consumption put forward by ethical trade might be problematic in two ways. Firstly, it uncannily resembles the ethos enforced under the communist rule, and, secondly, it appears as an assault on the long overdue *right* to consume. The difference between Poland and Finland in this respect is that in Poland the ethos of prudent consumption was imposed on the society externally, whereas in Finland responsible and moderate consumption was internalised. Indeed, where Finnish literature typically points to the gap – also aptly recognised by Eetti – between declared moral attitudes and actual purchasing behaviours (Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004; see also Autio and Heinonen, 2004; Salonen et al., 2014), a survey conducted in the Polish context indicated that consumption was seldom even a terrain for moral reflection (Mróz, 2010). Thus, the consumerist enchantment combined with the habit of short-term thinking that harks back to the previous experience of scarcity (Mazurek, 2012) might be a ‘materialist’ casing that ethical trade must yet penetrate.

## **SITUATED ECONOMIES**

The relevant literature often attributes the challenge of ethical trade taking root in Poland to the more limited financial resources of Polish consumers compared to their counterparts in the most developed ethical markets (e.g., Boenning, 2009; Koszewska, 2011; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). This significant economic disparity, although evident in the numerical data provided by the International Monetary Fund<sup>112</sup> and the World Bank<sup>113</sup>, is completely obscured in the North-South metageography. Thus, to elucidate more accurately the statuses of Poland and Finland in the global economy I borrow a more nuanced metageography of the world-systems theory.

To reiterate, the metageography of the world-systems theory divides the globe into three successive zones – core, semi-periphery and periphery – linked in a relationship of nesting economic oppression. In that model, the economic and political weakness of the periphery is universally exploited to externalise human and environmental costs of production, the semi-periphery figures as a buffer zone oppressed by the core, but simultaneously capitalising on the weakness of the periphery, and the core countries reap the financial benefits of global trade (Sowa, 2011; Zarycki, 2014). Defined by the condition of dependent development, semi-peripheries continuously compete with the periphery as well as with one another for the inflows of capital from the core (Wallerstein, 1984: 7, 2004; see also Sowa, 2011; Zarycki, 2014). Even though the borders of different zones are not very well demarcated, for our purposes

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<sup>112</sup> International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database. Available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/01/weodata/index.aspx> (accessed 6 July 2017).

<sup>113</sup> World Bank, GDP per capita, PPP. Available at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?view=chart> (accessed 6 July 2017).

it is enough to say that the core roughly corresponds to the EU-15<sup>114</sup> (including Finland), North America, Japan and Australia. The semi-periphery, in turn, spans – among others – the countries of the former ‘Soviet bloc’ (including Poland) usually considered as constitutive of the Global North, but also ‘Southern’ countries such as the Republic of South Africa, China, India, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, which are populated by many of the producers and workers supported by ethical trade. Finally, the periphery includes the remaining ‘developing’ countries spread across South America, Africa, Asia and the Carribean.

Despite its previously peripheral status as an exporter of cheap raw materials and low-processed products, Finland currently sits comfortably at the core of the global economy (see Hjerppe, 2008; Kaukiainen, 2006). The country has adapted well to the globalising world through the, already discussed, surplus-generating exports of high-value-added, high-tech goods, traded primarily within Europe (Kaukiainen, 2006). Finland also performs splendidly in terms of knowledge economy, a current blueprint for developed economies<sup>115</sup>. That is, despite retaining a sizeable volume of export-oriented production, Finland is – together with its Nordic neighbours – a poster child for an economy based on knowledge, research and development. Furthermore, even in the years of economic crisis, Finland’s GDP per capita stands at four times the world average<sup>116</sup>, and at nearly 110 per cent of the EU average<sup>117</sup>. Meanwhile, the situation in Poland is more problematic.

During the transition to the ‘modern’ democratic state, the command economy, which in Poland hinged on the coal, iron and steel industries, had to be transformed into a market economy modelled on the ‘developed’ world (see Berend, 2009). Among the first upshots of economic transformation were the high social costs: the dismantling of the social safety net, the rise of permanent unemployment and poverty, and social polarization (Berend, 2009: 205), the costs that Finland has largely managed to avoid in the face of economic crises (see Hjerppe, 2008). Almost 30 years on, even though Poland’s GDP per capita positions it in the global top quarter, it stands at 70 per cent of the EU

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<sup>114</sup> The world-systems analyses tend to designate Greece, Ireland, Portugal and certain regions in Italy, notably in the South, as semi-peripheral areas, but this level of nuance is not necessary for my argument.

<sup>115</sup> Knowledge Economy Index (KEI) 2007 Rankings. Available at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/KFDLP/Resources/461197-1170257103854/KEI.pdf> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>116</sup> In comparison, the GDP per capital in Poland is at the level of 1.2 world average. IMF, World Economic Outlook Database. Available at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2017/01/weodata/index.aspx> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>117</sup> Eurostat, National Accounts and GDP. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/National\\_accounts\\_and\\_GDP](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/National_accounts_and_GDP) (accessed 12 July 2017).

average<sup>118</sup>. Moreover, although the country fares relatively well in the knowledge economy on the global scale, it clearly lags behind most of the EU countries (Hardy, 2007; Żak, 2016).

These discrepancies can be approached as a resultant of the semi-peripheral status of Poland in the global market economy, which is manifest in the types of goods the country produces and under what conditions. The market transition required the reorientation of international trade from supplying the rapidly growing heavy industries in the Soviet Union and other socialist states to the export of goods that could recuperate the lost 'Western' markets. Perhaps in part due to its late arrival to global trade, Poland currently exports raw materials, including metals and foodstuffs, and semi-processed goods, including textiles and vehicle parts, while relatively high-technology products are being imported (Hardy, 2007)<sup>119</sup>. Relatedly, despite the economic restructuring, significant levels of employment persist in manufacturing (about 20 per cent, compared to the EU average of 15 per cent) and agriculture (over 10 per cent, compared to the EU average of 4.5 per cent)<sup>120</sup>. The continuing importance of manufacturing is a remnant of the EU-established outward processing trade scheme that was a hallmark of the early years of transformation (Berend, 2009). While the scheme helped the transitioning countries to revive their industries, it also allowed the EU-based corporations to subcontract the labour-intensive and low-value-added processes to the neighbouring low-wage countries and reimport the finished or semi-finished products at minimal costs. At the same time, the high-grade production remained in the EU-15 and other core countries (see Hardy, 2007).

As a persistent symptom of its semi-peripheral condition, Poland seeks to ensure its place in the global commodity chains through cheap labour, rather than innovation. This has two major consequences: the vulnerability of the workforce and dependence on direct foreign investment. With one of the lowest wage shares in the GDP among the EU countries, 23.6 per cent of Poland's workforce can be defined as low-wage earners as opposed to 5.3 per cent in Finland<sup>121</sup>. To a considerable extent, the export-oriented production is carried out by a well-trained but cheap and vulnerable workforce, especially in the so-called 'special economic zones', which are also largely exempted from

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<sup>118</sup> Poland in Figures, Polish Investment and Trade Agency. Available at [http://www.paih.gov.pl/poland\\_in\\_figures](http://www.paih.gov.pl/poland_in_figures) (accessed 7 July 2017).

<sup>119</sup> See also: The Observatory of Economic Complexity: Poland. Available at <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/pol> (accessed 9 October 2017).

<sup>120</sup> In Finland, employment equals 13.5 per cent in manufacturing and 4.2 per cent in agriculture. Skills panorama by sector. Available at <http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/sector> (accessed 7 July 2017).

<sup>121</sup> Low-wage earners make up 17 per cent of the employees within the EU. Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Wages\\_and\\_labour\\_costs](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Wages_and_labour_costs) (accessed 7 July 2017).

income and property tax to encourage foreign investment<sup>122</sup>. Foreign investment constitutes about 40 per cent of Poland's GDP, and the companies with foreign capital employ one-third of the Polish workers as well as contributing two-thirds to the country's exports<sup>123</sup>, thereby confirming the 'hegemonic status' of foreign investment in the financial strategy of Poland (Hardy, 2007: 768). On top of that, 'modernisation' of the country has been carried out thanks to the structural funds and subsidies flowing in from the EU, making Poland their biggest beneficiary<sup>124</sup>. In 2015, EU spending constituted 3.25 per cent of Poland's gross national income (GNI)<sup>125</sup>, that is, of GDP enlarged by income obtained from abroad. Arguably, such a strong dependence on foreign capital renders the Polish economy volatile.

This condensed numerical overview intends to hint at how the semi-peripheral status of Poland might interplay with the situated morality in a way that is not supportive of ethical trade. I argue that Poland's position in the global economy is not quantitatively but qualitatively similar to, at least some of, the producing countries supported by ethical trade. Certainly, Poland has its fair share in the economic oppression of the 'Southern' states. The most vicious recent examples are, perhaps, the subcontracting of production by the Gdansk-based Cyprus-registered LPP clothing company to the sweatshop Rana Plaza factory that collapsed in Bangladesh in April 2013, and the attempts by a subsidiary of the public company, PGNiG, to illegally mine crude oil in the occupied and conflict-ridden Western Sahara<sup>126</sup>. Yet, the Polish garment and footwear workers who produce for both local and foreign brands are also systematically exploited. Particularly captivating, but also perplexing, in this context is a report titled 'Labour on a Shoestring' prepared as a

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<sup>122</sup> On a side note, it is also possible to maintain that for Poland cheap labour has become one of the main export goods. That is, since the EU accession in 2004, over 2 million Poles have emigrated, most notably to the UK, many of whom have been sending their earnings back to Poland (Mazurek, 2012). Although a portion of those migrants were professionals, many landed low-end, low-paid jobs (e.g., Brown and Danson, 2008).

<sup>123</sup> 'Inwestycje zagraniczne dodały Polsce ponad 15 proc. PKB' [Foreign investment added over 15 per cent to the Poland's GDP]. Available at <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/inwestycje-zagraniczne-dodaly-polsce-ponad-15-proc-pkb/> (accessed 7 July 2017).

<sup>124</sup> Financial programming and budget: EU budget in my country. Available at <http://ec.europa.eu/budget/mycountry/PL/> (accessed 7 July 2017).

<sup>125</sup> EU member countries in brief: Poland. Available at [https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/poland\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/poland_en) (accessed 7 July 2017).

<sup>126</sup> 'Ucieczka z Sahary. Polska szuka ropy na okupowanych terenach' [The escape from Sahara. Poland looks for oil in the occupied territory]. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21 November 2016. Available at <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/7,127290,20996455,ucieczka-z-sahary-polska-szuka-ropy-na-okupowanych-terenach.html?bo=1> (accessed 7 July 2017).

deliverable for the Change Your Shoes campaign<sup>127</sup>. The research conducted in Poland – alongside Slovakia, Romania, Albania, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina – revealed violations of labour and human rights in footwear production that resembled those recorded in sweatshops across Asia: low wages insufficient to cover basic needs, unpaid overtime, poor working conditions, and a lack of workplace safety and security measures. Although the scale is decidedly different, similar problems corrode both Poland and the ‘Southern’ countries that ethical trade seeks to support.

Under those circumstances, the economically anchored morality of Polish consumers inclines them to see their ‘Southern’ counterparts either as competitors for the same pool of foreign investment or as a means of maximising their own benefit in the reality of scarce resources (think back to the ‘resourcefulness’ discussed in the previous section). And this is only if Polish consumers consider the ‘Global South’ at all. Conspicuously, in this section I have been at pains to locate Poland within the context of the European, specifically the EU, rather than the global economy. This is so because in Poland the material conditions are encased in a specific discursive metageography that fixes people’s gaze in one direction – West– while simultaneously turning their heads away from the rest of the world.

## **SITUATED DISCURSIVE METAGEOGRAPHIES**

The reinvented North-South metageography belies a much older division between West and East. Ethical trade’s attempts to locate Poland in the ‘Global North’ become half-cocked, because Polish people tend to situate themselves in the Eurocentric East-West metageography instead. This metageography has two primary consequences for the viability of ethical trade communication as moral education. Firstly, it augments the problematic position of Poland between core and periphery. Secondly, as the ‘West’ is fixed as the only moral reference point, the ‘South’ vanishes from sight.

Although veiled by the discourse of united Europe, the division between the European West and East persists (Popow, 2015b; Sowa, 2011; Zarycki, 2014). According to postcolonial readings, in the wake of the 2004 EU enlargement Central and Eastern Europe came to be perceived and represented as an ‘internal other’ of the ‘Old Europe’ (e.g., Grzymiski, 2009; Hudabiunigg, 2004; Kuus, 2004). Drawing on the germinal work of Edward Said, Merje Kuus (2004: 473) argues that the representations of Eastern European countries as needing culturing and tutelage are rooted in a ‘broadly orientalist discourse that assumes essential difference between Europe and Eastern Europe’. This difference is, familiarly, articulated through a series of binary oppositions such as rationality and passion, secularism and religious devotion, tolerance and bigotry, nationhood and nationalism (Said, 1978; see also Hudabiunigg, 2004;

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<sup>127</sup> Available at <https://cleanclothes.org/resources/recommended-reading/labour-on-a-shoestring/view> (accessed 7 July 2017).



Janion, 2003; Kuus, 2004; Popow, 2015b). In contrast to the core, the 'postcolonial' Central and Eastern European states must be perpetually tamed and continuously socialised into full Europeanness (Blagojević, 2009; Kuus, 2004; Sowa, 2011). The condition of being forever suspended between East (periphery) and West (core) is aptly summarised by Marina Blagojević (2009): Eastern Europe is perpetually 'lagging behind' and 'catching up' with the European core. Trapped in the tension between wanting to become truly European and not wanting to lose their own cultural distinctiveness, Central and Eastern Europeans internalise the elements of orientalist discourse that the 'West' uses to describe and construct them (Blagojević, 2009; Kuus, 2004; Popow, 2015b; Törnquist-Plewa, 2002).

On a national level, scholars widely acknowledge the notion of Poland as stretched between 'West' and 'East' (Grzymiski, 2010; Janion, 2003; Kochanowicz, 2001; Popow, 2015b; Skórczewski, 2009; Sowa, 2011; Törnquist-Plewa, 2002; Zarycki, 2014). This is usually taken to mean that Poland is located in an East-West transitory zone (Janion, 2003). In cultural and political terms, while Poles tend to recognise themselves as Western – especially in opposition to Russia, a powerful and strongly orientalist Eastern other (Janion, 2003; Popow, 2015b) – they realise that they are perceived as inferior by their 'truly Western' counterparts (Kochanowicz, 2001; Törnquist-Plewa, 2002). Following Kuus (2004), Grzymiski (2010) theorises this inferiority as self-orientalisation, that is, a self-perception that rests on deep-seated feelings of peripherality, backwardness and underdevelopment. In postcolonial theory, such a mechanism is termed 'provincialising' (Popow, 2015b: 108). In this context, as was evident in Pizca del Mundo's global education workshops, Poles tend to underestimate the economic and civilizational condition of their country (see Törnquist-Plewa, 2002: 237).

Importantly, it is precisely this *self-orientalising mindset* that concerns me here, rather than the factuality of the colonial past or postcolonial condition of Poland. The perceptions of Polish people impinge on the discursive metageography more than the actual material 'facts' (see Lewis and Wigen, 1997). Furthermore, I concur with Snochowska-Gonzalez (2012) in not being entirely convinced by the postcolonial readings of Polish history and contemporaneity, especially in relation to the EU, and in recognising that they have been hijacked and misused by the ultraconservative right wing (see also Popow, 2015b). Moreover, these interpretations conveniently forget Poland's own Eastbound 'colonising mission', which, prior to the 'colonising' partitions, extended to Lithuania, Belarus and Western Ukraine (see Sowa, 2011).

Using different vocabulary to describe the same mindset, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (2002) talks about the 'complex of an unwanted child' where the feeling of inferiority is compensated for with a desperate need for self-assertion. With this in mind, Polish society expects compensation from the West for the historical debt that supposedly accrued from the earlier undue suffering that Poland endured for the sake of Europe as a moral community

(Törnquist-Plewa, 2002: 222). This continuously reiterated tale of martyrdom stretches from the partitions of the eighteenth century to two world wars that tormented the country and saw the ‘indifference’ of the West to the local mass destruction and death to the undeserved yoke of communism viewed as a betrayal committed by the Allies (see Snochowska-Gonzalez, 2012; Sowa, 2011). It is in the light of such interpretations of historical events that a very significant portion of the society considers Poland to be the most victimised country in world history (Misztal, 2009).

For situated morality, conviction about one’s own victimhood inhibits empathy for distant others (for the contrasting findings in the Philippines see Ong, 2015), whereas holding others guilty of, and responsible for, redressing one’s previous predicament obliterates one’s own obligations towards the less fortunate<sup>128</sup>. Coming from a slightly different direction, this attitude is further amplified by the entrenched discourse of entrepreneurial citizenship as a hallmark of neo-liberal modernisation (Popow, 2014). As was palpable during Pizca del Mundo’s global education workshops, the ideal of a flexible individual responsible for their own well-being and financial prosperity evacuates moral and practical duties towards the poor, both within and outside the society, and stigmatises them as failed, unworthy, incompetent, lazy and obsolete (see Popow, 2015b).

Continuously comparing themselves to the minority of those who are better off, Poles are inclined to erase from their metageography the majority world, which is less privileged and far less prosperous (see Popow, 2015b: 114; Sowa, 2011). This limited metageography propels the vicious circle of inadequate global education (see Boenning, 2009; Koszewska, 2011; Kronenberg, 2010; Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014), which is a consequence and continuation of an ‘ethnocentric’ line in education and research instituted by the communist regime (Törnquist-Plewa, 2002: 235). The lack of knowledge prohibits Poles from adequately assessing their place in the world, and this ill-informed self-perception perpetuates and legitimises the lack of interest in the distant world and its peoples. Sadly, the Polish media – which for many is the main window to the world – do not help in broadening one’s mind. The representations of global processes and interconnectedness are rare and superficial subplots to

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<sup>128</sup> This attitude shines through Poland’s approach to development aid. Having processed a substantial amount of foreign assistance following World War II and the democratic transition in 1989, the United Nations Development Programme closed its national office in Warsaw in 2008, marking the ‘graduation’ of the country from the status of a recipient of foreign assistance to a donor. However, ever since joining the OECD Development Assistance Committee, Poland has consistently ranked as one of the stingiest contributors with its input standing at a mere 0.1 per cent of GNI in 2015. Thus, the pledge to increase the volume of development assistance to the level of 0.33 per cent of GNI by 2015 was not fulfilled. In comparison, Finland fared relatively well, contributing 0.56 per cent of its GNI to the development cooperation in 2015, before the government instituted cuts. In the same year, Finland ranked seventh (out of 28) in terms of contribution as a portion of GNI (DAC Member Profile: Finland. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/finland.htm>, accessed 11 July 2017).

the domestic issues or footnotes to supposedly singular, more dramatic events (see Czaplicka, 2010). But even these skin-deep and scarce representations might not always find recipients: a recent industry survey on news consumption revealed that only 23 per cent of a representative sample of 1009 respondents were primarily interested in foreign affairs, whereas the remaining 77 per cent followed mostly or exclusively domestic news<sup>129</sup>. Tenably, the interest of Poles in global issues is scant, and so is their knowledge of, and their ability to independently and critically analyse, processes that transcend national or continental borders (Czaplicka, 2010).

The light at the end of the tunnel flickered when global education was incorporated into the formal education system as a part of new curricula in 2008 (Popow, 2015a). However, two analyses of textbooks in geography and civics revealed a set of problems in how they conveyed knowledge about the world, including stereotypical representations of the 'South', the Western-centric bias and superficial descriptions of global interdependencies (Grupa Zagranica, 2016a; Popow, 2015a). Consequently, rather than priming a new generation of global citizens, 'global education' carried out in the formal educational setting reproduces the already existing narrow metageography and strengthens the views that this metageography implies; it produces what has been called elsewhere 'empty geographical knowledges' (Orgad, 2012: 146–7). Moreover, school textbooks largely eschewed the opportunity to promote societal change and globally responsible attitudes and behaviours, such as ethical consumption (Grupa Zagranica, 2016a: 20; Popow, 2015a: 271–2). In doing so, they failed to situate an individual in the global context as an agent whose actions can have a material impact, however small, on distant others.

In sum, arbitrary incorporation into the supposedly wealthy and benevolent 'Global North' on which ethical trade is predicated does not chime with the situated morality of Polish society. In other words, universalistic moral discourses cannot be anchored in the material reality as perceived by Poles. The ethos of constrained, concerned, empathic and pricey consumption can find its stable footing neither in the historical, economic, political and cultural materialities, nor in the discursive metageography that gives them a meaning.

Meanwhile, the situation in Finland is quite different. Even though Finland is historically and geographically located at the 'border between East and West' (Kallio, 1989; Meinander, 2002), today its position in the global metageography is truly 'Northern'. This is also reflected in their self-perception: the Western identification is embraced and generally unchallenged (Meinander, 2002). This identification was formed through some century-long and complex teetering between the West and Russia, of

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<sup>129</sup> 'Polak na bieżąco, czyli jak konsumujemy treści informacyjne' [A Pole up to date, or how do we consume information?]. Available at [http://www.scanner.com.pl/images/aktualnosci\\_biuro/upday/raport.pdf](http://www.scanner.com.pl/images/aktualnosci_biuro/upday/raport.pdf) (accessed 11 July 2017).

which the pragmatic trade relationship with the Soviet Union was a vital part (Meinander, 2002: 162; see also Eloranta et al., 2006). Torn at the turn of the twentieth century between the political dominion of Russian Empire, the Western heritage transmitted over several centuries of Swedish rule and the nationalist pursuits of ‘romantic’ Fennomen, Finland – similarly to Poland – initially built its Western identity on the shaky foundations of an imagined destiny as a ‘bulwark’ of Western civilisation and a torch for Eastbound education. This tentative and strained Western identity persisted for many decades, painfully dented when Finland was ‘abandoned’ by the West at the outbreak of the Winter War with the Soviet Union in late 1939. A more relaxed Western identity finally settled in following Finland’s EU accession in 1995. Meinander (2002: 166) describes the EU membership as an ‘emotional homecoming’ for many Finnish people in that it put an end to ideological searching and uncertainty by offering a sense of belonging and security. Thus, it seems, at least on the surface of it, that Finnish society has worked through the historical traumas that still haunt Poland (see Roos and Sicinski, 1987: 3). Of course, the ‘Western’ identity tells more about Finnish society’s feeling of belonging than about how they relate to ‘others’, such as Southern producers. Although the Finnish brand of ‘exceptionalism’ that clouds Finland’s historical involvement in colonial projects might compel Finns to shrug off the responsibility for global inequalities (see Rastas, 2016), in the context of ethical trade the modern Finnish identity is mobilised, which is premised on the values of tolerance and equality (Pantti, 2016: 363).

In social and political terms, over the last few years Finland has become a global champion in areas such as, but not limited to, overall stability<sup>130</sup>, social justice<sup>131</sup>, social progress<sup>132</sup>, gender equality<sup>133</sup>, education<sup>134</sup>, transparency<sup>135</sup> and press freedom<sup>136</sup> (see also Eloranta et al., 2006). Thus, Finnish society does not really have anybody to catch up with. As overachievers whose economic and social performance constitutes a benchmark for others, Finns enjoy a vantage point from which a vista opens that envelops the whole globe.

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<sup>130</sup> Fragile State Index. Available at <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>131</sup> Social Justice Index 2016. Available at <https://www.social-inclusion-monitor.eu> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>132</sup> 2017 Social Progress Index. Available at <http://www.socialprogressindex.com/?tab=2&code=FIN> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>133</sup> Gender Gap Report 2016. Available at <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2016/rankings> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>134</sup> OECD Better Life Index. Available at <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/education> (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>135</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. Available at [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016) (accessed 12 July 2017).

<sup>136</sup> 2017 World Press Freedom Index. Available at <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (accessed 12 July 2017).

In other words, the North-South metageography of ethical trade is fairly well aligned with the material reality experienced by a big portion of Finnish society. The relational morality that stems from this metageography finds fertile ground in a society well versed in global interdependencies and processes (see Salonen et al., 2014; Uusitalo and Oksanen, 2004). Nevertheless, of course, some cracks spoil this overall bright picture of Finland that come to light when compared with its Nordic neighbours. In terms of the budget spending on development aid in particular, Finland, with its 0.56 per cent of GNI, lags behind Sweden (1.4 per cent), Norway (1.05 per cent) and Denmark (0.85 per cent)<sup>137</sup>.

The divergent material and discursive contexts, I believe, help to anchor and appreciate the different modes of mediation between producers and consumers that Pizca del Mundo and Eetti employed in their communication. Mindful of the possibility that only a few in Poland would ensconce themselves in the subject position of citizen-consumer, Pizca del Mundo appealed in their communication to values that could resonate better with their audience: self-interest and resourcefulness hooked into care for oneself and one's close ones, and satisfied through quality products available at a reasonable price. The moral economy that decentred consumers enabled Pizca del Mundo to operate on the Polish market, sell products and, ultimately, contribute to the betterment of the situation of Southern producers. While global education of consumers – i.e., the establishing of mediated familiarity – continues to be a key component of Pizca del Mundo's operations, it is nevertheless secondary to selling products that offer a better deal for producers. In the more favourable Finnish context, the challenge for Eetti resided not so much in educating the society through providing information about global interdependencies and their consequences, but in mobilising citizen-consumers around issues that cannot be addressed by straightforward consumerist scripts. While not without its hurdles, this progressive project of moral education yet again places Finland at the helm of the global peloton in a shared effort towards a more just and sustainable world.

### **7.3 MORAL EDUCATION AND SITUATED MORALITIES**

This chapter's ambition to connect the empirically discerned discourses to the materially situated moralities of consumers had a twofold theoretical underpinning. On the one hand, it was motivated by the post-structuralist interest in the interplay between discourses and materiality. On the other hand, it was dictated by my approach to ethical trade communication as mediation. Writing about mediation as an ethical practice, scholars typically note that representations of distant others and their predicament must be

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<sup>137</sup> DAC members. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/dac/dacmembers.htm> (accessed 14 February 2018).

coherent with the 'local moral horizons' in that they resonate with the knowledge and sentiments of the audience (Tomlinson, 1999: 179; see also Orgad, 2012: 4; Silverstone, 2003: 476). Only then are the spectators ready to answer to the reality behind images (Silverstone, 2008). Of course, this argument can be extended beyond the representations of people and events to the representations of processes and causes, such as ethical trade. The imperative to consider the 'local moral horizons' – or 'mental landscapes' in the emic vocabulary – has been thus far overlooked in research on ethical trade. While the scant scholarship on ethical trade communication and marketing focuses on the moral obligations that ethical trade organisations have towards producers whose representations they circulate, it has hardly been acknowledged that the fulfilment of duties towards producers hinges on the accountability to consumers. That is, consumers' response determines the level of support that producers receive, and consumers are more likely to respond to messages attuned to their situated moralities.

With that, my argument comes full circle and returns to the Silverstonian notion of proper distance. To reiterate Silverstone's words, the task of mediators is to 'create some kind of comfort and pleasure for those on the receiving end of such mediations' (Silverstone, 2003: 476). With present contemplations in mind, this view – which I described in Section 3.3 as 'Northern-centric' – obtains a new meaning; namely, the accountability of mediators towards the audience in representing distant peoples, an unfamiliar world and events that are difficult to comprehend signals a moral imperative that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been empirically investigated in the context of ethical trade communication. While I still maintain that the concept of proper distance is strengthened by the accentuation of the primacy of obligations towards distant others, it is true that these obligations will remain forever suspended, abstract sentiments if not anchored in the situated morality of the audience.

Thus, in the light of my research, ethical trade communication appears not as a streamlined transfer of commonly held values, but as an arena of mediated moral education whose discursive horizon is demarcated by, and negotiated in relation to, the material conditions in the society (see Carey, 2008). Thus, from the analytical viewpoint, the supposedly universal consumer morality premised on solidarity and care with, and responsibility towards, Southern producers is more of an ideal type, a starting point for analysis, and not a given. On a practical level, enforcing the same moral and communicational scripts in disparate contexts is unlikely to mobilise a big enough portion of (citizen-)consumers to have a measurable impact on the unequitable structures of global trade. While practitioners, such as Pizca del Mundo and Eetti, intuitively accommodate what Lotta called the 'mental landscapes' of their audience, these are not duly acknowledged in scholarly literature. I do not advocate here the primacy of some disguised brand of moral relativism, but rather taking seriously the situated moralities on a societal level. Certainly, this

mildly revelatory call is valid for research to do with communication and morality beyond the narrow context of ethical trade.

## 8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

As I somewhat grandly declared in the opening chapter, the objectives of my study of ethical trade communication were both theoretical and empirical. The fundamental theoretical goal, pursued in Chapters 2 and 3, was to incise the conventional formulations of ethical trade with the perspective of communication studies, specifically mediation theory. After I got the concept of ethical trade communication as mediation and assembled an analytical framework to investigate it, the empirical objective was to use these rereadings to begin to understand the thus far understudied contexts, namely of Poland and Finland, in Chapters 5 and 6, respectively. Finally, a higher-level theoretical – or perhaps theorising – goal was to consider, in Chapter 7, some possible guiding forces of ethical trade communication in Poland and Finland. In addition to that, this brief chapter begins to formulate the ‘take-home message’ for the practitioners of ethical trade communication and points to several directions in which t subsequent research might head. Let us look at these objectives in turn.

### THEORETICAL RECONCEPTUALISATION

The rereading of ethical trade through the prism of mediation theory offered an opportunity to view ethical trade as a mediated relationship between producers and consumers. Consequently, a new vista opened up on ethical trade as a possible avenue of moral education, rather than a set of consumption-related practices. For communication scholars, the distinction in this context between the representation-anchored mediated familiarity and moral education as two modes of mediation might prove interesting. In this light, solidarity, care and responsibility, often located by the literature at the heart of ethical trade, emerged as dispositions that must be discursively constructed by ethical trade communication. Through theorising these moral inclinations as *performed by* ethical trade communication I deviated from the conventional approach whereby they are considered features embedded in – or hollowed out from – ethical trade as a theoretical ideal to be pursued. To the best of my knowledge, this is a rather original conceptualisation that contributes to the interdisciplinary body of research on ethical trade (Chapters 2 and 3). Furthermore, used in the context of ethical trade communication, the perspective of mediation laid bare the inadequacy to the context beyond the West of moral scripts assumed as universal by the ethical trade scholarship (Chapter 7). The literature on mediation also sensitised me to the situatedness of the audience and invited the theorising reflections elaborated in Chapter 7.

As productive as the reconceptualisation of ethical trade as a mediated relationship was in offering new entry points into the phenomenon, the analysis revealed its anticipatory status. That is, even if ethical trade



organisations achieved considerable success in morally educating consumers and establishing a mediated connection between producers and consumers, this connection was usually unidirectional. In other words, ethical trade was a mediated ethical relationship of consumers *to* producers whose mediated representations they received. The flow of knowledge in the opposite direction was rather limited, or else impossible for me to access. While I acknowledged this shortcoming of my rereading of ethical trade as a mediated relationship in describing the present state, I opted for maintaining its anticipatory and hopeful tone. Theoretically, I stood with postcolonial theory that argued for always acknowledging the mutuality and reciprocity in the conditions of global interdependence. The mutuality and reciprocity could play out in unequivocal ways and producers could potentially form ethical relationships with consumers on different bases than the flows of mediated knowledge and enact them in ways to which I did not have access.

## **EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTION**

Empirically, I analysed ethical trade in a rather novel setting located beyond the usually spotlighted ethical markets of the Anglosphere. I did so by focusing on two organisations: Pizca del Mundo in Poland and Eetti in Finland, each a major actor in ethical trade in their respective country. As anticipated in Chapter 1, the smallness of ethical trade markets in both countries provided a unique context for ethical trade communication as mediation. This allowed me to poke at some of the cornerstones of the ethical trade discourse that had been previously taken for granted, such as the North-South metageography and the consumer-centric moral economy.

While ethical trade marketing in the UK and US is usually oriented towards an incremental growth of the already substantial markets, in the case of Pizca del Mundo it served to arduously construct the market through disseminating information about the fair trade system and Southern producers. Thus, the primary objective of Pizca del Mundo's communication was to establish 'mediated familiarity' whose existence is *taken for granted* in more developed markets. At the same time, Pizca del Mundo were mindful that in order to support Southern producers the fair trade products had to be sold urgently, rather than in many years, after the seed of moral education has sprouted. Thus, in their more direct communication with consumers, the firm spotlighted the quality of products in a bid to lure the already existing gourmet, and not necessarily ethical, consumers.

For Eetti, communication was a way to overcome the organic smallness of the Finnish market, which placed natural limits on sales. Well aware that the carved-out market niche would not suffice to solve the structural and systemic problems of global trade, the organisation sought in their communication to morally educate citizen-consumers capable of supporting producers outside the supermarket checkout. Thus, Eetti's communication demonstrated an ambitious approach to ethical trade that transcended the concerns over

consumption and sales that seem to define ethical trade *marketing* in the UK and US.

Even though Pizca del Mundo and Eetti played enormous roles in developing ethical trade in their respective countries, the limited ‘sample’ is nevertheless an obvious limitation of this study. Naturally, then, I do not claim that the patterns diagnosed here can be generalised to other similar organisations in Poland and Finland, not to mention beyond the two countries. I do not even claim to have analysed the practices and content of communication of the two organisations in their totality, indeed I barely scratched the surface. However, generalisation and totalisation were not the ambitions of this project. Instead, typically of qualitative research and discourse analysis, I set out to examine only *some* and always *situated* aspects of ethical trade communication. In the process, I realised that the understandings I began to unravel were different from those that I had previously encountered in the literature. The exploration of these variations led me to the idea of situated moralities.

## **THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

While the uncovering in Chapter 7 of the discrepancies between the ‘generalising’ academic literature and the understandings circulating in the offbeat setting had a merit of its own, it also invited a more theoretically inclined – or tentatively theorising – argument. As mentioned above, in incising ethical trade with the notion of mediation I turned a curious eye on the situatedness of communication and its recipients. The empirical analysis exposed the, seemingly untroubled before, disjuncture between the ‘universalistic discourses’ of ethical trade circulating in academia and among practitioners alike, and their localised articulations in Pizca del Mundo’s and Eetti’s communication. With the sensitivity afforded by the notion of mediation, I teased out and foregrounded the dynamics between communication practices and the experienced and projected responses of the audience. These responses, in turn, were anchored in the local moral horizons of the recipients, or – in the parlance of this dissertation – in the situated moralities of consumers, acknowledged by ethical trade organisations in their communication.

I consider the linking of abstract moral discourses of ethical trade back to the ‘lived’, local material and discursive conditions to be, perhaps, the biggest intellectual contribution of this project. There are at least two reasons for that. Firstly, in the context of research on ethical trade, the notion of situated morality takes seriously consumers as moral agents. In doing so, it moves beyond the deterministic binary opposition of a ‘citizen-consumer’ ready to accept a stable and universal moral frame offered by ethical trade as their own, vis-à-vis a selfish and immature consumer not ready to do so. Instead, the notion of situated morality proposes that the individual internalisation and rejection of values and meanings offered by ethical trade is inextricably

connected to the more deep-seated material, social and cultural structures. With this in mind, my hope is for this account not to be read as denigrating Poles as inherently 'immoral', self-pitying and indifferent to the predicament of others. Rather, my intention was to demonstrate that the reluctant attitude towards ethical trade was not necessarily an innate, essential disposition, but also a, perhaps unconscious, response to external factors beyond one's cognition and control. Secondly, on a more general intellectual plane, this approach – although, admittedly, not particularly revelatory – can be usefully applied to unsettle and 'discursify' morality in the analyses of issues and dilemmas beyond trade and consumption.

Although I am quite proud of my tentative exploration of situated morality in the context of ethical trade in Poland and Finland, I do not turn a blind eye to its limitations. As the idea of situated moralities emerged late into the study, I barely began to explore some of their aspects and underpinnings, deliberately excluding and unintentionally overlooking many others. Moreover, while Poland and Finland – my country of birth and of residence, respectively – were much more familiar to me than the rest of the world, there was still a significant disproportion between my grasp of the two, especially in as tacit and latent a dimension as morality. Having been socialised in Poland, I was much more intimately familiar with the situated morality of my home society than of my host society. Although I tried to bridge this gap as best as possible with the help of 'formal', academic knowledge as well as through picking the brains of native Finns, discrepancy in the depth and breadth of my investigation remained both inevitable and palpable.

More fundamental and methodological apprehension relates to the inferring about the situated moralities of whole societies based on two organisations. While it seemed like a bold, reckless and, frankly, dubious move, I also strove to strengthen my case outside the analysed empirical material. That is, the wider relevance and recognition of situated moralities shone through the contextual interviews with the representatives of other organisations dealing with ethical trade – Fairtrade Polska and Fairtrade Finland, the Buy Responsibly Foundation and the Institute of Global Responsibility – as well as with three 'citizen-consumers' in Poland. It also found informal support in the many everyday conversations I had with Poles and Finns. Of course, the notion of situated moralities was also informed by my own perceptions: a retrospective introspection of my own moral 'socialisation', casual observations and more ethnographically inclined insights. Significantly, though, the objective of Chapter 7 did not consist in empirical generalisation, but rather in a theorisation firmly anchored in the relevant scholarly literature and, where appropriate, statistical sources and expert reports. Whether this tentative discovery was satisfactorily argued is, ultimately and as always, for the readers to decide.

## **PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION**

As I remarked in the opening chapter, the ambition of developing practical communication guidelines for ethical trade organisations was far beyond the scope of this study. Yet, primarily as a token of appreciation for the immense work done by ethical trade organisations that I cooperated with in the course of this project, this brief section begins to reflect on how the knowledge gained in this research might be helpful to practitioners. While, obviously, they are already very well aware of the existence of situated moralities and of how they play out in the context of ethical trade, they might benefit from the overview presented in this dissertation of the factors that underlie and shape these situated moralities. In other words, taking into account the historical experiences of consumption, the current economic position and discursive metageographies of the societies in which they operate might potentially help ethical trade organisations to better adjust the conventional ethical trade communication blueprints and scripts to the local context, especially to the nascent markets in Poland and other post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries.

For example, ethical trade can reposition itself as a manifestation of the labour solidarity between geographically separated workers oppressed – albeit to varying degrees – by the same structures and processes of global trade<sup>138</sup>. In doing so, ethical trade organisations will both rearticulate the problematic notion of ethical trade as motivated by benevolence and privilege, and counter the conventional image of global competition that pits peripheral and semi-peripheral countries against each other. Such a formulation will offer a shared subject position for the geographically dispersed people dispossessed by the economic globalisation – an identification to underpin a common struggle for distributional justice. More theoretically, the redefinition of ethical trade will attempt to transform the current antagonism into a chain of equivalence where, in the context of global economy and trade, one's interests would be compatible with the interests of distant others. Consequently, parties vulnerable to the dislocating effects of global capitalism, individuals as well as civil society organisations and states, would form an alliance against the common adversary in the shape of oppressive capitalism (see Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Mouffe, 2005). Such a project would be a bold attempt at an assault on the global hegemony.

## **UNTYING THE KNOT**

This section is, in a sense, a continuation of the previous one, which, in tying together the different levels of this project in order to tease out some potential contributions, necessarily pulled out some other threads. The limitations of the study indicated, above all, the tentative nature of the inquiry. This is,

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<sup>138</sup> This is a tactic used by a Polish NGO, the Institute for Global Responsibility (see Polynczuk-Alenius, forthcoming).

however, a rather typical feature of a qualitative and discourse-analytical query geared towards uncovering *some* understandings – and, hopefully, destabilising others – peculiar to *some* contexts. The open-endedness of this project invites further research in several areas.

Research on ethical trade communication can depart from this study in at least two directions. Firstly, this dissertation substantiates the need for studying the moral contexts beyond the notoriously spotlighted Anglosphere with its ‘universalised’ particularities. In this light, the communication practices of ethical trade organisations and the situated moralities of ethical consumers in the producing countries, such as India and South Africa, emerge as particularly compelling research settings. Secondly, this project signals the possibility of studying ethical consumers as more than a sum of their economic behaviours and consumption choices, and approaches them as actual moral agents instead. On that note, conducting a larger qualitative study focusing on consumers and their moral deliberation – including, for example, interviews, shopping trips and reflexive diaries – would allow situated morality to be approached as a discourse-in-action on which individuals draw, or not, in making and justifying their decisions.

The tentativeness of the notion of situated morality calls for more flesh and an expanded scope. These could be added, for example, through adopting it as a starting point for the analysis of other social phenomena. My planned postdoctoral research will proceed precisely in this direction: it will approach racism in Poland as a function of the situated morality of the society, of its economic and cultural position in the world, stored and circulating in mediated discourses. Relatedly, for communication studies, this project highlights the option of applying the concept of mediation outside the content and processes of media to other modes of communication, such as education or artistic expression.

Finally, this research poked at some ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of the ethical trade research in particular, but also certain practices of social scientific research in general. While I did not intend to offer a way out of the entrenched conundrums, I felt obliged to unmask some of the entrapments of the scientific process that we, more or less consciously, choose to accept. Finding a productive way out of the various ‘-centrism’ is a much more ambitious and demanding project, which, hopefully, the social scientific community can collectively undertake.

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