

Re-conceptualizing the Global Fair Trade Movement

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The global food system is situated within a neoliberal economic status quo. This context presents opportunities and constraints for organizational actors redressing economic inequities, social injustices, and ecological harms. This essay examines the Fair Trade movement from the perspective of rhetorical structuration theory in order to re-conceptualize how organizational actors involved in the Fair Trade movement are responding to, resisting, and transforming agency, structures, discursive awareness, global consciousness, and communicative reflexivity. [*Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2015 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.*]

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The neo-liberal economic philosophy of free trade has spurred economic globalization, otherwise referred to as corporate globalization, or “the role of corporate influence on the globalization process” (Bruner, 2002: 26). Although it is overly simplistic to reduce economic globalization to a cabal of powerful multinational corporations, there is an indisputable growing transnational capital class (Mann, 2001/2002). Along with the increasing reach of powerful multinational corporations and the organizing backbone of such trade organizations and agreements as the

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International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), there continues to be heated debate regarding who the real beneficiaries of deregulation, eliminating trade barriers, structural adjustment programs, and increased global capital flows, are (Aune, 2001). Petras (1999), for instance, argues that economic globalization is merely an ideological rationalization for growing class inequality. Perhaps it need not be so. But any serious attempt to examine what definitions and models of food justice might entail needs to resist abstractions of capital flows, organizational networks, and structures (Shannon, 2014).

The growing discontent among marginalized groups such as environmentalists who espouse environmental sustainability, labor unionists that toil for labor equity, and indigenous peoples, who experience dire poverty and unsatisfactory North-South trading relations, has been powerfully signaled during the Battle of Seattle (1999) and afterward. Global consciousness regarding the interconnections between economic, political, cultural, and ecological processes, structures, and problems has begun to get collectivized. In other words, new broad-based organizational networks, coalitions, economic and legal structures, and social collaborations have resulted from a growing global consciousness that social and environmental issues—when analyzed as a result of prevalent market-logic—are intertwined. Consequently, during the Battle of Seattle and afterward, organized labor, human rights organizations, indigenous farming communities, environmental organizations, international NGOs, and others, have banded together to pursue multi-faceted, social-movement based programs of change (Compa, 2001; Shiva, 2000). Such multi-movement, transnational, and anti-globalization protests have become commonplace all over the globe when powerful multi-national corporations and political leaders meet to pursue global economic policy.

An interesting response to the malaise of contemporary corporate hegemony can be found in the organizational innovation of the Fair Trade movement. While scholars in the fields of sociology, development, theology, business, business ethics, agriculture, marketing, and economics (Moore, 2004) have engaged in theorizing and empirically studying the Fair Trade movement, communication scholars have not heretofore taken up Fair Trade as an area of inquiry within their literature. Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney (2005: 170) urge communication scholars to engage with these macro-level problems from multi-disciplinary

perspectives in order to extend “communication literature on resistance”. This essay brings communication as a field into this important scholarly discussion in the context of growing interest in food justice. Specifically, the essay argues that macro-level globalization forces and meso-level practices of resistance to growing economic disparity and social injustice within the global food system can be productively examined through a communicative theorizing of the Fair Trade movement as a response to globalization processes. The essay makes a theoretical contribution by extending critical organizational communication literature from micro-level practices of resistance intra-organizationally to practices of resistance aimed at macro-level forces (Cloud, 2001; Ganesh, Zoller, & Cheney, 2005). It does so by approaching one model of resistance (Fair Trade movement) to global hegemony with Giddens’s (1984) structuration theory. The essay also makes a practical contribution by describing one specific form of organizational innovation that has had limited but promising success at transforming global power relationships by introducing a “third way” between unregulated global capitalism and state-centric models of development.

Through a rhetorical structural conceptualization of the Fair Trade movement, the paper aims to broaden the multi-disciplinary theoretical framework of Fair Trade and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the connections between global neo-liberal hegemony, organizing collective resistance and transformation, and food justice. In order to accomplish these objectives, the essay is organized into four sections. First, globalization literature is reviewed from a multidisciplinary perspective in order to bring social movement and organizational communication scholarship closer together. Then the essay re-conceptualizes the Fair Trade movement. It does so by highlighting its history, characteristics, and organizations and applying structuration theory to the Fair Trade movement as the movement addresses macro-level and meso-level social and economic inequalities and injustices. Last, the essay articulates some of the implications from this theoretical move and from the case of the Fair Trade movement.

Globalization, Social Movements, And Resistance

Globalization

Social movement scholars, political sociologists, and political economists, are among the social scientific disciplines in the midst of collecting data and theorizing globalization and its many epiphenomena.

There is still discussion regarding whether globalization constitutes a unique development and phenomenon or if it signals a mere increase in structural and processual trends that have been extant since humans first began interacting or trading. In other words, is globalization a change of type or degree? After studying détente and the 1960s through a global scope, Suri (2003) claims ideas, institutions, and personalities, transcended national boundaries before the internet existed thus lending support to the position that globalization is better defined as a change in degree, not type. In contrast, Hodgson (2002) found that in terms of the local-global relationship, indigenous identities have shifted with the influx of global political and economic processes and has transformed indigenous rights in the global sphere. Thus lending support to the position that globalization is a change in type. It is perhaps still too premature to make any general theoretical claims regarding this question. Or maybe it is a situation of both-and rather than either-or. That is, processes such as diffusion of ideas and innovations have accelerated, fragmented, and amplified and this indicates that globalization is an ongoing but complex phenomenon of differing degrees of acceptance and resistance. However, transformations of identity and policy innovations which paradigmatically alter the dynamics of economic growth, equitable distribution and compensation of resources and technologies, sustainable environmental practices, and socio-cultural autonomy and access, may present data to indicate globalization processes have introduced differences of type into the social, political, economic, and ecological matrix.

Social movement scholars studying globalization have contributed to more nuanced and complex conceptualizations of globalization. Research investigating the World Social Forum (WSF) is one such example. In their introduction to a special issue focusing on the WSF, Keraghel et al. (2004) explain that researching issues such as cultures of politics and the geography of cyberspace add to a more sophisticated understanding of globalization. They suggest that the idea of open space and accurate understandings of other worlds adds conceptual richness to theorizations of globalization. Also new in globalization theorizing, several scholars point to the multifaceted realities of globalization processes. Mann (2001; 2002) explains that vague arguments leveled against some assumed totalitarian neo-liberal program is overly simplistic because a combination of logics, including capital, nation-state, and geopolitical, rule the world economy. Likewise, O'Brien et al. (2000) contend that the sometimes antagonistic cooperation between global social movements

(GSM) and multinational economic institutions (MEI) has catalyzed a joint global economic governance structure.

Resisting Globalization

Social movement scholars have begun researching the myriad ways that globalization and social movement activity/activism intersect and influence each other. One dominant research approach that has emerged to analyzing these intersections is to study social movement protests *against* globalization. In keeping with the normative division of globalization phenomena within globalization studies as political, economic, and sociocultural, social movement scholars that are interested in protest against globalization appear to conceptualize their studies in a similar manner. For example, with regard to economic globalization, data on protest events and movements targeting the globalizing neo-liberal order are salient. In their triangulated study on the World Bank, IMF, WTO, and environmental, labor, and women's movements O'Brien et al. (2000) conclude that as a result of the complex interplay between multinational economic institutions (MEI) and global social movements (GSM) a kind of complex multilateralism is entailed by this unlikely global economic governance. In contrast, Naples & Desai (2002) explore how women in varying locales and at various levels of organizing resist global capital economic restructuring.

In addition to studies focusing on the economic institutions (e.g., WTO, World Bank, IMF) and processes (e.g., structural adjustment programs) associated with economic globalization, there are studies that introduce considerations of protesting some of the more abstract facets of economic globalization. In a provocative study highlighting spatial dimensions of economic globalization, Kohler (2003) argues that adopting the frame of global social movements and the constructs of "multiscalarity" and urban conflict, can help both research and practical tensions. Utilizing feminist standpoint theory and participant observation, Lee (2005) finds that a self-reflexive approach to the politics of representation can help critique global capitalism.

In terms of conceptual essays in this area of globalization and social movements, some scholars, like Mann (2001; 2002) and Petras (1999) adopt various Marxist theoretical inflections (e.g., labor/class relations; imperialism; Neo-Marxism; Marxian world systems theory) to critique economic globalization. They claim that increasing environmental degradation and class inequity call for tighter market regulations and altered class/labor relations. Hunter (1995) uses the frame of new

internationalism to posit that the Fair Trade movement is a movement-based adaptation to economic globalization that embodies opportunities and limitations. Internationally, it demonstrates a positive alternative to exploitative capitalistic practices and rules. Although, even as the movement is a positive adaptive reflexive response, its limits to systemic transformation still are potentially hindered by both the capitalistic ethos and other market pressures which it operates creatively alongside of. Additionally, U.S. based activists need to remain attentive to racism and nationalistic issues and Fair Trade coalitions need to focus work on transparency and democratic decision making.

Organizational Communication and Global Consciousness

Globalization is becoming a powerful force in both theory and social reality for organizational communication scholars. Stohl (2005) comments that in explaining and analyzing contemporary organization, she needed theory that simultaneously included micro-level agents and macro-level structures while attending to specific historical, political, economic, cultural, and technological factors. The “widening, deepening, and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life” (p. 231) provided her with a theoretical conceptualization that could begin to approach organizational forms and issues with which she was interested. The idea that organizations are key actors in recursively structuring, responding to these structures, and consequently restructuring globalizing forces and processes also helps guide her paradigmatic approach to organizational research in contemporary society.

This structural dynamic of structuring, reification of structure, and restructuring is true for organizations that—in the contemporary context—institutionalize either the rhetoric of free trade or the rhetoric of fair trade.¹ Given the posited power of organizations to both mold and respond to these complex globalizing dynamics (Stohl, 2005; Bruner, 2002), attention to these dynamics through critical organizational communication analysis is warranted. Even though both free trade and Fair Trade organizations are enmeshed in the same processes of economic globalization and signify paradoxical tension in their own way (Bruner, 2002; Moberg, 2005), the form of organizing, and their intended programs of change in the world are fundamentally different. As such, the Fair Trade movement may elude Ritzer’s (2004) dichotomous categories of “grobalization” and “glocalization” processes.

Global consciousness, a term that signifies the increasingly convergent patterns of thought and behavior, is yet another theorized outcome of frequent and widespread cross-cultural and transnational interactions (Aram, 1999; Stohl, 2005). The communication reflexivity that may result from increasingly global consciousness, for Stohl, recommends “new forms of organization and models of leadership” (p. 254). For Monge (1998), reflexivity is one of the basic communicative processes that is tied up with and can help inform globalizing consciousness.

Following Stohl (2005), I argue that new forms of organization are indeed invoked by such complex global macro-micro dialectics as hegemonic international trade policies, organizations, and practices and local experience, discursive awareness, and organized resistance. Given the impetus provided by these scholars, critical organizational communication researchers might ask “what specific kinds of organizational forms develop in response to increasing global consciousness of economic inequity, environmental degradation, and macroeconomic fluctuations?” and subsequently, “what can such organizational forms teach us about critical organizational communication theory pertaining to local-global resistance and transformation of the global food system?”

In re-conceptualizing the Fair Trade movement along these lines, the essay also responds to Moore’s (2004) call:

There is clearly work to be done in developing and articulating theoretical perspectives within which Fair Trade makes sense and while economic theory, moral philosophy, theology, sociology and development studies have been identified, there may well be other disciplines that could contribute to a broad-based theory of Fair Trade (p. 77)

A critical organizational communication approach to the Fair Trade movement utilizing a structurational rhetorical analysis can elucidate the complex symbolic-material interplay between global hegemonic forces and innovative organizational resistance. What follows is a broad sketch of the Fair Trade movement that articulates characteristics relevant to such a conceptualization.

RE-CONCEPTUALIZING FAIR TRADE

The dominance of free trade market discourse (Aune, 2001) has been challenged as of late by the deliberate intrusion of Fair Trade discourse

(Lang and Hines, 1993). Scholars in diverse fields have characterized the Fair Trade movement as a market-based change initiative to simultaneously resolve social and environmental problems (Taylor, 2005; Jaffee, Kloppenburg, & Monroy, 2004; Hudson & Hudson, 2004; Gareau, 2004); an anti-globalization movement (Moberg, 2005); and potential model of ethical entrepreneurship (Wempe, 2005). In response to the globalizing economic and social forces that have contributed to the rise of new, post Fordist organizational forms, and the increasing interdependence between local community's social organization and resource-use patterns and global market forces, Sarukhan and Larson (2001) recommend an inversion of the decade-old environmental slogan "think globally act locally". Thus, the new slogan becomes something like, "think locally while acting globally".

In these new post Fordist organizational forms operating in an increasingly globalized economic context, seemingly more democratic processes based on consensus have replaced the old modernistic fetish with rules, regulations, and policies. The modernist fetishization of rules haunts many large bureaucracies that have settled into a collective occupational psychosis where rule-bound procedures and chains of command overly determine how things are done. Newer organizational forms still rely on rules and regulations, but the uncritical adherence to a strict regime of such rules has been displaced by a flattening of organizational forms (coordinated across space) and as human laborers all over the world become more reflexive many organizations are abandoning (or at least rearticulating) rule-based configurations under the signs of mass production and efficiency. Authority is also rearticulated as situationally-relevant knowledge as opposed to formal position. Furthermore, agility, distance or detachment, responsibility, and entrepreneurial change agency have become more characteristic of organizations and organizational actors than the old ways rooted in tradition, custom, and stability. The Fair Trade movement, in many ways emulating many of these descriptive characterizations of post Fordist and postmodern organizational movements, has been viewed as the "quintessential postmodern social movement" (Moberg, 2005).

Part of the difficulty in a coherent interdisciplinary conceptualization of the Fair Trade movement may result from scholars' ability to only partially focus on an incredibly complex movement that, as Moore (2005) has shown, includes at least four organizational clusters: (a) producer organizations (e.g., Wild Forest Coffee); (b) buying organizations (e.g., Equal Exchange); (c) umbrella bodies (e.g., Fairtrade Organizations Labeling International or FLO); and (d) conventional organizations (e.g.,

supermarkets that sell Fair Trade products). To make matters even more complex, there has been a recent rift in the Fair Trade movement in terms of the organizational structures and processes legitimated. For instance, due to the enormous success of Fair Trade products in various national markets, some Fair Trade actors, such as Fair Trade USA have experimentally adopted a wider scope of organizational form. Diverging from the historical norm of the Fair Trade movement to work within a co-op structure, in 2011 Fair Trade USA left the global Fair Trade Federation to incorporate plantations to continue to expand supply and meet increased demand (Hoffner, 2014). Next, the essay provides a brief history of Fair Trade, identifies key characteristics of the movement, and explains the multi-organizational infrastructure of the broad-based Fair Trade movement.

Brief History of Fair Trade

The Fair Trade movement is roughly sixty years old. In the first years of the movement's existence, what social movement scholars refer to as the "genesis" stage of a movement (Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 2001), the movement did its work through international aid organizations such as OXFAM and SOS-Kinderdorf (Moberg, 2005). Many contemporary "Alternative Trading Organizations" (ATOs) retain ties to trade justice NGOs (Berry & McEachern, 2005). Later, in the 1970s, U.S. based Equal Exchange came along and began selling Fair Trade products such as organic, shade-grown coffee and tea. In the 1980s, three "alternative trade" (Moberg, 2005) organizations, such as the Max Havelaar label in the Netherlands, began to label the goods purchased from small-scale, alternative growers and artisans as "Fairtrade" products. Then, in 1997 the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) brought together these disparate, international labeling efforts, and created the first Fair Trade umbrella organization to establish a unified standard for certified "Fairtrade" goods (Moberg, 2005; Moore, 2004).

Social awareness raising events like "Make Poverty History" and "Live 8" helped reify the movement. The movement has continued to grow in success internationally, especially in Europe, where Sweden and the UK are the two highest consumer bases for "Fairtrade" products worldwide (Moberg, 2005). Sales for "Fairtrade" were up 51% in 2004 ("Fairtrade", 2005) and amounted to US \$500 million in sales (Moore, 2004). In 2007, global sales increased by 47% and in 2010, this sales figure increased to over €550 million (Fairtrade.net, 2010). By 2013, global Fairtrade sales reached £4.4 billion—an increase of 15% from the

previous year (Smithers, 2013). The current movement links roughly 23 prosperous countries with buying power to three regional networks on the continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean that represent 1.5 million farmers worldwide (Fairtrade International, 2015). From the last decade of the 20th century to the first decade of the 21st century, the number of commodities carrying Fairtrade labels increased from 7 to 18 and certified production organizations grew from 211 to 433 (Raynolds & Long, 2007). Cafédirect in the UK has been enormously successful: the European parliament has adopted Cafédirect coffee as its official brand (Lang & Gabriel, 2005). The movement now boasts of its own research institute and popular culture lifestyle magazine, the *New Consumer*.

Rhetorical Characteristics of the Fair Trade movement

The following set of rhetorical characteristics includes processual, structural, and normative aspects of the Fair Trade movement. While this list is not exhaustive, and there may be some overlap between distinct types of characteristics (i.e., structural and normative), this delineation provides a good illustration of the overall design, tenor, and *raison d'être* of the movement to date. For the definitions of the characteristics, generality rather than specificity for the level of abstractness aids a more comprehensive sketch of the movement. In the illustration column, a specific example from within the movement serves to manifest some concreteness to each of the defined characteristics. These characteristics were derived from an examination of recent, multi-disciplinary conceptual and factual treatments of the Fair Trade movement.

Multi-organizational Field of Fair Trade

This section fleshes out characteristic 9 of Table 1. The Fair Trade movement, like most other movements (see McCarthy, Mayer, & Zald, 1973; 1979), consists of a field of organizations. As previously mentioned, Moore (2004) divided the Fair Trade organizational field into four distinct organization types: (1) producer organizations; (2) buyer organizations; (3) umbrella organizations; and (4) mainstream organizations. While the basic structure of the movement remains the same, over the past decade there has been some convergence and redefinition within the multi-organizational field. Now producer organizations are organized into regional networks, buyer organizations are called “Fairtrade organizations” and include both purchase and

promotion activities, and the umbrella organizations have been refined to manage standards, certifications, audits, and labels.

Table 1. Fair Trade Movement Rhetorical Characteristics

Characteristic #	Characteristic Definition	Illustration
Characteristic 1	More sustainable two-way exchange, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect between producers & consumers, North & South	Fair Trade brings producers and consumers in geographically dispersed areas closer together (Barratt Brown, 1993). Equal Exchange [2] seeks long term relationships with its partners based on respect and trust.
Characteristic 2	Creating more continuity between buyers and sellers or producers and consumers	Fair Trade movement eliminates the onerous “middle man” involved in conventional market transactions (Brown, 2004)
Characteristic 3	Is a “third way” economic initiative underpinned by a distributional philosophy of justice	Equal Exchange ¹ is a for-profit buying organization yet pays a guaranteed minimum for small producers to counter global market price fluctuations
Characteristic 4	Mitigate gross socioeconomic inequity and foster sustainable livelihood while preserving local, cultural values and lifestyles	Individual producers more fairly compensated while simultaneously preserving local culture by investing in social and environmental causes with a portion of the proceeds
Characteristic 5	Engage producers in a more sustainable relationship with the natural resource base and improves environmental conditions/standards	Fair Trade buying organizations promote environmentally friendly practices such as organics, shade grown coffee, and other practices that protect the natural resource base and humans’ health and livelihood
Characteristic 6	Cultivate more ethically aware and worldly conscious consumers	Cafédirect allocates a good portion of its profits to “promotion of the Fair Trade concept” (Berry & McEachern, 2005, p. 82)
Characteristic 7	Price premium for goods used to further private, social, or environmental well-being	Buying organizations such as Equal Exchange pay above market prices for premium quality and organically certified products
Characteristic 8	Paradoxical in that it is a movement that works in, but against, the “free” market to alter normative rules and practices of international trade	Producer coops and buying organizations are for-profit but rearticulate market rules, production practices, and trading relationships
Characteristic 9	Multi-organizational (e.g., labeling organizations, producer co-ops, buying organizations, etc.), international structure	See “Multi-organizational Field of Fair Trade” below
Characteristic 10	Establishes its own standards and has evolved certification criteria (e.g., gender equity, environment, capacity building, etc.) for “Fairtrade” label eligibility	Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) uses a democratic process including producers and labeling organizations to determine a fair price for each product to be certified

Producer organizations in the Fair Trade movement have traditionally been marginalized groups from the Southern hemisphere that come together in collectivized structures such as farmer co-ops and women's artisan groups, in order to pool resources, gain access to global markets, and provide sociocultural support for traditional ways of life in the face of globalization. Many Fair Trade producer organizations throughout Latin America, Africa, and Asia, have increased access to participation and global markets for women and people of color, but require ongoing leadership, resources, commitment, and producer participation to foster greater gender, ethnic, racial, and economic equality (Raynolds & Bennet, 2015).

In the first years of the 21st century, Fair Trade organizations existed exclusively in geopolitically Northern counterparts to the Southern producer organizations. Fair Trade organizations still typically exist in the geopolitical north in such countries and regions as the U.S., Canada, Western Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but in the last five years have also expanded to Brazil, India, Kenya, and Eastern Europe. Examples of this type of organization in the U.S. are "Jim's Organic Coffee", "Peace Coffee", and virtual organizations like "Equop" ("Greener Coffee Companies", 2005; "Fairtrade", 2005).

Umbrella organizations are large, composite entities that function to help unify and administer Fair Trade processes and standards. In the first several decades of the Fair Trade movement, there existed only a small number of umbrella organizations, although, they continue to proliferate. Moore (2004) identified six such umbrella bodies. Organizations such as the Fairtrade Labeling Organization (FLO) set the standard for "Fairtrade" labeling criteria (Moore, 2004). The International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT) is a global membership organization that brings together buyer and producer organizations into one centralized, federated structure.

Mainstream organizations within the Fair Trade movement have increased as a response to market demands more than for any other reason. This type of commercial expansion has occurred to other market-engaged social movements seeking alternative sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and socioecological arrangements. The organic food movement, for example, has also experienced remarkable economic growth in the last several decades (Willer & Yussefi, 2005). Consequently, large chains such as Whole Foods and Wild Oats have entered mid-sized to large, urban communities and created market competition for the older, more grassroots movement selling organizations such as neighborhood co-ops and farmer's markets. In

more recent history, even larger scale alternative food retailer chains such as Whole Foods and Wild Oats have seen increased competition from more conventional and larger-scale retail chains such as Wal-Mart and Target.

A similar trend can be seen happening within the Fair Trade movement organizational field. As such, they pose an interesting dilemma to the movement. Organizations such as Nestle have begun labeling some of their products as Fairtrade products, and according to criteria set forth by independent Fair Trade certifying organizations such as the Fairtrade Foundation, Nestle products like “Partners’ Blend” coffee are eligible for the Fair Trade label (Ransom, 2005). Ironically, Nestle has been widely boycotted due to its attempt to market bottled baby milk formula to the poor mothers of underdeveloped countries, among other socially, ecologically, and economically unjust practices. When juxtaposed with the Fair Trade characteristics of pursuing justice through altering market-based inequities and helping to preserve local cultures and traditions, something seems amuck. As Ransom (2005) has argued, if giant multinational corporations keep encroaching on the *modus operandi* of the Fair Trade movement, and if consumers shift their focus to brands and products rather than people, organizations, and principles, the Fair Trade movement may be headed for co-optation or dissolution. A study of the relationship between organization size and commitment to sustainability within the US Fairtrade organizations selling coffee (including Equal Exchange, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, and Starbucks) found an inverse relationship between organization size and commitment to sustainability. The larger organizations also displayed less public discourse addressing tensions between size and sustainability (Howard & Jaffee, 2013).

Now that the history, rhetorical characteristics, and organizational structure of the Fair Trade movement has been explicated, the essay proceeds by explaining the theoretical approach utilized in order to extend critical organizational communication theory, contribute to a broader multi-disciplinary theorization of the Fair Trade movement, and finally, explore the potential for the organizational innovation of the Fair Trade movement to reify or resistively transform justice and injustice within the global arena.

STRUCTURATION AND TRANSFORMATION

This section applies structuration theory to the Fair Trade movement in order to extend critical organizational communication theory on

resistance and transformation of global economic power relations. The exegesis of the Fair Trade movement employing structuration theory in this essay owes its methodological rationale to Cheney and McMillan's (1990) explication of conducting organizational rhetorical analysis. The analysis will be organized into several subheadings including many of the central conceptual components to Giddens's (1984) original articulation of structuration theory. The aim is neither to provide a thoroughgoing analysis of the Fair Trade movement nor to explicate Giddens's theory of structuration. Rather the essay offers an illustrative application of a novel approach to global economic resistance and transformation in the hope that fuller, more extensive analyses may be developed following this kind of approach.

Structure

In structuration theory, there is no Lockean *tabula rasa*. Rather, there are certain structural "givens" that one enters into. The subtleties of global economic power disparities in the food sector were becoming ever clearer to citizen consumers throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The "hijacking" of the global food supply by behemoth multi-national agribusiness companies and the ecological, social, and economic consequences wrought by this system gave many pause. The founders of Equal Exchange explain their perception of the macro-level structures that preceded them:

In the mid-1980s the world of food was going through major changes. The U.S. public was beginning to see their nation's family farms squeezed out and replaced by industrial-scale, corporate-run agribusinesses reliant on chemical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. As a result, consumer food co-ops who offered their members more organic and locally produced food grew in popularity. At the same time, the U.S. specialty coffee market was exploding. Coffee aficionados, including many influenced by their travels in Europe, were eager to find and make great coffee here at home. It was not a coincidence that the founders arrived at a strategy to start a venture with fairly traded specialty coffee ("The changing world of food")

Thus, the Fair Trade movement can be seen as a collective response to unsavory structural conditions not of their making, in an effort to resist

and perhaps transform certain undesirable aspects of reified market relations (see characteristics 3, 4, 7, and 8).

Giddens's theory of structuration also introduced to social action theory the slipperiness of social reality in that social configurations are not uniform and predictable but rather diverse and contingent on context. Applied to the Fair Trade movement this tenet of structuration yields the insight that polysemy and multiple meanings are enacted in the Fair Trade movement's acceptance of diversity of local cultural ways of being and knowing. In fact, this acceptance of and respect for diversity of structure in local, situated cultures and communities is built into the mission of the movement. In juxtaposition with the grossly homogenizing impulse of neo-liberal economic globalization (Ritzer, 2004), Fair Trade works to preserve and celebrate the diversity of structures found in social life (see characteristics 1, 5, and 9).

Other noteworthy elements of the Fair Trade movement's structure are its connectivity and communality (Tenkasi & Mohrman, 1999). The movement's connectivity brings closer together sellers and buyers, producers and consumers (see characteristic 2). This also leads to time-space compression and thus contributes to the reproduction of certain globalizing forces, albeit in an alternative tenor. The movement's communality can be seen in buyer organizations that merchandize food and craft products from around the world. They communicate communality by paradoxically making the global community more intimate while seemingly more diverse (see characteristics 6, 7, and 8).

Agency

According to Cohen (1989) the relationship between agency and power in structuration theory lends itself to rendering actors' social agency as transformative capacity (see characteristics 4 and 7). In the Fair Trade movement, this transformative capacity can be seen at many levels. First, there is agency in the innovation of the ideological kernel of the Fair Trade movement through the auspices of the branding of Max Havelaar coffee in the Netherlands. The coffee was named after the Dutch book *Max Havelaar*, published in 1860 castigating the use of slaves in trading (Mulatuli, 1987). Second, the intervention of early Fair Trade movement organizations such as Oxfam and Equal Exchange in the "business as usual" mentality of the marketplace signals the power of social agency. The founders of Equal Exchange developed a vision for their organization that included the premise of organized social change ("A Vision of Fairness"). Structuration theory recognizes that any social

agency that has transformative capacity is underpinned by a manipulation of resources. These resources are material and discursive. Equal Exchange founders recognized this and had a multi-pronged start-up strategy that included fundraising and educating investors and consumers about the trade issues impacting farmers. Third, farmers, small producers, and producer organizations exemplify agency by their willingness to engage in an uncertain endeavor in order to improve their quality of life, protect their natural resource base, and preserve their local culture while simultaneously embarking upon a journey toward economic globalization (see characteristics 4 and 5). Fourth, consumers all over the world that buy Fair Trade products committed to voting with their dollars, pounds, and yen instantiate social agency and help to make the movement succeed at transforming the way trading is done.

Discursive Awareness and Global Consciousness

Global consciousness is making the interconnected nature of large-scale problems more clear. The criticism of corporate capitalism destroying local culture, degrading the environment, and reproducing inequitable socioeconomic conditions between north and south is a result of discursive awareness of broader social conditions. Corporate capitalism, in contrast to other versions of this economic philosophy, is more pointedly responsible for damaging local cultures, degrading the environment, and reproducing economic inequality. This is primarily due to the legal imperative for multinational corporations to maximize profit for shareholders at the expense of all other potential values. In this way heightened discursive awareness and global consciousness can lead to a more reflexive stance toward the material and symbolic consequences of globalization. In turn, this reflexivity can further inform the cultivation of an even more critical global consciousness regarding macro-level structures, relationships, power distribution, trade policies, and production practices as well as local issues important to a given community or culture (see characteristics 1 and 6). In other words, the relationship between global consciousness and reflexivity is bilateral and reiterative. The Fair Trade movement represents an alternative type of global consciousness formation. Somewhat akin to Freire's (1994) "conscientização", the global consciousness developed through participating in the Fair Trade movement (as organized producer, buyer, consumer, and rule-maker) is not neutrally made. Rather, such global consciousness has an explicit political-economic orientation toward

current injustices, unfairness, imbalances, and destructiveness with a mind toward social change, resistance, and transformation.

Communicative Reflexivity

The concept of reflexivity has myriad dimensions and applications. Traditionally, reflexivity has been used by scholars to get at the subtle workings of individual bias, presuppositions, values, assumptions, and experiences as they commingle with the research process. As such, reflexivity is conceptualized as a higher degree of subjective critical awareness in relation to the epistemic process of objective knowledge claims and construction. However, reflexivity has also been used to theorize different objects of study such as globalization (Stohl, 2005; Monge, 1998), agency-structure dynamics (Giddens, 1990), and managerial practice (Barge, 2004). Taking into account both scholarly self-directed and other-directed uses of reflexivity, Giddens (1979) contends that “reflexivity has to be reconstructed within the discourse of social theory not just in respect of the members of society whose conduct is the object of study, but also *in respect of social science itself as a form of human endeavour*” (p. 47, emphasis in original).

In both uses, reflexivity centers on symbolic action, context, and subsequent structural or processual change and/or maintenance. Analogous to Weaver’s (1953) idea that dialectic precedes ethical rhetoric, discursive awareness and global consciousness must precede a high degree of ethical reflexivity (characteristic 1 → 3 and 6). This is because reflexive monitoring of global or macro-level issues and dynamics is heightened and becomes more frequent as a result of discursive awareness of local issues. The discursive awareness of local issues occurs primarily through literacy, dialogue, and communication campaigns and is thus a micro and meso-level practice. In this fascinating process, the symbolic-material dialectic is brought to the forefront for without symbolic engagement or intervention, awareness of local/global material reality would never come about. Likewise, as a result of increased discursive awareness of local/global material reality, strategic discursive action (e.g., reflexive monitoring, campaigning) follows. This symbolic-material dialectic of reflexivity obtains in the Fair Trade movement’s vigilant monitoring of the global power structure’s impact on local ecological, social, and economic conditions and the subsequent strategic response.

This analysis situates itself theoretically in Monge’s (1998), Stohl’s (2005), and Giddens’s (1990) articulation of reflexivity as a

communication process that has the capacity to either alter or reproduce social meanings and structures in the face of globalizing processes. While reflexivity has typically been theorized at the level of the individual actor this essay argues that an organization as an entity can also act reflexively. Aram (1999) helps to advance alternative conceptions of global change organizations by conceiving of organizations as collective action systems, rather than a composite of individuals. If this is the case, an organization is not reduced to a container metaphor (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999), which houses the communication between individual actors and groups within and external to the physical confines of the organization's boundaries. Rather, a specific communication process—reflexivity—both helps to explain the organizational innovation (i.e. structure and agency) of the Fair Trade movement, and carries important implications for organizations in the 21st century globalizing environment. This analysis shifts attention away from individual actors and to organizations as entities that interact in a global environment in an effort to reflexively challenge and transform normative capitalistic ways of doing business, including the resistance and transformation of obsolete structures and relationships—such as food injustice.

An example of a structural transformation through the organizational innovation of the Fair Trade movement can be found in the movement's cost-structure (characteristic 7). By internalizing costs that free-market corporations externalize such as the loss of fertile topsoil due to unsustainable coffee growing practices, the movement exhibits reflexive awareness of discourse's effects on material reality (e.g., free-market capitalistic ideology not accounting for resource-base degradation and alternative growing practices loosening this embedded structure). Relationally, reflexivity is revealed through critical awareness of the superficial nature of human relationship developed through conventional capitalistic trading customs and the attempt to build more sustainable trading partnerships based on trust, respect, democracy, fairness, and transparency.

CONCLUSION

This essay, situated within a multi-disciplinary discussion of globalization and social movements, re-conceptualized the Fair Trade movement and through a rhetorical structural analysis provided one theoretically and practically useful approach to extending critical theory on resistance and transformation. One that is based on a closer and more

systematic look at how organizational actors in the food system embedded in a global situation of particular constraints and opportunities can build upon growing discursive awareness of global relations and structures to increase communicative reflexivity and deploy agency in the pursuit of food justice.

There are numerous implications that can be drawn from the theoretical moves in this essay. Due to limited space, only a few will be highlighted here. First, there appear to be specific opportunities and constraints with the contemporary Fair Trade movement. Realistically, approaching a movement as complex, multi-level, and ambitious as the Fair Trade movement from a lens of rhetorical structuration reveals unintended consequences for any pursuit of resistance, social change, and transformation. There have been advantageous and disadvantageous consequences in the social, environmental, and economic spheres that the movement is committed to improving. According to some, not all Fair Trade is fair. At the same time, not all free trade is unfair (Barnett, Cafaro, & Newholm, 2005).

On an even more fundamental level, there is a perhaps foundational tension between Fair Trade as a movement and Fair Trade as a market. If, as this analysis argues, this movement is actually a market, how do its agency-structure dynamics engage, impinge, and respond to corporate capitalism? From the structural-agentive dialectic the movement expresses, revolutionary transformation to social, ecological, and economic modalities may be possible if discursive awareness spreads and communicative reflexivity is collectively experienced and socialized. If the movement is a market, the market cannot coop the movement. Neither is the movement exactly operating “inside” the market. While this reconceptualization of the Fair Trade movement is a pronounced gesture toward the potential for foundational reexamination of these tensions, it is not a sustained examination of such. Innovative qualitative and quantitative metrics probably need to be developed to more holistically evaluate and compare empirical improvements in harm reduction, expanded access to markets, sustainable economic development, improved social equity, human fulfillment of purpose and participation, habitat preservation, biodiversity protection, soil improvement, and food quality, for instance. Also, state actors and trade structures need to act with even more flexibility and give more consideration to local constituents voicing local issues to be prioritized on the agenda (Ganesh, 2003).

There is also a limitation in the overlooked conditions of the impact of global economic hegemony on domestic small producers in Fairtrade

buying and promoting nations due to the reified North-South dichotomy in the Fair Trade movement. Nonetheless, many developed nations are in a unique position to help empower impoverished laborers in less developed nations (Brown, 2004) and as the Fair Trade movement moves forward, political as well as economic structures, relationships, and rules need to be manipulated for more significant transformation to occur. However, there are real limits to stretching political and economic instruments to expand goods (social, economic, and ecological). The inclusion of large multinational food corporations, the willingness to abandon co-op structures to expand supply, as well as the departure from the international Fair Trade Federation, may be outside the limits of the integrity of the triple bottom line at the expense of the social goods proviso for laborers in the global South.

Lastly, a rhetorical structuration theoretical framework offers useful insights for extending critical theory on resistance and transformation. The nuanced relationship structures between organizing, economic and political power relations, and social movements such as food justice and food sovereignty can be usefully illuminated through approaches such as the one used here. This essay enriches our understanding of opportunities, limitations, tensions, and paradoxes with innovative organized resistance. Critical engagement with specific processes and models of pursuing food justice—such as the Fair Trade movement—reveals a growing discursive awareness and communicative reflexivity in many sectors of human thought and action. This is a promising sign.

NOTES

¹For provocative treatments of the rhetoric of free trade see Robin Clair's (1996) work on ideology, colloquialism, and work socialization and James Aune's (2001) book *Selling the Free Market*.

²Equal Exchange, Inc. is the oldest U.S. based Fair Trade organization. It was founded in 1986. Because it is located in the U.S., it is what the movement calls a Fairtrade organization, buying and promoting Fairtrade products, principles, people and planet. Equal Exchange currently partners with over 40 small farmer co-ops from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the US. Over the three decades of its existence, the organization continues to experience dramatic economic growth. In 2014, Equal Exchange sold \$61.1 million of products in the principal categories of coffee, chocolate & cocoa, tea, bananas, avocados, food snacks, and other (Equal Exchange Annual Report, 2014).

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