Politics in the Pocket?

Coffee Activism, Political Consumerism and the Internet

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Abstract

This thesis examines coffee activism in the UK in order to discuss the possibilities and hindrances for civic engagement within the wider debates on the decline of political participation and the mediation of politics online. Coffee activism is an umbrella term for the fair trade movement and actors beyond the official network. This research is based on the analysis of selected activists' websites, online and offline interviews with activists and citizens, as well as events observation and survey questionnaires. I interrogate the landscape of coffee activism through spaces which allow political expression and participation to emerge, and question the possible colonisation of such spaces by consumer narratives and mobilisation calls. By portraying the online growth of both civic and consumer-related information, as well as communication and consumption flows, I argue that the internet has served mostly as an enhancer of a neoliberal consumer-driven rationale. Such narratives and directions belong in the repertoire of political consumerism, which has signalled a distance from previous types of civic engagement. There is a shift in the placement of personal experiences of political engagement from public to private spaces. Civic engagement here consists of mostly individual acts, which become politically meaningful on a collective level. This is discussed as collective individualism, signifying a mass scale of individual acts of citizenship. Distance from civic habits of the past assisted by liquid politics online and offline and infiltrated by consumer culture and the politics of neoliberalism allows for both optimism and scepticism for a politics within the capitalist modus operandi. Concurring with literature on the prolific, though fragmented, nature of citizenship and the politics of political consumerism, I argue for the restrictive enactment of forms of participation and the restrained use of the internet for political revival.

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Chapter 1

Introduction:

The Politics of Consuming Coffee

1.1 Planting the Seed

I'm writing this for all the people who will wake up tomorrow morning, grab a cup of coffee, and then stare at it, wondering how they can possibly do anything that matters to make the world a little bit less of a rotten place. A lot of people regard activism as an all-or-nothing epic struggle against injustice. They get easily disappointed when they encounter resistance or apathy, because they believe that activism is about big changes that matter. Occasionally, activism is indeed about big changes that matter. More often, however, activism is about little changes that no one notices, but matter anyway. ....

It has to do with your coffee. Your coffee, chances are, is from a country like Colombia, a country that used to have lots of biologically diverse forest, and now has very little. Maybe that coffee is from Colombia or somewhere else in South America, and maybe it isn't. Maybe it's from Africa, or Indonesia. The point is that most coffee is grown ... in economically-abusive relationships between big corporations and disempowered local people who don't have much control over the land around where they live any more.

One thing you could do is pledge to buy all your coffee from someone ... which offers coffees that are ... fair trade, which means that local communities around where the coffees are grown get a little bit more of a just economic compensation for their sacrifice.

That's what activism is about. …. Activism is about living in an awful world, and learning how to stop contributing to it being quite so awful, quite as much as you have, little by little, step by step, on your own, when no one else is looking….

Activism is about taking little parts of the stink of life away from your life, until eventually, you can catch a whiff of your own odour without wincing. … Activism is not all or nothing. Any action, no matter how small, counts for something.

(The Green Man[1])

The quote above comes from a US blog where the 'Green Man' draws a direct link between coffee consumption and activism. He contests the idea that activism is about big changes or charismatic leadership of the few, and calls on the humble many; the message is to wake up, smell the trade injustice and act by waking up to fair trade coffee. This simple argument is one which permeates the reconfiguration of the understanding of contemporary activism through the interrelation between politics and markets, as well as civic and consumer action. This thesis aims to analyse new forms of political participation through an exploration of coffee activism in the United Kingdom. In this thesis, coffee activism is an umbrella term used to describe a type of single-issue activism, which includes a number of voices and agendas that range from the more directly political to that which is more consumer-oriented. It involves the fair trade movement, as well as initiatives which are concerned with the promotion of ethical and moral practice and conditions in the chain of global coffee trade. These include solidarity campaigns, co-operatives and Alternative Trade Organisations (ATOs)[2], as well as eco-labelling schemes[3] and other certification labels[4]. The fair trade movement is concerned with tackling trade injustice by setting and activating

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[1] http://irregulartimes.com/index.php/archives/2008/03/17/columbian-grounds-activism/ [20 Oct 2009].
[2] ATOs are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or ethical businesses aligned with the fair trade movement and during their setting up they were affiliated with actors from the political left.
[3] Eco-labelling schemes are concerned with the promotion of products which have a reduced environmental impact and in terms of conditions of production and product packaging.
[4] Besides the Fairtrade Mark, there are other, though less popular, certification labels such as Rainforest Alliance, Soil Association, UTZ Certified and Tanzanian Hope Project or own supermarket's own labels such as the Waitrose and Sainsbury's certification labels.

mechanisms which protect the 'global South'[5] and raise awareness in the 'global North'[6]. In doing so, the movement is considering a variety of principles on social and environmental justice issues. Fair trade is primarily concerned with the promotion of the motto and practice of a 'fair day's pay for a fair day's work', as well as an environmental, developmental and gender equality agenda. The market-driven model of fair trade (Nicholls and Opal, 2005) fits well with the market-driven politics of the UK (Leys, 2001).

The subject matter of coffee activism requires a thorough exploration of ethical consumption. Through an analysis of the mediation and practice of coffee activism, I attempt to tackle the tensions and dilemmas involved in a contemporary politics of consumerism. Crucially, in a digital age, this involves the exploration and analysis of the mediation of ethical consumption and progressive political mobilisation. The choices for civic engagement in coffee activism are numerous and include, for instance, acts of ethical consumption, as well as signing petitions or lobbying MPs to bring forward the various associated issues. One of the aims of the analysis has been to map representations of coffee activism and ethical consumerism in an online context to better understand the nature of contemporary mediated political activism. The effectiveness of the medium in engaging citizens in online and offline political action, but also the phenomenon of political consumerism, are examined with regards to selected case studies; the cases chosen focuses on various groups and organisations actively engaged in coffee activism (Chapter 5).

Planting the seed of the discussion entails introducing the basic concepts of this thesis. At the heart of this project are the notions of citizenship and the mediation of political life. Citizenship is understood as a concept under transformation; while traditional perspectives (cf. Marshall, 1950; Sennett, 1974) place citizenship in the terrain of a commonly professed public space, there is now a necessity to widen the notion of the spaces and practices of citizenship to include international and culturally specific themes (cf. Lister, 2003; Stevenson, 2003; Isin and Nielsen, 2008). Citizenship, in this thesis, is explored through the concepts of individualisation, cosmopolitanism and consumerism. Civic engagement is adopted as a more suitable

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[5] The term 'global South' is employed to describe the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America that are targeted by the fair trade network where the producers of fair trade goods are based.
[6] The term 'global North' is employed to describe the developed countries of Europe and North America where the fair trade network originated and where the consumers of fair trade goods are based.

term for addressing citizens' participation in coffee activism. The qualitative difference between civic and political engagement is understood as being that the first is seen as less mandatory than the second (cf. Adler, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009). Civic engagement is a valuable term in capturing the transformations of citizenship and escaping the strict constraints of its classical sense. Additionally, a shared consciousness of global issues has been discussed through the notion of cosmopolitanism (cf. Beck, 2002, 2006). The mediation of political life is investigated with regards to internet politics, while taking into consideration the broader social and political framework through discourses of neoliberalism (cf. Brown, 2005; Harvey, 2005) and debates on commodification (cf. Marx, 1978; Fridell, 2006). I regard neoliberalism as the driving rationale of contemporary capitalism which prioritises the economic in the social, political and cultural aspects of life. It is a term synonymous with capitalism, free markets, deregulation and individualism and is responsible for the unfair treatment of coffee farmers which spurred coffee activism in the first place. Essentially, this project further explores the interplay between public versus private and how this relationship is mediated; this dichotomy is employed to discuss spatial political and economic distributions of civic engagement. The argument is that there is a blurring of individual and collective, as well as political and market-based forms of action. In these semi-public and semi-private interactions, there is a paradox. This is the phenomenon of collective individualism, which I develop throughout this thesis as the necessity of individual action to be translated into a collective response. Even more paradoxically, there is no need for market-action to be translated into political action. Forms of participation in coffee activism can merely consist of acts of political consumerism.

The phenomenon of market-based action through the consumption of ethically produced, traded and labelled purchases is the most popular type of civic engagement in coffee activism. This has been named 'ethical consumption' (Barnett *et al*, 2005a, 2005b; Trentmann, 2007), 'political consumerism' (Micheletti *et al*, 2004; Hozler, 2006) or 'radical consumption' (Littler, 2009). Bennett (2000) argues that types of civic engagement are better understood by the analysis of communication patterns around which it is facilitated. This project, then, critically discusses the social and political aspects of internet-mediated civic engagement in the case of ethical consumerism. I examine the possibilities for online participation by looking at how activists use the medium for campaigning, organisation and political mobilisation

purposes, while taking into account their local, national and international variances. The nature of online campaigning is explored through the use of technology, the stages of production, as well as the calls for online and offline mobilisation. The organisational structures and patterns of activists are also analysed by considering both their online and offline practices. This project, therefore, attempts to develop a broad understanding of contemporary activism. Jordan has argued that in the information society, political activism has increasingly been "setting moral and ethical agendas" (2002: 14). The interplay between an ethical imperative in politics and an ethical narrative in markets under the overarching framework of neoliberalism is examined in this thesis. Essentially, this project concerns a wide range of interlinked issues. The two focal questions which guide this thesis are:

1) Is there a relationship between coffee activism and online political mobilisation and, if so, how is it both facilitated and manifest?
2) What is the relationship between consumerism and activism and how is this manifest online and offline in the case of coffee activism?

In addition to these main research questions, there are a series of sub-questions which this project explores: What can the case of coffee activism tell us about the role of the internet in contemporary political mobilisation? How do activists perceive the role of the internet in their campaigning, organisation and political activism? How does the mediation of coffee activism facilitate a better understanding of the relationship between consumption and political action? How is the mediation of fair trade affecting contemporary politics?

1.2 Watering The Plant: Why Coffee Activism?

The importance of coffee in the world economy cannot be overstated. It is one of the most valuable primary products in world trade, in many years second in value only to oil as a source of foreign exchange to developing countries. Its cultivation, processing, trading, transportation and marketing provide employment for millions of people worldwide. Coffee is crucial to the

economies and politics of many developing countries; for many of the world's Least Developed Countries, exports of coffee account for a substantial part of their foreign exchange earnings in some cases over 80%. (International Coffee Organization[7])

A politics of justice built around the commodity of coffee is employed as the case study of this thesis. I chose to focus on coffee activism due to the contemporary complexity of political citizenship which touches upon different realms of our everyday lives and most appreciably that of consumption. The personal consumption of fairly or ethically labelled coffee in major coffee chains, big supermarket stores and the mushrooming of ethical online and offline shops is directly indicative of the vibrant private spaces of coffee activism. Additionally, the public spaces of coffee activism are evident in the organisation of the fair trade movement, as well as solidarity-based groups and other progressive social and political agencies that coalesce around the issue. The significance of the coffee commodity is vast; "coffee is the second most valuable legally exported commodity of the South, after oil, and it provides a livelihood for around 25 million coffee-producing families worldwide" (Fridell, 2007: 102). Even more precisely, coffee is "the second most valuable primary commodity exported by developing countries" (Talbot, 2004: 44).

The journey of coffee is characterised by a long process of diverse historical transformations[8]. Along with products such as bananas (Lamb, 2008) and sugar (Mintz, 1985), coffee has known a bleak history of trade (Allen, 1999; Wild, 2004; Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Luttinger and Dicum, 2006). The heritage of the unjust coffee trade history spans to contemporary times. As a product in the global market, coffee has been involving a network of intermediaries between producers and consumers. Its politics have been interwoven not just with consumption and consumer culture, but also with the contentious politics of trade justice. The interplay between these traditions has resulted in coffee becoming a powerful object for

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[7] http://www.ico.org/coffee_story.asp [22 Sep 2009].
[8] The discovery and journey of the coffee drink begin in its Ethiopian birthplace, from where it moves to the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century; coffee only arrives to Europe a century later and since then its popularisation is only a matter of time. During these centuries, there have been unconventional – at least by contemporary standards – occurrences relevant to coffee trade. From the banning of the product in Mecca in 1511 to its introduction to Europe by the Ottomans through diplomacy and war (Wild, 2004), it has been clear that there have been several social, political and cultural issues arising from such an economic matter.

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political consumerism. As consumer activism grew more sophisticated in the 20th century, political consumerism is now part of a strong consumer movement. Fair trade has been an integral part of political consumerism and fair trade coffee one of the most popular ethical commodities. The Fairtrade Mark is an independent consumer label which certifies that the product carrying its brand meets the international Fairtrade standards [9] set by the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO). The label, also, claims to bring producers and consumers closer by minimising the number of people involved in the trade circle and by setting a premium which reaches the producers despite market fluctuations or any production or distribution hindrances. The accomplishment of this consumer label has been declared through its recognition by 70% of the UK adult population[10]. This is the success story of coffee activism in the market arena.

Highlights of the recent dark history of coffee as a commodity include the 1989 collapse of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) and the fall of the "C" price[11] ten years later. The consequences of these market crises have impacted severely on the developing world:

> Just as farming families may be heavily dependent on coffee for their income, so are many nations. A handful of African countries rely on coffee for more than half of their foreign exchange, and a larger group of nations in Central America and Africa count on coffee for a significant portion of their income. (Jaffee, 2007: 45)

Reactions to these crises arose from a variety of fronts; dire economic developments combined with a rising feeling of social responsibility and global solidarity, signified the birth of contemporary coffee activism. The contentious politics of coffee manifested around the 1940s and spans to contemporary times. Activists around the world have been challenging mainstream trade by protesting or offering alternative

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[9] These standards are agreed through a process of research and consultation with key participants in the Fairtrade scheme, including producers themselves, traders, NGOs and labelling organisations such as the Fairtrade Foundation.

[10] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/may_2008/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/april_2008/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/april_2008/awareness_of_fairtrade_mark_leaps_to_70.aspx [10 Feb 2009].

[11] The phrase '"C" price' denotes the world price for coffee which is set by commodity traders on the New York Coffee, Sugar and Cocoa Exchange.

paths for trade with the aim of improving living conditions for coffee farmers in developing countries. The citizen in the North has been strongly encouraged to take responsibility for the producer in the South. This is the story of coffee activism in the political arena. The UK is currently the third largest consumer country of available fair trade certified coffee after Denmark and the Netherlands, while the US comes in fourth place (Wild, 2004). The diversity and rapid growth of the fair trade movement in the United Kingdom, particularly in comparison to other European countries, has also been emphasised (Krier, 2005). This is the story of coffee activism in the market arena. Participation in coffee activism, therefore, includes a range of practices from a single consumer preference to fully committed engagement in protesting and lobbying, as well as the boycotting of unethical coffee trade.

In light of the widened and constantly widening fair trade market and movement in the UK, this thesis examines activists' and citizens' relevant practices online and offline. The empirical approach of this research involves a multi-method examination of activists, citizens and the spaces and stories carrying the weight of the movement. Through the selection of a range of groups and organisations, the various dimensions of ideologies and actions are explored. Coffee activism is not restricted in the typical involvement of charity or development NGOs, but includes a wealth of activist initiatives both connected to and disconnected from the official network. The seven case studies that account for the bulk of my analysis reflect the diversity of the population in terms of localities, scales, and types of actors. They include six groups and organisations based and operating in the UK, as well as a transnational organisation operating in Europe. An analysis of their websites is undertaken to explore the contemporary mediation of coffee activism and the functionality of online mobilisation in this case (Chapter 8). Interviews are also conducted with activists from the case studies and citizens broadly engaged in coffee activism, so as to question the relationship between civic engagement and political consumerism. Also, an observation of fair and solidarity trade events is employed, in order to examine possible links between internet activism, offline mobilisation and political consumerism.

This thesis does not in any way assess the actual developmental work carried out by the fair trade movement or other initiatives of coffee activism. It appreciably recognises the significant efforts to ameliorate living conditions for millions of farmers who are faced with destitution. Rather, I analyse the structures for political

participation emerging among the celebrated category of 'the consumers of the North'. Through this choice, I aspire to add to understandings of contemporary civic engagement through the examination of forms of citizenship that are inflected through their mediation. The wide acknowledgement of the Fairtrade Mark, the agreement of Starbucks to sell fair trade coffee in the UK in 2002 and their consequent switch to 100% fair trade espresso-based drinks by the end of 2009 are only a few of the numerous instances which have signified the mainstream attention gained by coffee activism. I also seek to critique the neoliberal framing of consumer-driven narratives of fair trade as restricting civic engagement in the marketplace and silencing the political potential of the movement (Chapters 6 and 7). As such, this project looks for coffee activism online and offline, in the spaces of politics and the spaces of markets, in the actions and opinions of individuals, groups and organisations.

1.3 Picking the Coffee: The Structure and Choices of this Thesis

In this thesis, there are different levels of interrogation which concern the case of coffee activism in terms of its situation between politics and market, as well as its online mediation. I evaluate the use of the internet by activists and citizens alike in terms of civic engagement in coffee activism and ethical consumption practices. In addition, I draw on their views on the significance and employment of the medium. The effectiveness of the internet as a tool for offline mobilisation is thereby scrutinised. I employ an enquiry of the internet in order to discuss some of the main claims regarding its revolutionary potential for political communication and mobilisation, which have been articulated about the medium over the last decade. Finally, the notion of political consumerism as a form of participation is explored through its mediation and correlation to other forms of enacting politics. A synoptic itemisation of the chapters of this thesis follows.

Chapter 2 (*Contemporary Politics*) argues for a series of alternations in the nature of contemporary politics. I suggest that a conceptualisation of liquid politics is significant in our understanding of the reconfigurations of the 'political'. Liquid politics is highly ephemeral and prone to the fragmentation of attention and, consequently, action. Manifestations of citizenship are individualised, consumer-

based, transient and related to lifestyle politics. The soaring levels of marketisation of engagement in coffee activism suggest its susceptibility to a neoliberal modus operandi. An increasing relevance of cosmopolitan citizenship is also suggested. Coffee activism enables the clarification of certain characteristics of contemporary politics because of its claims for the politicisation of consumption. As the interrelation between consumption and citizenship becomes increasingly evident, so do the tensions in their relationship. The main argument concerns the diffusion of ways of being political, inclusive of consumer action. I also argue for the framing of a phenomenon which I question as 'collective individualism'. This relates to the paradoxical relationship between societal and political individualisation, as well as the requirement of collectivity or the political meaningfulness of engagement. In this chapter, I engage with a picture of politics and what is wrong with that picture.

Chapter 3 (*Political Consumerism*) clarifies certain concepts relevant to the contemporary relationship between markets and politics. In this chapter, I theorise the politicisation of the market on two levels. On a first level, the concept of political consumerism is delineated, placed in context and interrogated with regards to its political or apolitical nature. The online mediation of this phenomenon is also discussed. On a second level, the analysis explores the relationship between coffee activism and ethical consumerism. This is a chapter about the phenomenon of political consumerism as one constantly shifting between two arenas, that of markets and that of politics. Political consumerism has been theorised as a form of political participation in the marketplace, but has not been examined in terms of the restrictions posed by its neoliberal context. This chapter critiques the concept of political consumerism within the wider context of the debates on a contemporary liquid politics.

Chapter 4 (*Digital Debates*) investigates internet politics and the role of the medium in facilitating political communication in terms of information, organisation and mobilisation. I outline the opportunities and restrictions set by the internet as a platform for the mediation of politics. This chapter follows through an argument on the appropriation of the internet to dominant offline actors. By taking a historical snapshot of the medium and coffee activism, I point to the initiatives which have been significant in shaping their present. This snapshot shows both promises and fallacies of the internet for both politics and markets, and is further scrutinised through the Goldhaber's (1997) notion of an online economy of attention. Attention is an elusive

prerequisite for a healthy politics, but also a sustainable marketplace. The competition for attention online can mobilise citizens and consumers, or citizen-consumers, but it can also frame politics in a specific rationalised manner. Another proposition of this chapter concerns the inextricable relationship between the online and the offline realm, which is further explored in the next chapter.

In Chapter 5 (*Methodology*), I consider the parameters involved in researching the internet and its contexts. A research design is developed to deal with the complexity of issues around the technologies and repertoires of coffee activism. A combination of different online and offline qualitative and quantitative methods is employed. A selection of case studies is utilised to focus on the micro-sociological instances of a vast population of coffee activists. Through the analysis of their websites, the opportunities for interactive participation and the digital narratives of coffee activism are explored. Through interviews with activists, I endeavour to shed light on the representations of this type of activism, decision-making on employing communications technologies and their understanding of political consumerism. Through events observation and interviews with citizens, the link between the internet and mobilisation is empirically explored and scrutinised. At this stage, I also address the interrogation of civic engagement through citizens' political background and current involvement and practices. The main argument of this chapter concerns the need for an offline/online combination of methods in research pertaining to the internet.

Chapter 6 (*A History of Coffee Activism*) portrays the historical evolution of the fair trade market and movement, as well as other initiative on fair, solidarity or alternative ways of trading which dispute the systemic patterns of the free market. This chapter provides a historical and contextual focus of the case study employed. By outlining a brief history of coffee activism, I trace three principal processes which have advanced its mainstreaming in the United Kingdom. The widening of access to the ethical type of consumption that is fair trade, the employment of branding as a strategic mechanism for extensive promotion, as well as the involvement of key economic players such as companies and supermarkets have been crucial to the outreach of coffee activism. In this chapter, I offer an analytical exploration of the correlation between alternative and mainstream trade and make a case for a sociological observation of the processes which have impacted the widening of coffee activism's boundaries.

Chapter 7 (*After Mainstreaming*) follows on from the discussion in Chapter 6, in order to explore the consequences of mainstreaming the fair trade movement. Based on interviews with citizens, I investigate the tensions inherent in a politics of consumerism. The dominant argument in the fair trade literature is that the fair trade movement and market allows for the decommodification of goods. However, civic engagement in coffee activism appears to be commodifying the very notion of consumer citizenship; its increasingly mainstreamed presence results in the proliferation of consumer mobilisation, while downplaying direct political action. Branding plays a crucial role in this process. Through an exploration of the relationship between branding and coffee activism, I discuss the potential commodification of the notion of civic engagement and the relationship of tension between fair trade and businesses. The entry of dominant economic players in the fair trade market has signified a capitalist-friendly version of fair trade as parallel to free trade. Here I argue that the processes which have impacted the mainstreaming of coffee activism have transformed citizenship as a form of liquid participation in a neoliberal marketplace.

Chapter 8 (*Framing Online Politics*) focuses on the different structures and narratives which frame coffee activism online. There are two levels of analysis which concern the technological sophistication of the websites and their projections of political participation as a campaigning process or as a consumption process. On the one hand, by investigating the form and content of the online public faces of the selected groups and organisations, I focus on the structures of participation offered. This chapter argues that the websites examined are restricted to basic and linear communication flows, in contrast with Web 2.0 perspectives (O'Reilly, 2005). On the other hand, by outlining different types of stories which construct an understanding of engagement through ethical consumption, I underline the infiltration of consumerism in the rhetoric of coffee activism. This chapter portrays a continuum of narratives within which the various selected groups and organisations reside. At the two ends of the continuum there are calls for political-type participation and market-type participation respectively. Conclusively, the message is mixed and coffee activism takes place both in the streets and in supermarkets, but the mobilisation messages are leaning more heavily towards market-based action.

Chapter 9 (*The Politics of Space and the Space of Politics*) sheds light on the online and offline spaces of coffee activism. It discusses the politics of space in terms

of the importance of spaces of information and spaces of action in this particular type of activism. Spaces of information concern the physical or media environments where information is sought after or given and explores how these might impact upon perceptions of what fair trade is and how one should act on it. In other words, in this chapter, I demonstrate how communicative practices in certain types of spaces influence the types of politics advocated. I also explore the space of a politics past and a politics present; traditional spaces of political involvement such as membership in a party or political groups and organisations, as well as contemporary spaces of consumer action and cosmopolitan citizenship are explored. There is a tendency of citizens interviewed to quietly withdraw from national politics, seeking alternative ways of expressing themselves. This chapter argues that there is a growing rhetoric of consumerism in online environments, as well as the sense of political empowerment by use of the market as a space for expression.

Finally, Chapter 10 (*Conclusion*) summarises the core conclusions of this research and sets the ground for further debate. I bring together and discuss the concepts which are introduced in this thesis (i.e. coffee activism, liquid politics, collective individualism and the marketopoly). I demonstrate how coffee activism presents a fruitful opportunity for citizens to participate in political life, how the internet functions as a medium of potentialities for both political and market actors and how neoliberal narratives are framing discourses of coffee activism. Trentmann (2007) discusses a 'civic side of consumption' which is perceived by citizens as a direct opportunity to engage in international issues, such as trade justice. Despite a grim picture of waning participation rates and decline of trust in traditional politics, opportunities for civic engagement appear to be growing. The politics of coffee activism presents an alternative way of engagement which provides spaces and actions for direct involvement in cosmopolitan concerns. It does not contradict traditional ways of engagement, but rather offers new spaces and tools for political expression. In particular, this chapter elaborates on the 'marketopoly', a concept employed to deal with the ubiquitous presence of neoliberalism in contemporary markets, but also politics. The term is similar to the word 'oligopoly' signifying the existence of a few dominant players in a market. 'Marketopoly' marks the reign of the market itself. I argue that the reign of a market-based ideology is directly impacting the politics of coffee activism.

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1.4 Conclusion: Your Coffee is Served

Wild writes that "as the world has woken up to coffee, it has also woken up to its geopolitics" (2004: 282). On one level, this thesis is not about coffee at all. I am employing a wide range of literature on online and offline political practices, neoliberalism, cosmopolitan and consumer cultures to discuss how a simple act such as purchasing coffee potentially opens a political door, which previously seemed invisible to the majority of consumers. The intricate balance between the values of public spaces and those of private spaces – evident in the politicisation of consumption – are crucial to understanding contemporary political involvement. This is enacted in a politically degrading environment, where the disassociation of citizens with national states is being replaced by the solidification of consumers' bonds with the market. Citizens are increasingly turning to the marketplace to voice their concerns on social issues such as trade justice. They are given the possibility to do so through their consuming practices. The growing rhetoric of empowerment through the marketplace demands closer interrogation, as discourses of individualism and consumption are further embedded in social norms and values through a neoliberal politics.

Beyond this, I look at the historical continuity of an issue-based type of activism as digitisation sprints forth in advanced capitalist societies. Coffee activism has always been correlated with purchases of ethical goods. I examine the mediation of political consumerism and the interplay between political and economic activity through a variety of prismatic viewpoints including activists and citizens alike. At the same time, I explore the online and offline structures and narratives which convey coffee activism in the United Kingdom. The issues explored invoke several paradigms that demand critical attention. Among these, there are debates on the relationship between politically active citizens and consumers, contemporary mobilisation and the use of the internet as a tool for resistance. The sets of relationships between activism, the internet, political mobilisation and political consumerism are indeed the foundations of this thesis, whilst also engaging with the wider issues of civic engagement in a fragmented and diversified political landscape, and examining the grey areas of the relationship between politics and markets. In

conclusion, this project hopes to add to the academic understanding of cyberactivism (i.e. the production, meaning and consumption of contemporary political campaigns) and the nature of contemporary political activism.

Chapter 2

Contemporary Politics:

Coffee, Context, and Citizenship

2.1 Civic Life at the Contested Crossroads

This work begins on two basic premises. The first is that what it means to be political in developed capitalist societies is contested. The second is that civic life is considerably moulded not only by political, but also by social, cultural and economic processes. This chapter aims to untangle some of the past and present debates on contemporary civic life by addressing issues around citizenship and civic engagement and contextualising them in light of the tradition of 'market-driven politics' (Leys, 2001) in the UK. In terms of nomenclature, there is a subtle difference between the terms 'civic' and 'political'; civic engagement is regarded as voluntary participation in public life and a "precondition for the political" (Dahlgren, 2009: 59). It is in this broader sense that I discuss civic engagement in coffee activism throughout this thesis. Civic engagement is considered to be a necessary condition for a healthy democracy; the political must become activated for manifestations of citizenship to emerge. In the context of 'market-driven politics', the process of creating conditions and activating a democratic politics is inescapably influenced by the agency of the market. Therefore, the continuation of a debate on the interplay between politics and markets (Lindblom, 1977) is crucial to understand contemporary civic life. There is also budding literature on the reconfiguration of the very notion of 'citizenship' pertaining to the rising significance of the 'civic agency' (Dahlgren, 2009: 59) of consumers (Stevenson, 2003; Lewis *et al*, 2005; Miller, 2007; Root, 2007; Trentmann, 2007).

In post-war Britain, the term 'citizenship' has been long associated with the legal sets of rights and obligations that go hand in hand with belonging in a national body politic. These rights and obligations had been closely defined by the

relationship of citizens with the state. Thomas Humphrey Marshall (1950) drew a particular picture of citizenship, where he discerned three elements (civil, political and social) to comprise its full schema. He associated civil citizenship with the 'basic legal integrity of society's members" (Dahlgren, 2009: 50), such as "liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice" (Marshall, 2006: 30). He also defined political citizenship as the rights to exercise political power, such as partaking in the democratic electoral process, and social citizenship as the rights to standard of life and social heritage. This static perception of citizenship in advanced societies is now dated. From a feminist viewpoint, it stands out as patriarchal (cf. Voet, 1998; Lister, 2003; Lloyd, 2005), as dictated by the reproduction of a traditional exclusive system, despite the inclusion of women in this picture. Lister (2003) argues that traditional notions of citizenship within the boundaries of the nation exclude meaningful participation in the global civil society and alternative forms of politics; she argues that "'vocabularies of citizenship' and their meanings vary according to social, political and cultural context and reflect historical legacies" (Lister, 2003: 3). Moreover, Marshall's picture does not account for the infiltration of markets in political life. It remains a traditional perspective and does not address the notion of the 'citizen' in the individualistic and atomised cosmology of liberalism; it cannot, therefore, account for the transformations which apply precisely to the neoliberal spirit of our political times. A new vernacular on citizenship is growing. This chapter aspires to discuss a model of civic engagement through the particular case of coffee activism, in light of the social and economic transformations brought about by the rise in power of conservative, neoliberal parties on both sides of the Atlantic.

Besides differences in defining civic life throughout multiple political and theoretical traditions, there is one fundamental reason as to why it appears contested in contemporary capitalist societies. This is the fall of the electoral process. A deterioration of participation in the most fundamental civil right is evident, as participation in electoral politics has been appreciably abating (Gray and Caul, 2000; Pattie and Johnston, 2001). Figure 2.1[12] portrays the General Election turnout in the United Kingdom over the years 1945-2005.

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[12] Figure 2.1 is taken from http://www.ukpolitical.info/Turnout45.htm [26 Dec 2009].

Figure 2. 1: Decline in Voter Participation During 1945-2005
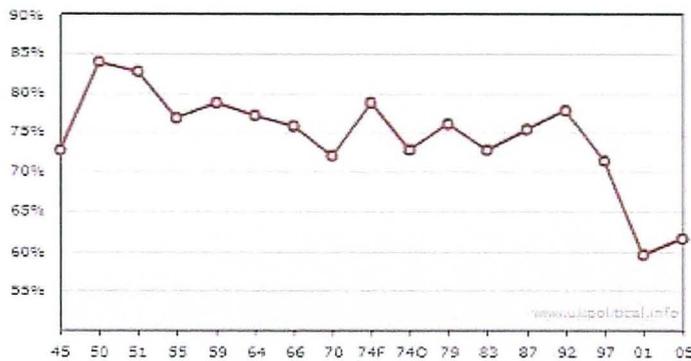
A significant decline in voter turnout is shown in this graph. Since 1991, the percentage of political participation in the form of voting has shown a dramatic decrease, which is documented as "the lowest since before the First World War" (Root, 2007: 72). These types of tendencies have been deemed as indicative of a politically apathetic age, where non-political realms, such as reality television, are winning the hearts and minds of British citizens:

> The decline in [electoral] turnout has been brought into sharper focus by the success of reality television shows like *Pop Idol* and *Big Brother* where audiences cast their votes for their favourites or to eject contestants they dislike. In 2001, the two UK *Pop Idol* finalists, Gareth Gates and Will Young, received more votes between them than the Liberal Democrats, who finished a strong third in the 2001 British general election. (Lewis *et al*, 2005: 2)

The same type of argument is made by a UK government Minister with regards to elections on the European Union level:

> Sadly enough I can tell you that in the UK, the televised "Big Brother" produced higher voting rates than the election to the European Parliament. We must face that traditional democratic channels have lost much of their ability to engage people. Politics has become an issue of interest for fewer and fewer people[13]. (Graham Stringer, MP, 2001)

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[13] http://www.mail-archive.com/do-wire@tc.umn.edu/msg00238.html [22 Oct 2009].

Arguments which generalise by comparing statistics with societal tendencies are overwhelmingly simplistic (Coleman, 2006). Coleman, instead, explores explanations for such apathy by hinting towards potential flaws in contemporary civic culture, as well as the proliferation of readily accessible technological innovations.

The sudden decline of a primary civic habit has also spurred discussions on the relevance of another dimension of citizenship; *cultural citizenship* as related to media consumption (Lewis *et al*, 2005; Miller, 2007; Couldry *et al*, 2010), but also to commodity consumption (Stevenson, 2003; Micheletti *et al*, 2004). Coleman and Blumler write that:

> Addressed as consumers in the marketplace, as members of audiences consuming mass-media output and as individual personalities in the sphere of intimate sociability, people have become used to having multiple social identities. The role of being a citizen is one of the more confusing of these identities. (2009: 4)

Civic life seems to be only one part of a warped whirlpool of threads, the total of which can allure citizens into a different realm, one where consumption offers the sense of a more direct and less confusing representation than parliamentary politics. Participation in coffee activism through the consumption of ethically produced and sourced goods is gaining impetus in the United Kingdom (Chapters 3 and 6). In this chapter, I elaborate on the consequences of the existence of such forms of participation through an understanding of its degrees and contexts. In terms of degrees, an 'elusive engagement' (Dahlgren, 2009: 13) is examined through the conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) and through the merging of public and private spaces and action. In terms of contexts, then, the impact of globalisation on the consciousness and emotional life of citizens is considered to have 'stamped' citizenship with a mark of cosmopolitanism. Finally, the long-standing marriage of politics with markets is explored as a playground of civic life.

2.2 A Liquid Politics? The Civic Life of Homo Ephemeris

The understanding of civic engagement is intrinsically linked to the understanding of the zeitgeist. Bauman's (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007) genealogy of liquidity concerns the nature of constructions, such as the role of institutions such as the state and the means of production, as well as reconstructions of contemporary life, such as the emotions of fear or love. The main articulation of his claims is that contemporary life is the consequence of liquid modernity and its conditions of precariousness, instability, fluctuation and disorientation. Bauman (2007) argues for a transition from a 'solid' to a 'liquid' state of modernity where there is a swift decomposition of social forms such as those guarding choices, routines and behaviours. The conditions of liquid times include the separation of power from politics, the decline of community, the rise of lifestyles and the seeming freedom of choice. There is a certainty about the uncertainty of liquid life which is ruled by the conditions of fluidity, disposability, adaptability and constant motion. Liquid life is a "precarious life, lived under conditions of constant uncertainty" (Bauman, 2005: 2). For the author, the consequences of liquidity have led to the "withdrawal from politics and the public realm" (Bauman, 2005: 130). His understanding of politics draws from Arendt's argument, according to which "the public realm has lost the power of illumination which was originally part of its very nature" (1983: 4). It can be argued that Arendt's predisposition to motion was positive, provided that it is available and sustained in the public realm:

> Being able to depart from where we will is the prototypal gesture of being free, as limitation of freedom of movement has from time immemorial been the precondition for enslavement. Freedom of movement is also the indispensable condition for action, and it is in action that men primarily experience freedom in the world. When men are deprived of a public space – which is constituted by acting together and then fills of its own accord with the events and stories that develop into history – they retreat into their freedom of thought. (1983: 9)

However, she argues that the public realm has been diminishing (Arendt, 1958), along the same lines as other authors who have heralded the waning of this realm by

defining it as a decreasing 'space' (Sennett, 1974), 'sphere' (Habermas, 1989) or 'domain' (Marquand, 2004).

Liquidity equals a reckless motion, whereby the freedom of mobility from public to the private realm constitutes "the collapse of long-term thinking, planning and acting" (Bauman, 2007: 3). Subsequently, for Bauman, liquid modernity causes the negation of political life. However, as suggested above, the idea of political life demands reconfiguration; the 'power of illumination', which was originally the goal of a healthy democratic system, should be shed in spaces where civic engagement takes place. Stevenson (2003) discusses 'cultural citizenship' as inclusive of cosmopolitan tendencies, ecological sensitivities and consumer practices among other variables. Accordingly, I assume citizenship to refer to acting politically in a variety of ways and settings, ranging from everyday practices to full-on activism. The expression of such action might include participation in local politics, campaigning groups, demonstrations, protest marches, boycotts or even digital forms of action, such as signing a petition, lobbying your MP or even getting your hands – metaphorically and legally speaking – dirty with hacktivism. The proliferation of various types of political expression is evident. Paradoxically, the lack of public space in which citizenship is made manifest is not only causing citizens to retreat to the realm of thought, but also to other more private realms. Perhaps, then, there is such a concept as 'liquid politics' and it is to be found in the proliferation of activities surrounding extra-parliamentary politics.

What could be said to be happening is a reconfiguration of civic engagement which has been theorised under different interpretations of cultural citizenship. There is a blooming of different avatars of citizenship which are not mutually exclusive; terms such as 'ecological-citizen', 'consumer-citizen' (or more commonly described as 'citizen-consumer'), 'cosmopolitan-citizen', 'intimate-citizen' or 'youth-citizen' are now valid terms to describe citizenship through the practice of according acts (Isin and Nielsen, 2008). An ecological-citizen in this sense is one who subscribes to an environmental cause, but might also be a consumer-citizen when consuming recyclable or environmentally sustainable commodities. The correlations between these different forms of civic engagement are endless, and point to the fragmentation of citizenship. What is evident from the transformations of civic life is that civic engagement has become a fluid form of participation. Moreover, an understanding of liquid politics will have to be open to forms of civic engagement as inclusive and

exclusive of the conventional. Bennett pertinently argues that "new forms of public identity and civic life are emerging as old patterns fade away" (2000: 307). Such an idea of politics, which resonates with Bauman's liquidity, would borrow notions around the decline of traditional politics, the precariousness of citizenship, individualism and the decomposition of the collective, as well as the reign of consumerism.

Liquid politics is the politics of the ephemeral, and agrees with the landscape of new media such as the internet (Chapter 4). Dahlgren argues that "political parties have become more *voter-oriented* rather than *member-oriented*, as citizens' identification with specific parties has become looser [italics in original text]" (2009: 23). Collective forms of political organisation are changing the landscape of solid political culture. Citizens' connection with parliamentary politics is confined to their exercise of the right to vote, but as mentioned above that has been decreasing. The presumption of liquid politics raises the question not of whether citizens are being or becoming political, but why they are not being political on a sustainable basis. Participation in coffee activism is prolific in forms of civic engagement. Forms of participation as such include activities as variable as raising awareness among one's social circle, lobbying the local council to become fair trade certified, marching for trade justice, or – notably – making specific purchases in shops or supermarkets. These are increasingly viewed as acts of political significance by activists as well as consumers (Chapter 9), but are not necessarily anchored in any commitment beyond the availability of time and access. In the case of coffee activism, therefore, cultural citizenship entails the manifestation of a variety of acts of civic engagement in the political, but also the public realm. The manifestations of engagement in coffee activism directly affect the relationship between the 'public' and the 'private', often blurring the line which separates individual from collective action, as well as 'citizenship' from 'consumption'.

2.3 The Private/Public Synecdoche: Collective Individualism

The theorisation of liquidity as the driver of modernity has been significant for understanding the changing relationship between citizens and states, but also between

states and markets. As discussed above, liquid modernity invokes the possibility of expanding the terrain of citizenship, as it allows for the politicisation of a variety of civic actions. For instance, in the case of coffee activism citizenship is simultaneously manifested in a diversity of spaces, from election booths to online window-shopping. Contrary to arguments for the decline of citizenship (cf. Falk, 2000; Putnam, 2000), Scammell argues that "citizenship is not dead, or dying, but found in new places, in life-politics... and in consumption" (2000: 351). A revitalised perception of space for civic partaking is emerging. Theorisations of 'life politics' (Giddens, 1991), 'subpolitics' (Beck, 1997), and 'lifestyle politics' (Bennett, 1998) have widened the focus of the study of civic life. Giddens defines 'life politics' as "a politics of choice", "a politics of lifestyle" and "a politics of self-actualisation" (1991: 214), where globalising influences and the project of the self interact. Beck views 'subpolitics' as an eruption beyond the formal picture of politics, such as the one drawn by Marshall, and writes that:

> People expect to find politics in the arenas prescribed for it, and they expect it to be performed by the duly authorized agents: parliaments, political parties, trade unions, and so on. If the clocks of politics stop there, then it seems that politics as a whole has stopped ticking. (1997: 98)

Also, Bennett argues for a 'lifestyle politics', where "personal identity is replacing collective identity as the basis for contemporary political engagement", thus changing "the character of politics itself" (1998: 755). According to these theorisations, politics is internalised individually and externalised collectively. This is not a new argument (cf. Roszak, 1979). Hannah Arendt has also noted the alienation from the civic habits of the past to be "the basic attitude of the modern individual" (1983: 24). There is an intimacy in the ways in which citizens are political which subverts traditional understandings of collective politics. These perspectives present different articulations of a common yet individualised politics, one embraced by individuals who are in charge of their personal political experiences and acts (Elias, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Elliot and Lemert, 2006). This process of the personalisation of politics has had an impact on the ideological affinities connecting citizens with states.

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The breakage from the politics of solid modernity and the adoption of the politics of liquid modernity has altered the ways in which citizens relate to the repertoire of politics. The dominance of individual over collective forms of politics has arguably placed a "stronger emphasis on single issues than on overarching platforms or ideologies" (Dahlgren, 2009: 33). In their turn, the collapse of collective ideology and, consequently, the decline in action have resulted in the presence of 'dynamics of individualisation' (Mouffe, 2005). While Mouffe's perspective argues for a more antagonistic politics than the lifestyle politics model does, the focus on individualities remains strong in both. One verdict for contemporary politics is, therefore, the escalating disassociation of the individual from the collective. Citizens are alone in, and solely responsible for, their political life. This state has been facilitated by social, political and economic institutions. As Mouffe emphasises, "the basic institutions of society are now oriented towards the individual and no longer towards the group or the family" (2005: 37-8). The individual not only votes alone, but also makes active choices in terms of their engagement with politics. The individualisation thesis offered by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) is a similar one; the authors add that 'institutionalized individualism' signifies societal diversification, indefinite and mandatory choice, political atomisation, individual blame and responsibility, globalised life, reflexivity, and distance from national politics (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: 24-8). Bauman also notes the decline of community and the estrangement from societal structures:

> If the individual is the citizen's worst enemy and if individualization spells trouble for citizenship and citizenship-based politics, it is because the concerns and preoccupations of individuals qua individuals fill the public space, claiming to be its only legitimate occupants and elbowing out from public discourse anything else. The 'public' is colonized by the 'private'. (2002: xviii)

If politics are internalised due to institutional pressures, the outcome is a retreat from the public space, which is evident in the decreasing numbers of electoral turnout.

Political communication is directed more towards the individual rather than the collective. For instance, the premise of a form of political consumerism, namely the action of purchasing fair trade coffee, is communicated to the individual who internalises the issue and engages in ethical consumption individually. However,

while a form of consumer civic engagement such as this might constitute an individual act, it only has real consequences when these individual acts come together as a collective effort. The orientation of practices, such as this one, seems to address individualities on a collective level. Collective individualities as acts of citizenship that both adhere to and challenge individualism present a useful way of understanding the fragmentation of contemporary politics. This example reverberates a crucial and paradoxical element of the individualisation thesis, which contends that "human mutuality and community rest no longer on solidly established traditions, but rather on a paradoxical collectivity of reciprocal individualization" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002: xxi). The ultimate paradox, therefore, of this state of disassociation with collectivity is that, essentially, without the sum of individualities no political sociability is possible. This phenomenon can be defined as collective individualism. While action is illustrated as an individual task, without the collectiveness of individualities no meaningful politics can be realised. An autonomist perception of individualisation and its political potential would, therefore, not be valid.

Moreover, the individualisation thesis is closely related to the cosmopolitanism thesis (Beck, 2002, 2006), according to which individuals turn to various forms of engagement to voice concerns over global issues. Bennett (2004a) also relates lifestyle politics to 'global citizenship'. Consequently, the rise of life politics, subpolitics and lifestyle politics concern the increasing irrelevance of national politics in terms of citizenship. Fenton argues that:

> The growing, 'civic disengagement' from state politics – the kind of politics that has been developed through modern history to fit and serve the political integration into 'nation-states' – has shifted political interests and hopes to new terrains that are borderless and global. (2008a: 242)

The personalisation of politics allows for a global vista into a political imaginary. The very existence, history and nature of coffee activism have been infused by the connection between the global South and the global North by relationships of production and consumption of goods. The sensitisation of the movement was originally beckoning to feelings of charity, but it can be argued that at some point in its history it was also beckoning to feelings of cosmopolitan solidarity (Chapter 9). The correlation between national and global political life, as well as that between

individual and collective acts of civic engagement is evident in the case of coffee activism. In this particular case, a variety of mixed acts comprise the political efforts of the movement. Ranging from local campaigning to global boycotting, coffee activism presents an illuminating opportunity to examine the various dynamics of cultural citizenship.

2.4 Cosmopolitanism and Civic Engagement

The effects of globalisation of goods and images on citizenship have often been theorised through the notion of cosmopolitan citizenship (Hill, 2000; Held, 2003; Beck, 2006; Kivisto and Faist, 2007). The relevant freedom of mobility in international travel and the ubiquitous mediation of global issues and cultural goods enabled – among other factors by the internet – are only some of the variables which have been considered crucial to the reconfiguration of identity and citizenship. This is especially the case in terms of forming an understanding of the issues facing citizens of the world. Stevenson views cosmopolitan citizenship as a form of cultural citizenship, which "seeks an institutional and political grounding in the context of shared global problems" (2003: 5). Theories of cosmopolitanism attempt to explain how the intensification of links between cultures and individuals has almost removed national blinkers from citizens (Featherstone, 2002). Cosmopolitanism, then, in terms of political identity, refers to widened citizen consciousness with respect to international issues. Coleman and Blumler (2009) discern between institutionalised forms of citizenship, such as legal-judicial citizenship and political citizenship, and a different form of 'affective citizenship'. The latter is differentiated from the previous two in the sense that it "is primarily concerned to mobilise feelings of civic belonging, loyalty and solidarity' (Coleman and Blumler, 2009: 5). Although affective citizenship was primarily related to national identity (Billig, 1995), it has also been connected to cosmopolitan identity (Beck, 1997, 2002). Beck (2006) identifies a crucial component of a cosmopolitan outlook to be 'cosmopolitan empathy'; he discerns the 'globalization of emotions' (Beck, 2006: 5-6) as the driving force of contemporary civic engagement. But if there is a rise in cosmopolitan empathy, does this mean it replaces national empathy? For Beck the answer is no; "the transnational

and the cosmopolitan should be understood as the summation of the redefinitions of the national and the local" (2006: 6). Consequently, a re-examination of civic attention to local, national and international politics is essential.

Globalisation is a phenomenon which dates back to the 15th century AD (Held, 2003; Tilly, 2004). The notion of cosmopolitanism dates back to the golden age of Athenian democracy in the 5th century BC, and Socrates' self-pronouncement as κοσμοπολίτης (citizen of the world). What is different about the discussion of cosmopolitan citizenship today, is that cosmopolitan citizens have to filter their engagement with the cosmos through the prism of the decline of national politics, the individualisation of political participation, and the shift in the political mindset from public to private spaces (Chapters 3 and 8). Moreover, the use of technological innovations in terms of communication has had important consequences for political communication and participation. The impact of new media upon political communication has been significant in influencing the understanding of cosmopolitan citizens (Bennett, 2004a; Bennett *et al*, 2007; Hrynyshyn, 2008). Political communication is an important factor in terms of processes of information-gathering, awareness-raising, resource-donating, mobilisation-causing, which are relevant to cyberactivism (Chapter 4). Falk argues that:

> In the context of progressive forms of resistance to the abusive sides of economic globalization, the strong tendency has been for individuals to bond across boundaries, which weakens in other respects traditional territorially based citizenship and its core reality of a symbiotic relationship to the state. (2000: 7)

In other words citizens of the world are concerned with singular and specific issues of an environmental, humanitarian or socio-political nature, rather than with multiple and broad class or party issues (Bennett, 2004a; Dahlgren, 2009). Cosmopolitan citizenship remains fragmented. Stevenson (2003) relates the 'cosmopolitan-citizen' to other forms of citizenship such as the 'multicultural-citizen', the 'ecological-citizen', the 'cultural-citizen' and the 'consumer-citizen'. This fragmentation can be related and unrelated to the breakage of the collective. In this sense, the 'dynamics of individualisation' are particularly evident in consumer citizenship, which is characterised by individualisation of consumption, but not explicitly linked with

manifestations of cosmopolitan citizenship and collective mass-scale action in solidarity to a cause beyond national relevance.

An active cosmopolitan civic culture, however, is considered an antidote to the fragmentation of citizenship (Stevenson, 2003; Fenton, 2008b). Stevenson argues that "without a politically robust cosmopolitan culture, we will remain a world at the mercy of the interests of nation-states and economic markets" (2003: 39). Similarly, Fenton argues that the sense of solidarity and a "viable political community" (2008b: 39) are crucial, if we adhere to arguing for the positive political ramifications of the fragmentation of society. Again, the need for a wider manifestation of collective individualism remains. I consider ideal cosmopolitan citizenship, as informed by the mediation of world issues, to include an extended awareness on all local, national and international levels and to be indicative of 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999). As a result, I regard cosmopolitan civic engagement as a proliferation in the forms of personal political decisions and actions which can have a global impact. One of these is evident in the case of coffee or fair trade activism.

Campaigning for fair trade and trade justice relates to the impact of globalisation on identities in the form of cosmopolitan citizenship (Littler, 2009). It has been argued that Beck's (2006) analysis uncovers "the cosmopolitanization of the political: a window for democracy in the age of globalization" (Hier, 2008: 32). Cosmopolitan citizenship makes claims to global rights and responsibilities. In the case of the fair trade movement, consumers in the global North make political claims about the lives of the producers in the global South (cf. Huey, 2005; Nicholls and Opal, 2005). Fair trade is also a case where the 'cosmopolitan-citizen' meets the 'consumer-citizen'. Additionally, such acts of citizenship might refer to either the purchase of eco-friendly products or the abstinence from purchasing country-specific products. Cosmopolitan citizenship is, therefore, linked to consumer citizenship. The infiltration of consumer culture in manifestations of citizenship cannot be denied. As Bennett writes:

> For many of today's global citizens, the very private activities of consumption are regarded as having public and even international consequences for human rights, labor conditions, life in fragile democracies, and environmental quality. (2000: 208)

The link between cosmopolitan and consumer citizenship in the case of fair trade is evident. Even if not from a lifestyle politics perspective, but from a consumer activism perspective, Bauman argues that the emergence of "'consumer activism' is a symptom of the growing disenchantment with politics" (2007: 247). The decline of class politics and the presence of issue-based activism demonstrate the fragmentation of citizenship. Therefore, the body politic is, both in market and political arenas, influenced by the parameter of individualisation.

It is possible to evaluate as political various forms of participation through the market, particularly through consumption of fair trade goods. Littler (2009: 23) identifies cosmopolitan 'caring consumption' in particular purchasing practices. She consequently argues that looking at how cosmopolitan citizenship and concerns become entwined with consumption is important in terms of understanding the various extensions of citizenship. Citizens involved in fair trade are becoming politically sensitive to global events and developments (Chapter 9). This indicates a growing sense of amplified affective engagement in the sense of 'cosmopolitan empathy' (Beck, 2006) or 'cosmopolitan caring' (Littler, 2009), which is grounded and enacted locally at various physical spaces. The cosmopolitan fair trade narrative places the consumer at a more privileged position and the producers at an under-privileged position. By narrating the consequences of opposing life circumstances, coffee activism signifies and stresses the responsibility of (consumer) action. The mechanism which facilitates this interaction is the marketplace. The link between cosmopolitan citizenship and consumption has also been noted by Sassatelli (2007) who argues that, through their interaction, global citizenship is manifested. The assumption is that the purchase of ethically produced and traded goods either makes the consumer comply with certain moral standards and/or makes claims to the mainstream market for the integration of morality (Chapters 3 and 7). But this new form of consumption does not only have moral repercussions. A consumer-infiltrated citizenship is complex:

Consumption has also been an integral aspect of new, more transnational forms of governance. The focus on neoliberalism tends to be on its economic side, but the privatization of the consumer into a market-based citizen-consumer also intersects with law, legal forms of knowledge and politics, and new supra-

national institutions that transcend a more territorially based model of citizenship. (Trentmann, 2007: 151)

In the case of coffee activism, this type of citizenship is more apparent than others. Through its diverse manifestations in raising awareness, advocating, and protesting for solidarity in international coffee trade, coffee activism is one of the most interesting examples of how activism is now centred around a single-issue which is global and at the same time local, political but also commercial.

The examples employed here are drawn from the field of coffee activism, and attention must be paid to the societal contexts within which it operates. A critique of the movement requires an interrogation of the notion of individualisation. As a movement which prioritises individual forms of participation, coffee activism can be susceptible to a neoliberal mentality (Chapter 3). By mobilising individualities through the market, there is little guarantee of the prioritisation of moral, social and environmental standards over profit (Chapter 7). Increasingly, more cosmopolitan citizens seek opportunities and structures to express themselves politically. One of the arenas they choose to do so is the market, where consumer capitalism appears to allow and enable citizens to make political claims (Chapter 9). The following section interrogates the processes which have lead to this phenomenon and which figure dramatically in liquid politics. Dispersion of politics is typical of the conditions of liquid modernity, where project-type thinking, such as setting the task to purchase fair trade at the next shopping trip, penetrates all forms of social life. Billig (1995) speaks of 'banal nationalism' as manifested in symbolic repertoires ranging from superficial to meaningful expressions of affective citizenship. Similarly, Beck (2002) discusses the ranges of 'banal cosmopolitanism'. Another condition is the *marketopoly,* or the reign of markets. The tensions involved in these forms of contemporary civic engagement are outlined below.

2.5 Politics in the Marketopoly under Neoliberalism

Kivisto and Faist (2007) capture some of the directions of contemporary citizenship by arguing for its diminishing in the national public realm, and a

concurrent expansion of political and affective citizenship, such as the establishment of European Union citizenship and cosmopolitan citizenship correspondingly. One of the reasons, which the authors offer for the diminishing of public life, is that "traditional domains of civic activity are marginalised by uncontrolled market forces" (Dahlgren, 2009: 61). Thus far, I have discussed fragmentation, individualisation and cosmopolitanism as the conditions which have facilitated a turn away from the public towards the private realms of civic life. These parameters are tied together in an understanding of a politics of liquidity. The most crucial element of liquidity, however, has not yet been discussed. The shift from public to private realms of civic life concerns not only a shift from a collective to an individual politics, but also from a state to a market-based political arena. The increasing correlation of public and private structures can be further understood through the conceptual framework of neoliberalism.

Hesmondhalgh defines neoliberalism as "the central guiding principles of economic thought and management in advanced industrial countries... over the last three decades" (2008: 100). Between the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, in the years 1979 and 1981 Thatcherism in the UK and Reaganism in the USA signified the imposition of economic policies which promoted neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2008). While the term has been criticised for its conceptual broadness (Larner, 2003), it is undeniable that the series of economic policies, which it has been associated with, have shifted the balance of power between the state and the market, thus causing a series of effects on social and political life. As Freedman writes:

Neo-liberalism's discursive attachment to free markets, individual rights, personal choice, small government and limited regulation is now a firmly established part of contemporary life, celebrated and publicized by powerful voices in politics, business, media and academia across the world. (2008: 36)

Brown (2005) illuminates as characteristic of neoliberalism the subjection of the political sphere to an economic rationality. The market here is seen as the organising and regulative principle of state and society. Economic rationality expands its principles to non-economic realms, and, subsequently, states and subjects are suffused with it. The principles of neoliberalism have been identified as inclusive of free trade,

liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation (cf. Harvey, 2005; Hesmondhalgh, 2008).

On this basis, there are two guiding principles of a neoliberal rationality which have impacted on civic life in contemporary capitalist societies. The first lies in the development of the classic liberal notion of democracy in the marketplace. The Keynesian tradition implies that democracy in the marketplace ensures competition and equal access, but, in practice, the dominance of a monopoly is typically the case (Harvey, 2005). The entrepreneurial spirit of neoliberal times has also benefited economic oligopolies. The idea that freedom in markets is freedom in trade implies that the rules of the market dominate nationally and internationally. By highlighting the notion of economic freedom, this principle corresponds to arguments on individualisation, particularly through the promotion of entrepreneurship. Another interpretation of the term individualisation stands for the neoliberal notion of the free market individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The term 'neoliberalism' signifies the increasing distance from an economic pluralist liberal framework, which has potential ramifications for socio-political areas. It has been associated with the rise and dominance of free markets and economic policies characterised by privatisation and deregulation.

Aligned with the argument on the decline of participation in typical forms of political institutions and spaces, stands the argument on the power claims of private institutions. Bauman (2005) diagnoses a potential illness in liquid life caused by what he calls the 'consumerism syndrome'. This echoes Lasch's (1979) concerns about the false cure of consumption offered to the isolated, self-involved citizens in capitalist societies and is projected in Barber's (2007) work on the infiltration of consumer rationality at the expense of civic life. These critical lines of argumentation here evoke questions of the commodification of cultural citizenship. The dominance of consumerism as a way of life can also be attributed to neoliberalism. As Harvey argues, "neoliberalization required both politically and economically the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism" (2005: 42). It has been argued that the proliferation of consumer groups and organisations resonates with what has been conceptualised as a new type of politics (Daunton and Hilton, 2001). Liquid politics is overtaken by the private, both in the sense of the citizen as an entity of powerful agency, but also in terms of private interests going public. By the latter, I suggest that new relevant

forms of politics can include the politics for fair trade, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), environmental sustainability and against genetically modified foods and goods. In all these cases, private companies come into the political game. If globalisation is blurring geographical boundaries, then neoliberalism is also blurring the boundaries between the public and private.

A second perspective on the political claims of neoliberalism, which has been scrutinised, concerns the notion of commodification (Heilbroner, 1992; Ertman and Williams, 2005). Heilbroner explicitly distinguishes between the terms 'commercialisation' and 'commodification', in the sense that:

> Commercialization implies an extension of the market into arenas from which we feel its values ought to be excluded... Commodification is not seen as an intrusion into our personal domains, but an enlargement of them or perhaps as a democratization of refinements that were formerly enjoyed only by those who had the leisure, or could command the trained services, to enjoy what is now offered by a purchasable good. (1992: 90-1)

Commodification is hence understood as the attribution of commercial value on things which did not or should not have such value. It stands for the never-ending cycle of circulation, consumption and re-circulation of practically anything, from sunsets and spaces to ideas and puppies (Frank and Weiland, 1997; Weiermair and Mathies, 2004; Nast, 2006). Another definition of commodification is offered by Barber:

> Commodification is the mode by which a consumer society reproduces itself, working overtime to create uniform monopolies of taste and behavior. To commodify an object is to transform multiple meanings into a singular market meaning, namely the potential of a good or service to be bought and sold. To commodify is thus to colonize. (2007: 247)

Commodification is, thus, part of a larger epistemological framework, which can be discussed as *economism* which also seeks to colonise and integrate all other aspects of life into an economic one (Frank, 2000; Hertz, 2001). Economism negates all other modes of reasoning to their economic counterparts (cf. Self, 2000; Touraine, 2001;

Dahlgren, 2009). The framework of economism is manifested in the symbolic power of neoliberalism and has been critiqued in so far as it is moulding preferences, values and tastes to its liking (cf. Frank, 1997; Cohen, 2003; Heath and Potter, 2005). It has also been discussed as "market populism" (Frank, 2000; Leys, 2003). However, Brown regards neoliberalism as a form of sophisticated economism because "it does not presume the ontological givenness of a thoroughgoing economic rationality for all domains of society but rather takes as its task the development, dissemination, and institutionalization of such a rationality" (2005: 40-1). Neoliberalism favours the individual as an empowered entity in the marketplace (Carrier, 1997; Harvey, 2005). This rhetoric of empowerment through economy, rather than a political cause, is for instance evident in a YouTube video where George Alagiah[14] candidly says that:

> I just want to take up a few minutes of your time to tell you why I became patron of the Fairtrade Foundation. I suppose I must have spent about fifteen years of my career as a foreign correspondent and I went all over the world, travelled all over the world and I covered coups and famines, corruption, war, disaster. Now by the end of my years on the road, those fifteen years I suppose I reached one very simple conclusion. And it was this: *economics sometimes plays as important a part in helping to solve these problems as politics does*[15].

The last sentence corresponds directly to aforementioned arguments on the banal form which politics can take by its association with the practice of consumption, which is what Alagiah suggests here. A turn to economics when it comes to providing solutions to real political problems causes concerns over the colonisation of state institutions by market institutions. The case of fair trade is a good example of how cultural citizenship becomes manifest in liquid acts of civic engagement, driven by cosmopolitan sensitivities and practiced individually in the market arena. Individuals engage in a form of politics beyond their legal responsibilities, beyond national politics and through a series of privatised forms of engagement such as consumption and attendance of fair trade events. Neoliberalism has been pushing towards a shift of

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[14] George Alagiah is a prominent British media figure. He is currently a BBC news presenter, and was former foreign correspondent for BBC, as well as former patron of the Fairtrade Foundation (2002-2009).
[15] 'A message from George Alagiah' video from the Fairtrade Foundation YouTube Channel (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSmxyIia0U4 [02/01/2009]).

the political process from political structures to market structures, as the state grows weaker and the market stronger. In Klein's (2000) terms, the interplay between market and politics results on the politicisation of the market and vice versa. Such concerns extend to the voicing of arguments on the possible commodification of citizenship by its enactment in the marketopoly.

In the same spirit, Beck (2006) scrutinises the concept of 'globalism'. The term relates to the notion of 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2002), which is the illusion of global connection through the consumption of imported commodities. Essentially, it connotes the oversimplification of the understanding of global life through the act of consumption of globally produced and imported goods. In much the same way as holiday 'packages' organised by travel agencies in most parts of the world do not necessarily provide any direct knowledge or understanding of the experience of everyday local life, the consumption of fair trade goods imported from a country of the global South does not necessarily equate to a desire to assist and play a direct and active part in a solidarity cause. This is one of the core arguments in this thesis and one which has captured the imagination of the researcher. In this light, one of the major tensions of the politics of consumption is highlighted. Economism and globalism are related notions to the extent that they encourage economic determinism.

Contrary to the growing pessimism about the future of political life, but also in contrast to the dogmas of economism, I contextualise and argue for new forms of civic engagement by looking at the case of coffee activism. Demonstrating reflexivity to the spirit of contemporary times, citizens appear to be claiming the political elsewhere; the marketplace is becoming a place of pilgrimage for the voicing of political claims as citizens demonstrate their preference for commodities branded as ethically produced over others (cf. Nava, 1991; Micheletti *et al*, 2004). Fridell has a strong point in arguing that while fair trade can operate as a "symbolic tool to critique conventional trade" (2007: 270), but simultaneously disapproves of uncritical enthusiasm over its potential to politically empower citizens. The narratives of coffee activism are entrenched in the celebration of consumer lifestyles, leading to criticism concerning its attraction of the middle-class (Frank, 2003; Stolle *et al*, 2005; Littler, 2009). Participation in coffee activism is increasingly directed towards participation in ethical consumerism (Chapter 8). Such a form of civic engagement is incorporating more private expressions of identity, such as consumer action or ethical consumerism (Klein, 2000; Bauman, 2007; Sassatelli, 2007). Criticism around the

notion of consumer citizenship in fair trade has focused on the aims of democratic citizenship, concerns about equality and the shortcomings of consumption as a political act (Jubas, 2007).

The notion of citizenship has been thoroughly revised to adapt to the transformations in the social world. Perhaps the most significant adaptation is the recognition of, or resistance to the concept and reality of neoliberal globalisation. A number of valuable studies have been dedicated to the understanding of 'cultural citizenship' in this light (Stevenson, 2003; Miller, 2007) signifying a theoretical shift in conceptualising the operation of individuals within both public and market spaces. Cultural citizenship is at the heart of this thesis and mainly concerns "the uneasy interdependence of citizenship, consumption and politics" (Miller, 2007: 28). The binary opposition of citizen/consumer is no longer viable; this thesis focuses on the enactment of a certain type of politics which relates to the consumption of a particularly basic type of commodity. A model of liquid politics has been introduced as inclusive of meaningful, but fragmented, politically intended, but subject to an economic rationale, series of acts of civic engagement.

2.6 Conclusion: Into the Wild, Between Politics and Markets

This chapter has focused on the delineation of contemporary politics, which correspond to Zygmunt Bauman's (2000, 2005, 2007) genealogy of liquid modernity, life and times. Bauman does not exclusively discuss liquid politics, but points to the disassociation of citizens with political life, the alienation of people who live alone together in the cities of the world, the cosmopoles, and the displacement of public with private interests. My aim is to assemble a series of theoretical tools which forward an understanding of politics in liquid times. As the political becomes infused with the personal and the social in lifestyle politics (Norris, 2002; Bennett, 2004a), there is the urgent task to revisit much of our understanding of contemporary political life. A new vocabulary on what it means to be political is incessantly growing; traditional understandings of citizenship bound to the obligations of representative democracy no longer adequately describe what it means to express and act politically. The basis of this theorisation concerns the reconfiguration of the public versus private

dualism. The cultivated equation of the term private to include the personal and the market realm have manifested in the legitimacy of 'homo economicus' (Brown, 2005: 40). Particularly in the case of consumer citizenship, this suggests an empowerment of the individual in the market arena. There has been a blurring – not a separation – of the public and private realms both in terms of the tensions of collective individualism and politicisation in the marketopoly. These reconfigurations have constituted an essential widening of our understanding of what it means to be political. In terms of political participation, the fall of collectivism has been heralded, along with the rise of individualisation (Elias, 1991; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Elliot and Lemert, 2006).

I argue that a renewal of the contemporary political grammar is essential not only in terms of exploring new conceptual opportunities, but also in terms of recognising the real opportunities and hindrances of forms of civic engagement. Sennett (1974) has suggested the turn to private terrains by arguing for the death of public space. However, the decline of voter turnout does not signal the death of citizenship, but rather suggests that politics has been diffusing in private and intimate settings. While there seems to be a significant gaining of distance from civic habits of the past, civic engagement is taking place elsewhere. There is increasing individualisation brought upon by institutions such as the state and the market, which has been facilitated by neoliberalism and the economic reading of the value of freedom. This is an elusive idea of freedom, as even individual action does not have an impact unless it is collective. Cosmopolitan citizenship consists of widened empathy in the global village, but is often reduced to consumer-based practices which do not extend over the marketplace. Coffee activism is at play between public and private spaces, between individual actions and collective structures, as well as between the local and the global.

There are two basic tensions in civic engagement around coffee activism. The first is between individuality and collectivity. The blurring of public and private spheres has pushed to the fore the 'dynamics of individualisation' (Mouffe, 2005) in ephemeral politics, which embraces individually selected and sets tasks as politically powerful. The notion of 'collective individualism' might be a meaningful response to the privatisation and 'lifestylisation' of politics. This concept contends that while, in its immediate manifestation, civic engagement appears to be an individual act, it can only have political repercussions when it is the sum of collective individualities acting

at the same time, on the same subject, with the same agenda. For instance, while boycotts are individual acts in the sense that shopping is a personal task, they are only effective if they are conducted on a large-scale. Also, ethical consumption can be considered as political since it has succeeded in changing the range of coffee activism by impacting on its mainstreaming (Chapter 6). In liquid politics, citizenship is transformed towards uncertain directions. The political has been brought back to play by a variety of state, civil society and increasingly market organisations. The penetration of markets in the field of politics has not been without significant consequences, as even there commodification can take its toll. There are tensions in contemporary politics, which have been caused by a penetrating consumer culture and an economic rationality.

The second tension, therefore, is that between consumption and citizenship. Political participation is explored in this chapter through the notion of liquid politics, citizenship and civic engagement, which includes extra-parliamentary forms of participation, such as consumer activism. However, consumer action in the marketopoly is inescapably subject to its rationality. The neoliberal market presumes an abundance of options to gratify any type of consumer appetite; some have even been adhering to the notion of consumer as economic voter (cf. Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Cherrier, 2006) (Chapter 3). Cosmopolitanism has also impacted on citizenship expanding civic attention beyond national issues and borders. Global issues such as fair trade have been brought to the forefront. The forms of 'acts of citizenship' (Isin and Nielsen, 2008) descending from the globalisation of political awareness in the case of coffee activism are intrinsically connected to the market and the empowerment of citizens through selective consumption. Consumerism constitutes an important paradigm in the reworking of the understanding of doing politics and being political today. The politics of consumption are gaining increasing attention in the fields of politics and sociology, as well as communication. A methodical discussion of the relationship between consumption and citizenship follows in Chapter 3, where I elaborate on the concept of political consumerism as a phenomenon which signifies a deeper relationship between politics and markets and makes political claims in the wild lands outside the public space of politics.

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Chapter 3

Political Consumerism:

Exploring a Politics of the Pocket

3.1 Political Consumerism Explained

The reconfigurations of political life have been impacted by the conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), the globalisation of emotions (Beck, 2006), in the sense of the extension of sympathy from the first world to the third world, alongside the pressures of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). These parameters have underlined the necessity of incorporating new parameters in the political fold. A significant manifestation of contemporary politics is evident in a phenomenon discussed as *political* (Micheletti *et al*, 2004), *ethical* (Barnett *et al*, 2005a, 2005b), *socially conscious* (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972; Keum *et al*, 2004) or *radical* (Littler, 2009) consumption or consumerism. There are only slight conceptual differences among these terms; the terms *political* and *radical* consumerism emphasise a more civic form of engagement, while the terms *ethical* and *socially conscious* consumerism describe a more civic form of consumption. The words consumption and consumerism are used here fairly interchangeably. Nowadays, in advanced capitalist societies, even a simple ritual such as getting a cup of coffee, whether you need an eye-opener before work or whether you feel like hanging out with friends is filled with a plethora of connotations. For instance, you can either choose to buy a cup of coffee from Starbucks because you are attracted to the company or the array of choice, or you can choose not to perhaps because you have been exposed to information about the company or about the trade injustice characterising the second most imported product after oil; coffee is 'black gold' (Wild, 2004).

Consumer power has been discussed as a potentially political variable (Nava, 1991). This has been especially the case since, beyond boycotting a certain brand or company, consumers are increasingly being offered the option of 'buycotting'

(Micheletti *et al*, 2004). Boycotts and 'buycotts' are acts of what has been discussed as political or radical consumerism. They are part of the variety of market-based actions which have some type of political impact; they are defined as political acts in the market arena. A widely acknowledged definition of the phenomenon asserts that "political consumerism is the use of market purchases by individuals, groups and institutions, who want to take responsibility for political, economic, and societal developments" (Micheletti *et al*, 2004: xxv). In accordance with arguments on the decline of traditional forms of participation, the advocates of political consumerism recognise the shift towards a private arena for the enactment of an individualistic politics. Micheletti *et al* (2004) argue that the shift from a traditional model of participation in the political space to a model of participation in the market space can be attributed to factors such as the disassociation with political life, resistance to other countries where human rights are violated (through boycotting) and to the free trade rule, the asymmetrical growth between economics and politics, as well as the growing significance of consumer goods and consumption. A seeming disengagement with traditional forms of public politics has been noted, while an economic rationale has infiltrated all aspects of contemporary life and consumer culture has flourished (Chapter 2). In this context, the concept of political consumerism is essential to an understanding of contemporary politics.

There are arguably two basic types of political consumerism. These are boycotts and 'buycotts'. A consumer boycott is "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace" (Friedman, 1999: 4). The etymology of the term is derived from the historical figure of Charles Cunningham Boycott (1832-1897) during the time he served as a land agent of the British ruling class in an Irish county (1872-1880) (Friedman, 2004). Captain Boycott has gained posthumous notoriety because of his strict treatment towards Irish farmers. It is reported that when they requested a reduction of their rents he proceeded to evict them[16]. The farmers responded with a total denial of labour and services for the Boycott family, forcing them to return to England. This type of action has from there on been labelled a 'boycott'. In terms of contemporary consumer action, a boycott is discussed as negative political consumerism (Micheletti *et al*, 2004).

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[16] http://www.keepmilitarymuseum.org/boycott.php?&dx=1&ob=3 [15 Feb 2010].

Correspondingly, a 'buycott' or 'positive buying' is the conduct of selective purchases with a variety of ethical connotations. This is accordingly perceived as positive political consumerism. In both cases, "choices [are] based on considerations of justice or fairness, or on an assessment of business and government practices" (Stolle *et al*, 2005: 246). There are numerous arguments that boycotts and 'buycotts' represent political acts in the marketplace (Micheletti *et al*, 2004; Stolle *et al*, 2005). In this chapter, I narrow my focus on the role of positive political consumerism in the field of coffee activism. By developing such a discussion, I introduce and critically appraise a standardised enveloping form of participation in liquid politics.

This chapter does not discuss business ethics, marketing strategies, market research, or consumer theory in the sense of economics, nor does it seek to evaluate or advertise any of the businesses or venues mentioned. This chapter aspires to enrich an understanding of the contemporary relationship between markets and politics. It discusses various aspects of the politicisation of consumption and focuses its analysis on the concept of political consumerism, and the rhetoric of ethics in consumer citizenship. Here, I theorise the politicisation of the market on two levels. Firstly, the concept of political consumerism is delineated, placed in context and interrogated with regards to its political or apolitical nature and its mediation. Secondly, the analysis focuses on and explores ethical consumerism, ethical consumers and the availability of 'ethical' coffee. This chapter concerns a paradox. That is the phenomenon of political consumerism, as one constantly shifts between two arenas, that of markets and that of politics. Political consumerism has been theorised as a form of political participation in the market, but has not been examined in terms of the restrictions posed by its contextualisation in neoliberal times. A private arena such as personal choice in the marketplace enables public forms of political expression in the case of ethical consumption, but certain conditions must be met for there to be a substantial impact of those actions in the political arena. Additionally, in liquid modernity, forms of political expression and participation are fleeting, private and individual, but there is often the requirement and enactment of sustained, public and collective acts of citizenship in the form of collective individualism.

3.2 Political Consumerism Historicised

Political consumerism descends from consumer activism and presents a more sophisticated form of it. The history of consumer activism dates back to the nineteenth century. The co-operative movement was established in the UK in 1844 and was fuelled by "the working-class reaction to excessive prices and poor quality goods, food in particular" (Lang and Gabriel, 2005: 41). According to a number of sources, there are broadly four historical periods of consumer awareness and action (Lang and Hines, 1993; Lang and Gabriel, 2005; Nicholls and Opal, 2005). The first period is characterised by the organisation around co-operatives and initial attempts to exercise consumer power over the stages of production. The second period concerned value-for-money activism, basic product information and reliability in labelling. The third period was prompted by Naderism[17] and was exemplified by concerns on consumer safety, manufacturer accountability and threats posed by the growing monopoly of corporations. The later historical wave is arguably the one we are riding now and in this literature it has been described as green or ethical consumerism (Lang and Gabriel, 2005).

According to Nicholls and Opal, this wave concerns environmental and ethical issues pertaining to corporate practices and "is characterized by consumer awareness of animal welfare, environmental degradation and human working conditions and trade justice" (2005: 181). In this historical moment, one of the consumer concerns has extended from reliable labelling to responsible labelling. Eco-labelling was introduced in the UK during the late 1980s. The UK government set up an Ecolabelling Board in 1992[18] and had been keen on involvement with the EU eco-label scheme, but "British consumers are largely oblivious to the EU eco-label despite the fact that there is no competing national scheme [anymore]" (Jordan *et al*, 2004: 172). The green consumer movement started in the UK during this period and then spread to the USA, although previous waves of the consumer movement had typically moved the other way around, from the USA to the UK (Lang and Gabriel, 2005). The

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[17] The term Naderism is derived from Ralph Nader, a Harvard-educated lawyer, public interest activist, corporate critic and the Green Party presidential candidate in the 2000 US elections. Nader sprung public debate and a new wave in consumer activism. His book *Unsafe at Any Speed* (1965) functioned as an exposé of the car industry. A fundamental viewpoint of Naderism is that the consumer is overpowered by corporations, helpless to the quality of their products, but that the consumer's role is to be an active citizen to demand and stand up for their rights.

[18] http://ecolabel.defra.gov.uk/history.htm [02 Jan 2010].

most distinctive attribute of the latest wave of consumer activism is that it "does not regard poor consumer quality of goods as cause for political action, but considers the poor political quality of goods as cause for consumer action" (Follesdal, 2004: 19). There is a definitive differentiation between the current and the previous historical periods of consumer activism. Therefore, in contemporary consumer activism, concerns extend beyond the rights of consumers and towards their responsibilities as cosmopolitan citizens. Consumer activism is presently closely linked to green or ethical consumerism, which is a more popular term for positive political consumerism.

We are currently witnessing a proliferation of ethical/green goods. These are goods "made of durable, non-toxic, organic or recycled materials" and "powered by renewable energy", as well as goods which "support all participants in the supply chain fairly" (New Internationalist[19]). As Lang and Hines (1993) point out, this is an era where recyclable paper and eco-friendly gadgets, fair trade products and organic groceries, against animal testing cosmetics and natural beauty products are no longer a niche market, but have become widely available (Chapter 6). Online and offline outlets for ethical consumption have proliferated ranging from the commitment of leading UK supermarkets, such as Waitrose and Sainsbury's to online supermarkets, such as the Ethicalsuperstore.com. In these contemporary markets, a sophisticated array of both commercial and political actors are active in promoting and supporting a variety of products from coffee and tea to sustainable energy light bulbs and recycled toilet paper. The consequences of the blurring between a private space through personal choices in the market and a public (political) space causes a similar blurring in terms of actors involved in political consumerism. These types of actors arguably "create a blurring at the edges of what it means to be a campaign group on the one hand, and what it means to be a trader on the other" (Harrison, 2005: 63). Harrison (2005) distinguishes between trading campaigners and campaigning traders. A simple way to define this distinction is by regarding trading campaigners as taking traditional campaign groups a step further by promoting change through trade as well as campaigning. Campaigning traders, then, are market-based types of actors, such as companies who get involved in campaigning for issues relevant to the products they trade.

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[19] http://shop.newint.org/uk/index.php?main_page=page&id=2&chapter=0 [27 Oct 2008].

The rise of ethical consumerism has been noted, though unevenly, across European countries (cf. Barnett *et al*, 2005b; Ferrer and Fraile, 2006). Ethical consumerism has known particular growth in the United Kingdom (Wild, 2004; Krier, 2006), while traditional understandings of citizenship are becoming irrelevant (Chapter 2). Political consumerism is an ideal case for examining the new parameters which define contemporary civic life. Beyond boycotting and buycotting, popular forms of civic engagement include petition-signing and fund-raising (cf. Norris *et al*, 2005; Ferrer and Fraile, 2006). Forms of political participation apart from voting (the most obvious form of partaking in political life) also include campaign or political group involvement as well as demonstrating, marching and protesting. A digitisation of types of participation is also arguably becoming more widespread (for a critical discussion, see Chapter 4). There are novel characteristics in the phenomenon of political consumerism as a form of civic engagement. These include the use of the market, a traditionally commercial arena, for political purposes, the focus on participation in international politics, rather than in national politics, and the perception of the citizen as an empowered economic voter, as well as the individualisation of that engagement. There is a tendency, therefore, from the part of ethical consumerism to draw from the vigour of economic globalisation; in this sense, coffee activism becomes an alternative vehicle for the politics of trade through acts of consumption.

The strength of political consumerism is predominantly based "in the strength of economic globalization and the weakness of political globalization" (Follesdal *et al*, 2004: 291). While economic globalisation is blooming in terms of global flows of goods and services, political globalisation has been slowly developing in terms of systemic global governance. Van Aelst and Walgrave offer the following definition for globalisation:

Globalization means different things for different people. In the business community it refers to a 'free world' for trade, commerce and money; for political scholars and politicians the disappearing or a least challenging of state borders is central; while globalization for the average man or woman means he or she can eat the same food, wear the same shoes or watch the same television programmes as someone living on the other side of the planet. (2004: 99)

There is, consequently, an economic, political and socio-cultural perspective on the effects of globalisation. While the economic aspect has been flourishing, it has also impacted on the socio-cultural aspect when the connection among global citizens echoes the notion of banal cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2006) in the form of a superficial connectedness through consumption. However, cosmopolitanism has arguably broadened the political vigilance of citizens in the developed world through their engagement in political consumerism (Chapter 9). Simultaneously, there are tensions in the enactment of public-oriented action in private settings evident in its grounding in neoliberalism. Similarly, a crucial tenant of political consumerism is its foundation in market individualism.

3.3 Political Consumerism, Consumption and Individualisation

Political consumerism is a predominantly individualised form of engagement. It consists of fragmented and fleeting types of personal action, such as the occasional purchase of fair trade coffee from the supermarket or the local shop. There is consensus among the relevant literature on the highly individualised nature of the phenomenon (cf. Scammell, 2000; Micheletti *et al*, 2004; Baringhorst, 2005). Goul Andersen and Tobiasen argue that "political consumerism is linked to underlying processes of individualization in society, and patterns of political participation" (2004: 213). The term has been theorised as almost synonymous with the individualisation of action. As Stolle and Hooghe contend, "loose, non-bureaucratic, individualized action is also a good description for political consumerism" (2004: 273). This contrasts traditional forms of action in collective contentious behaviour and corresponds to an understanding of contemporary politics as subject to the private realm. Political consumerism is, therefore, perceived as a form of liquid politics, as it is characterised by fluidity, individualisation and the potential for change. This presents one of the fundamental reasons for its potential susceptibility by different forms of engagement beyond politics. I regard the notions of attention and sustenance as the crucial preconditions to a meaningful politics (Chapter 4). A study of the role of individualisation is relevant to the potential sustenance of coffee activism and political consumerism.

Political consumerism is also another form of consumption, and one which epitomises individual behaviour. In what Bauman describes as a 'society of consumers':

The privatized utopias of the cowboys and cowgirls of the consumerist era show instead vastly expanded 'free space' ... a kind of empty space of which the liquid modern consumer [is] bent on solo performances and only on solo performances. (2007: 50)

The prevalence of consumer culture has been widely theorised (Lury, 1996; Slater, 1997; Miles, 1998; Cohen, 2003; Bauman, 2007; Sassatelli, 2007). Consumption can broadly be described as "a particular field of practices within everyday life, which combines the satisfaction of needs with expressions of identity" (Halkier, 2004: 224) and consumerism as the extravagant cousin of consumption. To rephrase the aforementioned definition, consumerism is a particular field of practices within everyday life, which combines the satisfaction of non-basic needs with expressions of identity. One might argue that the key difference between consumption and consumerism – although both terms are used here – is that consumerism is used more often in discussions for and against a consumer culture, and therefore may obtain a slightly more negative meaning from the point of view of anti-consumerist debates. However, as Lang and Gabriel point out, "the rich literature on consumers, consumerism and consumption all thrive on ... [a certain] ambiguity" (2005: 39). This 'ambiguity' concerns the agency of consumers as active or passive to market forces. In this sense, the political vision of coffee activism is seemingly blurred by the vagueness of the market. In some cases, this can result to the loss of political memory (Chapter 9). Besides attempting to further clarify the notion of active or passive consumer, this thesis attempts to discuss the ambivalence of ethical consumption as an act of civic engagement. Therefore, rather than merely discussing the consumer in terms of their agency in the marketplace, I turn the discussion to the agency he/she might have in the political space.

The overarching consumer culture has resulted in the proliferation of print and virtual media in the form of magazines aimed at supplying the consumer with information on the ethics involved in the process of shopping and by directing them to shops that provide such services. The media play a vital role in transmitting

information, which is crucial for the mobilisation of political consumers. The effectiveness of the internet for consumer activism in particular has been noted. Scammell argues that "some of the most celebrated, and arguably successful, consumer actions were led on the Net" (2000: 355) and Klein views the internet as a "tool of choice for spreading information about multinationals around the world" (2000: 393). In this light, the medium appears to be a powerful tool for political consumerism. Nicholls and Opal point out that:

> There has been a change in consumer attitude towards business ethics, largely driven by better information about the supply chain. The media and the Internet now regularly expose unethical business behaviour, and it is clear that such information damages the bottom line. (2005: 24)

In terms of negative political consumerism, the list of such outlets is endless and ranges from the Ethical Consumer's boycott list [20] to Boycott Watch (http://www.boycottwatch.org), a non-profit organisation that publicises boycott calls, to more specific campaign-driven organisations such as McSpotlight (http://www.mcspotlight.org) against McDonalds and the Campaign to Stop Killer Coke (http://killercoke.org) against the Coca-Cola Company. There are a significant number of online sites dedicated to boycotting by spreading information on unethical businesses and calling for action.

Similarly, in positive political consumerism there is a diverse array of actors ranging from ethical businesses to fair trade campaigns, all of which operate some form of online presence. Popular examples include the New Consumer (http://www.newconsumer.com) and the Ethical Consumer Research Association (http://www.ethicalconsumer.org), which runs an online ethical shopping guide called Ethical Score (http://ethicalscore.org). Also, online businesses such as Ethical Superstore (http://www.ethicalsuperstore.com) have been met with enthusiasm. The Ethical Superstore, which launched in November 2006, is one of many instances where businesses are addressing a type of consumer who cares for ethical shopping:

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[20] http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/Boycotts/currentboycotts.aspx [12 Feb 2009].

Ethicalsuperstore.com is a one-stop online shop for ethical gifts, eco-friendly gadgets, and Fair Trade and organic groceries. From organic wine to Fairtrade coffee, from vegetarian food to cosmetics free from animal cruelty, Ethicalsuperstore.com features a vast range that helps you to "buy what you believe". (Ethicalsuperstore.com Manifesto, 2008[21])

There are numerous examples of online commercial spaces devoted to ethical consumerism. The BAFTS website (http://www.bafts.org.uk) provides a database of online and offline fair trade certified shops in the UK. Besides ethical businesses, a variety of actors address the citizen as an individual entity. Baringhorst refers to civic society organisations such as trade unions, church groups and NGOs, which "despite their different social and ideological backgrounds, all address a new prime mover of social and political change: the citizen as ethical consumer" (2005: 4). The ethical consumer is, therefore, regarded as an individual theoretically capable of political action. This creates a certain trust in the marketplaces, and one that might even overpower the trust – or rather lack of – in the political spaces (Chapter 2).

The relationship between individualism and consumption is irrefutable. Giddens identifies this relationship as troubled, as he senses "a distinction between individualism and consumption – or consumer culture – although the two are linked" (2003: 388). Consumption is an act which occurs in a variety of commercial spaces online and offline and individualisation is typical of the growth of political consumerism. But, while political consumerism is characterised by significant individualisation, theories of the phenomenon are not pessimistic about the disengagement of the individual from the collective, but rather view the consumer as an active political being, whose choices form the magnum of the political lava: "The consumers who aim at behaving 'as citizens', i.e. with public concerns in mind, do so by *individually deciding* what is the public good and how it can be pursued by means of their buying choices" (Pellizzoni, 2007: 4 [italics in original text]). Consumers are regarded as politicised individuals. There is, therefore, a pressing persistence in the political vernacular of political consumerism. In fact, it has been argued that political consumerism closely resembles a 'very immediate democratic process' (Nava, 1991: 168). The wider notion that politics is privatised and that this privatisation amounts to

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[21] http://www.ethicalsuperstore.com/download_docs/ethicalsuperstore_info_pack_lo_res.pdf [15 Apr 2008].

individualisation as equal in politics as in markets is common (Bauman, 1990; Klein, 2000). The 'new consumer' is regarded as a powerful entity, born and bred in market choice (Lewis and Bridger, 2001). The evolution of consumer citizenship is evident in the case of political consumerism, which refers to a certain type of purchasing practices of more ethical consequences for the producers, consumers, human beings and animals, as well as the environment. This is, in other words, an attempt to put 'ethics' into the process of shopping or into the shopping basket. An enquiry here would, then, interrogate how political an individualised, private form of consumption which makes political claims can be.

3.4 Ethics in the Shopping Basket: The Consumer as Economic Voter?

Political consumerism raises a variety of questions about the nature of contemporary civic engagement. Hence, it should be interrogated with regards to its political nature. One should question whether such types of action are indeed political or whether they are merely cases of consumer preference. Jaffee poses the question as to whether the act of consuming fair trade products is synonymous to the act of casting a vote: "after all, isn't fair trade primarily about a person "voting for fairness" with their dollars?" (2007: 228). The argument that selections of products are replacing selections of candidates or political parties in the marketopoly has been developing to a direction that replies positively to this question (cf. Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Cherrier, 2006). The consumer has been addressed as an economic voter:

> Consumers are active individuals and ethical voters. They can, bearing in mind their individual limitations in terms of finances, time, cognitive capacity and knowledge, use consumption as a potential resource for changing and influencing political actions. Under this approach, we might term ethical consumption behaviour as personal actions performed by a singular agency to underline the individual nature of both the ethical act and the reasons of this ethical act. (Cherrier, 2006: 516)

Voting in the space of the market does not have the same connotations or implications as it has in the realm of politics. This seems a contested discussion, which attempts to separate the civic habits of citizens from their public arenas and turn them to the private spaces of 'choice' in the neoliberal market. Boycotts and 'buycotts' present good examples of citizens being able to criticise or appraise market actors such as multinational corporations, which elude government regulation. As Follesdal points out, "if global markets are to be normatively justified, the responsibilities for re-distribution and prevention of harm must be borne by agents other than the state-namely corporations and consumers" (2004: 13). However, first and foremost the liquid nature of consumption cannot unconditionally yield political influence. Consumption is not an institutionalised, sustained and stable act; it is non-committing and personal. Peretti with Micheletti write that "consumption becomes political when consumers assess products through the eyes of citizens" (2004: 127). But how can this assessment, signifying a political outlook of consumption, occur in a meaningful and sustained manner?

Merely the fact that political consumerism is paralleled to economic voting means that there is the recognition of the need for a collective effort, which is something that corresponds with the idea of collective individualism as introduced in Chapter 2. However, as outlined so far, individualisation is typical in consumption. Giddens argues that "buying things is only one aspect of the whole variety of lifestyle decisions which people have to take individually and collectively now" (2003: 395). However, as I have discussed above, the majority of scholarship on political consumerism tends to assume that it has a deeply political nature. In particular, as Follesdal notes, "traditionally, political participation has involved the relationship between citizens and their government, which in turn regulates the market. Political consumerism adds to this conception in that citizens turn directly to the market in a variety of political concerns" (2004: 3). Such an argument presupposes the idea of 'active consumerism' (Lang and Gabriel, 2005: 39), in the sense that there is a purpose and a series of conscious and judicious procedures preceding the actual act of consumption. An opposing argument claims that acts of political consumerism are often simply the effect of successful marketing under the business-as-usual model (Fridell et al, 2008). Bauman also claims that "consumer and expressive freedoms are not interfered with politically so long as they remain politically ineffective" (1988: 88). The effectiveness of political consumerism in bringing change is highly relevant

to these debates, but the consciousness of undertaking such individual or collective actions is also an important dimension to be considered.

The politics of the pocket is a type of politics particularly suited to liquid modernity and is subject to conditions of constant change and fleeting practices. Halkier (2004) examines how types of political consumerism can be conceptualised as political participation and discusses three dimensions of political participation to address this question: *agency*, *community*, and *influence*. He argues that political consumerism is a meaningful type of political participation when all three elements are present. The term agency refers to the "capacity of citizens to act" (Halkier, 2004: 224). The author relates this dimension to *intentionality*, therefore the degree of *consciousness* of one's actions is a key factor of the political nature of one's acts. Stolle and Hooghe also underline the significance of this dimension, naming it 'awareness' (2004: 280) and adding to it the degree of regularity of action. The dimension of community refers to the "degree in which citizens experience a belonging to a collectivity related to their actions" (Halkier, 2004: 224). Therefore, although political consumerism is embedded in social and market individualisation and enacted by consuming individuals, collectivity is essential to its effects; the notion of collective individualism is evidently crucial here. The act of a 'buycott', for instance, might be a lonely consumer-type act, but in order for it to have meaningful political impact, there must be a collective effort to 'buycott' certain products. As Hozler points out, political consumerism "does not eliminate individual economic choice, but utilizes it to achieve political objectives" (2006: 406). Finally, 'influence' addresses the capacity of citizens to bring about social change. It is important to highlight once again that these dimensions are meaningless when they are separate. As Berry and McEachern remind us, "awareness does not necessarily translate into action" (2005: 69). Similarly, collectivity and influence alone do not constitute the politicisation of consumption.

The connection between consumer citizenship and political participation is fairly straight-forward; ethical consumers *intentionally* prefer to buy or not to buy specific products "because they want to change institutional or market practices" (Stolle and Micheletti, 2005: 1). They *individually* choose to buy or not buy these products, but *collectively* have the potential to bring about *change*: "a boycott is 'an agreement not to do business with'. Thus, one cannot boycott alone. Two people

must agree in order for a boycott to exist" (Boycott Watch FAQs[22]). From a qualitative perspective, change aimed by boycotts or buycotts concern corporate responsibility, environmental issues, human rights, social justice and fairness in trade. However, the grounding of consumer citizenship in the neoliberal market poses certain constraints. Schmookler argues that "the market is often likened to a democracy, in which we all vote with our money. Each time we spend, it is as though we have put our vote into the ballot box of this economic democracy" (1993: 46). The investigation of the context under which consumer citizenship is manifested demands further exploration. The resolve to substitute political for economic democracy does not come without consequences. Although political consumerism is paralleled to a form of political engagement, this cannot be equated to democratic participation. The spaces of the politics and markets create an economical way of dealing with ethical concerns. However, their diffusion cannot override the normative operation of politics. Therefore, while political consumerism might be political under certain conditions, it cannot be viewed as democratic under any conditions.

Likening the market to a type of democracy complies with the neoliberal notion of the marketopoly. The evasive type of engagement through a potential act of consumerism is a double puzzle. On the one hand, the liquidity of consumption must be sustained in order for it to have political significance, while on the other the relationship between consumer-based and citizen-based action poses engaging questions. For instance, an argument drawn from economism could suggest that the equation of the market to a democracy means that all forms of political organisation should be integrated into economic powers. This type of questions signifies the penetration of market logic into contemporary political life. Coffee activism does not pose such a question, but as it has evolved into a significant form of civic engagement which is highly valued by those who practise it (Chapter 8), it then sets the ground for a further discussion of the politics of neoliberalism.

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[22] http://www.boycottwatch.org/faq.htm [01 May 2008].

3.5 Political Consumerism, Ethical Consumers and Neoliberalism

The dominance of economics over politics is characteristic of the embeddedness of neoliberalism. Viewing the consumer as economic voter resoundingly echoes arguments around economism (Chapter 2) and the further disassociation from civic habits of the past. Klein argues that "the struggle between consumerism and citizenship, between market values of competition, and political values of solidarity, politicizes the market and privatises and commercializes politics" (2000: xiii). These transformations of politics have seemingly empowered consumer citizenship over other civic forms of citizenship. I have argued that the ethical consumer, the agent of political consumerism, is an amalgamated version of the participating citizen and the 'active consumer' who intentionally, simultaneously individually and collectively makes informed choices in the marketplace to impact on global affairs. Ethical businesses do not fail to underline the power of the consumer:

> Ultimately the choice is yours, the ethical consumer, of what to support in your ethical purchasing – our aim is to empower you to make the choices that are right for you and your family. Please let us know if there is a product or brand you feel we should support (or stop supporting). (Ethicalsuperstore.com Manifesto[23])

> [Consumers] are at one end of the supply chain, farmers are at the other, and consumers really do have the power to send a message back all the way through that complicated supply chain. (Chris Wille of the Rainforest Alliance[24])

But who are these empowered ethical consumers? In this section, I explore the types of citizens involved in political consumerism and explore the relationships between their actions and the overarching neoliberal marketplace in order to further assess the opportunities and hindrances of consumer citizenship.

Newholm (1999) discerns between three types of ethical consumers: *distancers*, *integrators*, and *rationalisers*. Distancers are those consumers who

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[23] http://www.ethicalsuperstore.com/download_docs/ethicalsuperstore_info_pack_lo_res.pdf [15 Apr 2008].
[24] Quoted in 'Special Report on Food Politics: Voting With Your Trolley', 07/12/2006, *The Economist*.

perform actions of negative political consumerism, namely boycotts. Integrators are those who, as the term suggests, integrate ethical consumerism into their lifestyle in a more committed manner. Finally, rationalisers select specific ethical products without becoming integrators, "whilst showing concern for issues, rarely sacrifice quality, choice or pleasure" (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 187). Newholm's typology is concerned with the degrees of integration of ethical consumerism into consumers' lifestyle and consuming patterns. Conversely, ethical consumers are more often than not typical consumers and might not always integrate their consumption patterns into their lifestyle with the same degree and frequency. A corresponding typology is offered by Dickinson and Carsky (2005) who suggest three roughly corresponding types of ethical consumer: *eager* consumer, *eager, but needing incentive* consumer, and *indifferent* consumer. These three categories refer to different degrees of willingness, or *intentionality* (Halkier, 2004) for participation in political consumerism. These concern the gradations of active perceptions of coffee activism and are crucial in determining the rationales for participation.

Kennedy's (2004) study of ethical consumers in Britain offers a more sophisticated typology of green/ethical consumers in terms of demographics and lifestyles, in order of preference of such products from high to low: *professionals, lower "professionals", vegetarians and vegans, alternative lifestylers and "drop-outs", those with special health needs* and *ordinary mass consumers*. The first and most commonly met group (professionals) describes "relatively wealthy, ethically aware, and highly informed consumers... people living in "two career" families and with professional qualifications". This argument underlines the importance of wealth and awareness, but does not necessitate that the combination of cultural and economic capital puts consumers in a better place for purchasing ethically. There are different critiques of the driving forces behind political consumerism. On the one hand, there is a critical stance towards a hierarchy of consumption, with political consumerism being the practice of affluent middle-class consumers who are able to afford such products (Basu, 2001; Frank, 2003; Littler, 2009). On the other hand, other scholars address the information wealth which drives such consumer practices by emphasising awareness and information as key determinants of the phenomenon (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004; Follesdal, 2004).

Despite the variation of the drivers of political consumerism, there is at least one certainty in its enactment: this is that it has been prolific in the neoliberal

marketplace. Therefore, the question of commodification of consumer citizenship should be addressed. The case of the fair trade movement is an engaging example; there are two ideas which can be interrogated with regards to the exploration of its alternative radical *ideology* and the *autonomy* of the movement. According to Heath and Potter, "'fair trade' and 'ethical marketing' are hardly revolutionary ideas, and they certainly present no threat to the capitalist system" (2005: 4). There is an argument, therefore, that fair trade politics has been commodified by the capitalist system. However, the range of actors involved in coffee activism allows for a more thorough representation of the alternative and autonomous nature of the movement, despite evidence for a dominant consumer-driven rhetoric (Chapter 8). Jaffee distinguishes two camps of fair trade actors with regards to their motivation and practices: small to medium sized groups which are "ethical", "ideological" and "alternative", as well as medium, national and transnational organisations which are more "mainstream, profit-oriented or "nonideological" and yet "consumers can see no difference" (2007: 205-206). Essentially, profit and ideology are the discerning variables between the two types of actors. This differentiation can also be broadly applied to coffee activism. The infiltration of market practices seems to be a crucial factor in determining how mainstream or alternative these groups and organisations are. In coffee activism, this can be explored through the generation of income of these groups, as well as through the blurring of consumer and political action (Chapters 8 and 9).

The mainstream coffee industry appears to have a say in the development of fair trade: "At the London-based International Coffee Organization, economist Denis Seudieu says the industry supports Fairtrade unless it gets so big that consumers "stop buying coffee at all"[25]. Another view celebrates the autonomy of the movement; according to Yilmaz, fair trade "is a movement that does not depend as much on external actors to exist" (2006: 41). This is usually relevant for the second camp of actors who are "capable of generating economic value" (Yilmaz, 2006: 41). However, this does not imply that the first camp of activists is always susceptible to market actors. Some of them resolve to creative ways of raising funds through donations, memberships, and of course in the case of fair trade activists, a shop, which promotes and sells fair trade goods. Beyond the potential involvement of commercial

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[25] Contreras, Joseph and Underhill, William (2001) 'How Fair is Fairtrade?' *Newsweek*, November 5 2001,

actors in fair trade, the UK government is also showing interest in the movement by boosting its finances with their investment[26]. However, there is also evidence that the autonomy of the fair trade movement is often sustained through the income-raising mechanisms of various activists (Chapter 8). A critique of the terms of commodification enables an analysis of the tensions involved in a politics of consumption.

The commodification thesis is related to, but distinct from, the co-optation thesis which concerns the processes of appropriation of a niche – usually cultural or subcultural – group to the point of the corroding its revolutionary values (cf. Frank, 1997; Heath and Potter, 2005; Moore, 2007). The term 'commodification' is more appropriate to theorise the impact of economics on political life, while the term 'co-optation' has been discussed extensively in terms of the appropriation of alternative cultures such as the DIY underground (Moore, 2007), independent music, film and life (Heath and Potter, 2005), as well as youth lifestyles (Rushkoff, 2001, 2004). All these cases contemplate the domination of business and marketing strategies upon all aspects of life; they argue that "the myth of co-optation …serves to conceal the fact that 'alternative' is, and always has been, good business" (Heath and Potter, 2005, 131). The infiltration of 'hip consumerism' into counterculture has been theorised by Thomas Frank (1997) and his study of the advertising and menswear industry titled *the conquest of cool*. Hip consumerism is described as "driven by disgust with mass society itself" (Frank, 1997: 28), thereby hinting the fragmentation of consumption evoked by a resistance to a uniform society. The theory of co-optation attempts to use certain politically radical commodities, in order to enhance sales through the commercialisation of activism. Therefore, consumerism can be paralleled to an almost alternative, though politically mild way of resistance. In this sense, it is also familiar to ethical consumerism, which extends that 'resistance' from a project of self development to a project of world development. While 'hip consumerism' refers to the individual as a consumer-driven identity builder, ethical consumerism refers to the individual as a morally aware global citizen.

As a political movement which germinates in the marketplace through individual acts of consumption, the nature of the fair trade movement appears to be

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[26] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/october_2009/uk_government_announces_12_million_investment_for_fairtrade_on_15th_anniversary_of_the_fairtrade_mark.aspx [19 Oct 2009].

susceptible to commodification. As Harvey claims, "any political movement that holds individual freedoms to be sacrosanct is vulnerable to incorporation into the neoliberal fold" (2005: 41). Moreover, the resistance of the fair trade movement yields the choice of purchasing ethically certified product *A* over non-ethically certified product *B*. Similarly, then, to other niche countercultures such as DIY, punk and other alternative groups, the question of 'selling out' to the mainstream might also be posed to fair trade. However, this is a vexing question. On the one hand, there are arguments on the neutralisation of the movement's political rhetoric (Low and Davenport, 2005a) while, on the other, the success of fair trade in the mainstream marketplace is considered essential for the growth of the movement (Lamb, 2009). Perhaps a better question is whether fair trade is a caprice of neoliberalism; whether participation in ethical consumerism equals the very commodification of citizenship. The notion that capitalism is accommodating new tendencies by commodifying them might be an argument for the commodification of coffee activism and consumer citizenship. Littler counter-argues that "discourse around ethical consumption often mobilizes a fear of 'political correctness' to neutralize its connection to a broader, collective and political movement in the process" (2009: 18). It is imperative not to regard the enactment of all ethical consumerism as obviously political. There is a conceptual difference, therefore, between political and ethical consumerism. Political consumerism is more relevant to a new form of political participation in liquid politics, while ethical consumerism is more concerned with a "consumer story [which] does not necessarily have to contain the social or economic justice story – particularly in its more developed policy and political activism versions" (Bennett *et al*, 2007: n.p.n.).

3.6 Conclusion: The Wild Lands

Coffee was one of the first products to gain global recognition as ethical. Consumer citizenship – in the form of participation in fair trade or otherwise labelled as an ethical market – is characterised by a variety of tensions. Conceptually, political consumerism is an amalgam of alternative political participation and a sophisticated form of consumer activism; it is a concept relevant to fair trade, green/ethical

consumerism, boycotts, organic and recyclable goods and other socially conscious markets. On the other hand, ethical consumerism can refer to a less political type of consumer activism. The research on ethical consumerism in the form of fair trade has been thriving, but there are further questions to be asked about the different levels of operation of ethical/fair coffee campaigning/activism. While the fair trade market is expanding to subsume products ranging from bananas to knickers, the history of coffee can illuminate the changing paths of civic engagement. Political consumerism seems to be a valuable concept for the understanding of the politics of the 21st century. Forms of positive and negative political consumerism originate from a long history of consumer activism. While boycotting is more directly political in the agonistic sense, buycotting exists in the blurry space between the private function of the market and the public function of politics. In terms of cultural citizenship, political consumerism has been theorised as a form of political participation in the market, but has not been examined in terms of the restrictions posed by neoliberalism. The gradual mainstreaming of fair trade is explored in more detail in Chapter 6. Here, I have taken a sceptical outlook on fair trade due to the constant integration of commercial interests in the cause. While coffee activism and other forms of ethical consumption have recruited a politics of the pocket against trade injustice, the proliferation of consumer-oriented stories and spaces has further impacted the fragmentation of types of action. Therefore, I also argue that the politicisation of consumption is by all means conditional.

A significant tension rests in the need to reconcile the liquid, private, fleeting and individualistic nature of political consumerism with public, sustained and collective forms of civic engagement. There are high levels of individualisation in political consumerism and a highly individualised rhetoric in the marketplace. Consumers appear empowered by their ability to turn to a mechanism which records – and presumably accounts for – each individual purchase. Political consumerism can be paralleled to a form of political participation when certain circumstances are fulfilled; intentionality, collectivity and influence are crucial factors to the politicisation of consumption (Halkier, 2004). If coffee activism is to have significant political impact, collective individualism should be a parameter of its enactment. Moreover, while political consumerism can be perceived as political, it is uncertain whether it can be perceived as democratic. The market should not be expected or allowed to create an economic democracy, which can result in the control of political

authority by an oligarchy of conglomerates. Ethical consumers appear to be the 'usual suspects', middle-class, educated and wealthy professionals, as they appear to have easy access to information, which is the driving force of this type of consumerism (cf. Basu, 2001; Frank, 2003). However, a process of incorporation into the mainstream political and market fold has been at play. As a niche market of the ethical/green type is argued to be channelling into the mainstream, it is unlikely that its political claims will be radical. The claims of an issue such as coffee activism rely on a variety of media, which, as agents of symbolic power, have the potential of capturing collective civic imagination. It could be argued that the amplification of online access and content has brought coffee activism to the mainstream of civic consciousness. The next chapter directly explores the impact of the internet on contemporary civic engagement and the mediation of political and economic life.

Chapter 4

Digital Debates:

Coffee Activism and Internet Politics

4.1 Digital Debates on Internet Politics

The contemporary composition of political and economic life has been outlined in the previous chapters. I now turn my attention to an integral aspect of the relationship between the 'political' and the 'economic' with regards to their mediation. The online mediation of coffee activism is a crucial point in the exploration of contemporary politics. By interrogating the digitisation of a form of participation which envelopes both private (market) and public (political) spaces, I explore the forces which shape political communication online, and the potential of political uses of the internet. Digital debates on contemporary politics have been prolific since the late 1990s. These debates have been focusing their attention on the relationship between the internet and democratic politics (cf. Buchstein, 1997; Bennett and Entman, 2001; Chadwick, 2006; Coleman and Blumler, 2009), as well as that between the internet and socially and politically progressive activist politics (cf. Hill and Hughes, 1998; Meikle, 2002; Atton, 2004; Downing *et al*, 2001; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003; van de Donk *et al*, 2005; Oates *et al*, 2006). In this manner, the focus of these debates can be theorised as 'e-politics' and 'internet politics' correspondingly, where the former is associated with electoral campaigns and party politics, while the latter encompasses a broader understanding and includes a widening understanding of the political, as suggested in Chapter 2. The restructuring of communication technologies and their uses has occurred through the development of internet-based Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as electronic mail, electronic mailing lists, websites, electronic forums, podcasts, remote servers, social networking sites and numerous embryonic digital communication technologies. Hill and Hughes highlight that "communication is an essential part of

politics... Given that politics is dependent on communication, anything that affects how people communicate will ultimately affect politics as well" (1998: 22). This reconfiguration has in its turn impacted on the realm of public and private life and has necessitated the rethinking of the mediation of civic life.

The developments in the field of political communication, but also political engagement, have been regarded in many different ways. The arguments forwarded have to do with the dynamics of change in terms of the relationship between new technological developments and politics. One argument is that the mediation of politics is not revolutionised by internet technology, but rather technology is normalised by the prevailing political realm. This can be discussed as the rationalisation thesis or, as Resnick describes it, the normalisation thesis, which contends that:

> What has occurred in recent years is the normalization of Cyberspace. Cyberspace has not become the locus of a new politics that spills out of the computer screen and revitalizes citizenship and democracy. If anything, ordinary politics in all its complexity and vitality has invaded and captured Cyberspace. (1998: 49)

According to the rationalisation thesis, digital technology does not significantly alter political life, but rather reproduces the powerful offline modus operandi in online spaces (Resnick, 1998; Margolis and Resnick, 2000). An assumption here is that communication technologies alone are not able to change the political landscape, but rather that they are embedded in governing political and economic contexts. This discussion is elaborated in this chapter, as I point out the potentialities and drawbacks of digital debates on internet politics. Several arguments have been voiced with regards to the potential appropriation of accommodating technologies such as the internet to the caprices of the status quo (cf. Hill and Hughes, 1998; Robins and Webster, 1999; Margolis and Resnick, 2000). Buchstein (1997) suggests that there are two types of arguments in the internet politics literature: the optimistic and the neutral theoretical strands. Another argument, therefore, follows an optimistic point of view, which envisions and expects the golden age of digital life (Gates, 1995; Negroponte, 1995). Neutral views similarly regard ICTs such as the internet as 'neutral tools' (cf. Bell, 1975; Dery, 1996), which are asocial and disembedded. The

setback of Buchstein's distinction is that he does not account for the appropriation of the internet by political elites or the creative embeddedness of the internet in online activism. The optimist outlook overemphasises the potentialities of the internet for the strengthening of community or social change, but cannot provide a holistic perspective on the agency of the medium, when fragmentation and filtering can sabotage the unity of a civic body. Also, it fails to regard the unequal distribution of online access (Norris, 2001). The neutral outlook is crucial as well, as it celebrates the medium as an independent force, which can also facilitate social change, but fails to account for social, political and economic parameters in the use of technology.

It is more appropriate to examine internet politics both within their overarching contexts and also everyday uses. A technology such as the internet has known great diversification and has been integrated in all patterns of life at a precipitate speed. In terms of political activism, the internet has been heralded as reinvigorating:

> Political activism has been reinvented in recent decades by a diversification in the *agencies* (the collective organizations structuring political activity), the *repertoires* (the actions commonly used for political expression), and the *targets* (the political actors that participants seek to influence). The surge of protest politics, new social movements, and Internet activism exemplify these changes. If the opportunities for political expression and mobilization have fragmented and multiplied over the years... democratic engagement may have adapted and evolved in accordance with the new structures of opportunities, rather than simply atrophying. (Norris, 2002: 215-6 [italics in original text])

Similarly, coffee activism has been demonstrating an evolution of electronic media use. For instance, boycott campaigns and relevant calls for ethical consumption have proliferated online (Chapter 3). More arguments are developing around the perception that the internet is connected to its contexts and amenable to its uses (cf. Norris, 2001; Bennett, 2003, 2004b; Chadwick, 2006; Papacharissi, 2009; Coleman and Blumler, 2009). This does not suggest that the internet is a 'neutral' technology, but rather that "the democratic potential of the internet is not dependent on its primary features. It is realized only through the agents who engage in reflexive and democratic activity" (Fenton, 2008b: 53).

In this chapter, I address issues surrounding the potentialities of internet politics by scrutinising the structural and contextual characteristics of the medium, as well as cases which allow for both optimism and scepticism in the reconfiguration of contemporary politics. I present an argument on the operation of the internet within the fields of neoliberal capitalism and liquid modernity. In the wild lands of neoliberalism, the internet can potentially function as a medium for social change by breaking away from the traditional form of a colonised space. However, it can also operate as a loudspeaker for big politics and big businesses, muting alternative politics and initiatives. Moreover, the conditions of liquidity are most evident online where high flexibility and short temporality of content are one-click away from millions of other websites[27]. This chapter also focuses on the types of spaces the internet comprises of and their uses for alternative political ends. My epistemological approach to the internet is intrinsically linked to this discussion. By looking at the spaces, uses and contexts of the internet, I discuss the potentialities of the medium for political expression and participation in the case of coffee activism.

4.2 A Polaroid of Digital History: The Internet circa the 1990s

Technology and society do not coincide. History undermines ontology. (Silverstone, 1999: 10)

The correlation of the internet with politics dates back to the 1990s when the medium gained popular access and gave hope to a politics in crisis (Chapter 2). The ground-breaking nature of the internet (cf. Rheingold, 1993) was regarded as a potential saviour of the disconnections between citizens and those between citizens and states. The celebration of the revolutionising potential of the medium co-existed alongside concerns of its appropriation to an offline status quo, as typified by the rationalisation thesis. There was also another growing strand in the literature, according to which "the new ICTs are playing a much more significant role in the extra-parliamentary context, in fact even enabling forms of participation that would not have been possible without them" (Dahlgren, 2004: xiii). The parliamentary and

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[27] According to Netcraft there were 156 million websites in 2008 http://www.labnol.org/internet/blogging/the-total-number-of-websites-on-earth/2257/ [02 Feb 2010].

extra-parliamentary contexts have experienced different types of restructuring in terms of their communication practices. Exogenous factors such as 'individualization' (as a social phenomenon) and 'economisation' (or neoliberal economism) and 'mediatisation' have been discussed as reforming the directions of political communication (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). The impact of mediatisation on political communication, organisation and mobilisation has been theorised in terms of internet politics. Resnick discerns three types of internet politics: "politics within the Net, politics which impacts the Net, and, political uses of the Net" (1998: 55). Politics within the internet is the online activity which is deliberative or activist, but in any case remains online. Politics within the internet concerns activities in online networks and Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). An example of this is citizens' interactions in electronic forums. Politics which impacts the internet refers to the digitisation of offline politics and cases where traditional political agents and structures have activated their online status and carry out their operations both offline and online. Electronic roots have been placed by the vast majority of political parties, civil society organisations and interest groups in developed countries. Finally, political uses of the internet relate to the deployment of the internet as a medium for protest. This type of internet politics has given birth to terms such as 'cyberactivism' (McCaughey and Ayers, 2003), 'cyberprotest' (van de Donk et al, 2004), 'cyberpolitics' (Hill and Hughes, 1998), 'online activism' (Vegh, 2003) or 'internet activism' (Kahn and Kellner, 2004). I employ these terms interchangeably to discuss the use of the internet for coffee activism.

As a tool for activism, the internet has been used "in a power struggle of control and resistance between the power elite and the public" (Vegh, 2003: 71). The year 1999 imprinted internet activism in the public memory and illuminated the possibilities for activism in an interconnected world. Historically, there are two main events which drew attention to the political use of the internet. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, the Mexico-based revolutionary movement, has been a celebrated case where activists employing digital communication technologies have gained global recognition and solidarity (cf. Russell, 2001; Garrido and Halavais, 2003). Moreover, the anti-WTO protests in Seattle during the same year gave birth to the Independent Media Center Worldwide Network (Indymedia) and breathed hope in to the anti-globalisation movement (cf. Levi and Olson, 2000; van de Donk et al, 2004). The last case, in particular, has been argued to revolutionise journalism by

equating users and producers of online news; Indymedia remains among the most celebrated cases of digital reconfigurations where the internet provides a space for fairly unregulated civic expression and deliberation (Scott, 2005; Platon and Deuze, 2003). The case of active engagement in the production of alternative information has been heralded as one of the promising possibilities offered by the internet. It has also allowed for instances, such as the above, where the use of the medium by traditional structures 'as usual' is directly challenged. Technology has been regarded as empowering to political activism.

However, there is another significant event which was caused by the internet and which was taking place during the second half of the 1990s. This was "a destructive stock bubble whose subsequent crash has damaged the lives of countless people" (Agre, 2002: 149). This is referred to as the dot-com bubble in both academic and popular parlance. During the late 1990s, there was mounting financial interest in the business potentials of the internet, which inevitably led to what can now be conceptualised as the internet crunch, the boom and bust of the internet market. It is safe to say that since its introduction to the public, both political and market actors have been competing for a chance to utilise this (at that time new) medium. This historic flashback is relevant and crucial to the consideration of contemporary potentials for internet politics. The massive business interest which preceded and followed the dot-com bubble allows for the suggestion that a rationalisation of markets online is also at play. Scott and Street argue that "just as e-commerce has opened up new markets for firms, so it has opened up new techniques of mobilisation and lowered the costs for social movement organisations" (2001: 49). Coffee activism is a case of political engagement through both the political and the market space. In coffee activism, online structures have been turned on. Because the basis for involvement is ethical consumption, technological structures have been employed for the dissemination of information of this type of consumer activism, as well as the opening of new windows for its practice. Therefore, the interactions of these spaces determine the types of functions made available online.

The internet is a platform which contains more platforms and even more spaces which are constantly mediated, altered and updated. As a stage for extra-parliamentary politics, the internet has been accredited a significant role in terms of its communication-facilitating, network-building and organising capacities for relevant global social activism (Bennett, 2004a; Peretti, 2004). The case of fair trade networks

in the UK and the US has been specifically examined in terms of organisational sustainability (Bennett *et al*, 2007). In this thesis, I am not examining fair trade cyberactivism in the sense of a loosely connected network, but rather the case of coffee cyberactivism which presents a truly fragmented landscape of significantly diverse social groups, organisations and acts of engagement. In coffee activism, online structures are operating. Because the basis for involvement is ethical consumption, technological structures have been set in motion for the dissemination of information of this type of consumer activism, as well as the opening up of new windows for its practice. Different types of coffee activists articulate different types of narratives (Chapter 8) which, in their turn, impact citizens' understanding of the cause (Chapter 9).

This thesis examines different aspects of coffee activism online and offline. Coffee activism is theorised as an extra-parliamentary form of engagement which sways between public and private arenas. As most forms of activist groups or organisations, coffee activism has also found its way online. The interesting part of this case of coffee activism is the activation of both its structures for public engagement and its structures for political consumerism. Their relationship is examined in this thesis in terms of their mediatised nature. The history of the internet is infused in celebratory and sceptic moments and lines of argumentation. In the following section, I explore how the structural configurations of the internet have allowed for the reconfiguration of political and commercial uses of the medium.

4.3 Internet Architecture: Information, Mobilisation, Organisation

The architectural characteristics of the internet have been the drivers of arguments on its open nature. In contrast to previous communication technologies, the internet can facilitate new forms of interactivity and information flows through various models of communication, while overcoming spatial and temporal dimensions (cf. Bennett, 2003; Gurak, 2004). In terms of interactivity, we can discern between one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many and many-to-one communication (Chadwick, 2006). *One-to-one communication* is evident in cases such as email and instant messaging where one internet user interacts with another; *one-to-many*

communication flows are manifest in web pages and online documents where the creator of one site interacts with many users through such sites; *many-to-many* communication refers to the multiple interactions of users through sites such as discussion groups, mailing lists and blogs[28]; *many-to-one* communication concerns the multiple communication of users to an individual or group, such as in the case of online polls or petitions. The first two cases are indicative of bilateral interactivity, while the latter two suggest the existence of multilateral interactivity. The diversification of information flows has been one of the most celebrated attributes of the internet. Oates (2008) summarises the innovative characteristics of the medium as the virtually cost-free distribution of information to an inexhaustible population; the potential editorial autonomy; the escape from national regulation and control; the ability to circulate information globally; and the possibility to break the consumer and producer of content divide online[29]. The scales of opportunities opened up by the varied flows of information and interaction can contrast the rationalisation thesis. In this sense, certain attributes of the internet, such as the ability to offer outlets for voicing concerns, can overcome geographic barriers of political articulation. However, it should be underlined that technological advancements should be examined with regards to their adaptation by various social actors.

Furthermore, the instantaneity of diverse information flows has been linked to the amelioration of mobilisation practices. There is a strong link between communication technologies and political mobilisation (cf. Jones, 1994). The sophistication of communication technologies has impacted the scholarly field in terms of the conceptualisation of internet mobilisation or e-mobilisation[30] (Gibson *et al*, 2005; Chadwick, 2006). These arguments have been posed against the rationalisation thesis, by exhibiting the variety of "new resources offered in the online environment for mobilisation" (Gibson *et al*, 2005: 561). Vegh (2003) suggests that the internet can be used for mobilisation by calling for offline action, calling for action which normally takes place offline (but can be conducted more efficiently

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[28] Blogs are small websites typically maintained by individuals who update them on a fairly regular basis and which typically attract repeated visitors; blogs often contain text, videos (videoblogs or vlogs), photographs (photoblogs) and/or audio (podcasts).

[29] The latter has also been discussed as 'produsage' (Bruns, 2006) and refers to the interrelation of production and consumption of information online. This is more relevant for cases such as Indymedia and commentary sections on news and blogs.

[30] The terms are used interchangeably here, rather than in the 'internet politics' and 'e-politics' distinction outlined in the beginning of this chapter.

online) and action which can only occur online. The use of the internet for offline action is typical in calls for demonstrations, marches, or boycotts. The use of the internet for action which can be more effectively conducted online includes instances where online tools such mailing lists are used for mobilisation purposes, such as online sit-ins and the signing of electronic petitions, which circulate virally. Moreover, the UK government holds a database of ongoing electronic petitions[31]. Finally, calls for action which can only be take place online include for instance "a coordinated massive spamming campaign or pingstorm attack[32]" (Vegh, 2003: 75). In coffee activism, the internet can be used for mobilisation for a variety of online and offline actions, such as events attendance, involvement, fund-raising and, last but not least, ethical consumption. In this case, mobilisation concerns offline action, but is sometimes conducted online (i.e. in the case of fund-raising online) to facilitate easier interactions with the cause. However, the use of the internet in coffee activism as a revolutionary tool does not appear to be the case. For coffee activists the medium, rather, eases communications with other activists or specific groups of citizens, while slightly amplifying ethical consumerism online (Chapter 8); for citizens involved in coffee activism the internet provides an invaluable source of information (Chapter 9).

There are also sceptical approaches to the revolutionising of mobilisation practices by the internet (Rucht, 2005). Rucht (2005) denies the utter marginalisation of conventional media. This standpoint is the extension of an argument raised much before the time of the internet concerning scepticism to the wild enthusiasm around media such as television (cf. Marvin, 1988). Although Rucht (2005) does not disregard the internet as a potent platform for mobilisation, he also does not disregard the significant forms of mobilisation in the pre-internet age. He argues in favour of a rationalisation thesis, by underlining that often online attention is gained by already known actors and therefore privileges those who are already privileged. While balancing enthusiasm with scepticism is difficult in internet mobilisation, it is crucial to remember that coffee activism is a phenomenon with a history of half a century and, therefore, its translation into the internet realm cannot be assumed as apparent.

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[31] http://petitions.number10.gov.uk [2 May 2009].
[32] A PingStorm attack is a Denial of Service (DoS) attack which consists of a flood of ping requests, which are used to check network conditions, which are aimed to cause the disruption of the normal activity of a system. This type of mobilisation through the internet concerns a variety of tactics, from Internet petitions and campaigns to more aggressive and tactical uses of the internet, such as hacktivism.

Political uses of the internet and its information channels have raised "new questions about political organizing and social change" (McCaughey and Ayers, 2003: 3). The internet has arguably offered revolutionary ways of organisation to a variety of social, political and economic agents. One of the most recently acclaimed technological innovations was the model of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005). This term had been a buzzword of the internet business world before migrating into the social sciences mainstream. Web 2.0 has impacted on internet politics in terms of the ways information is organised, transmitted and received in a non-linear manner through a variety and syndication of internet channels. According to Chadwick and Howard, the technological focus of Web 2.0 offers some principles which are appropriate for social science investigation:

- The internet as platform for political discourse;
- the collective intelligence emergent from political web use;
- the importance of data over particular software and hardware applications;
- perpetual experimentalism in the public domain;
- the creation of small-scale forms of political engagement through consumerism;
- the propagation of political content over multiple applications;
- and rich user experiences on political websites. (2009: 4)

The currency of the internet ranges from email, mailing lists, and to blogs, websites, social networks and search engines. These channels are often seen as transformed by the structural shifts of Web 2.0 because of the successful popularity of a few cases. While several parts of the blogosphere and cyberspace have adapted to these swift transformations and broken free of their linear past, it is not safe to assume that this has been a homogenous change across the internet landscape. This observation relates to the aforementioned necessity of the investigation of levels of adaptation of technologies by activists. In the case of coffee activism, Web 2.0 can maximise opportunities for deliberation, which is argued to be one of the main tenants of political consumerism (cf. Halkier, 2004; Kennedy, 2004). However, the adaptation of Web 2.0 structures in coffee activism is atypical (Chapter 8).

In the realm of information distribution, search engines constitute exemplary cases of the success of the Web 2.0 model. The functionality of search engines rests in their ability to "interpret links to a webpage as objective, peer-endorsed and machine-readable signs of value" (Walker, 2002). They are essentially databases of websites and operate as platform for online navigation. The case of Google is particularly indicative of the functionality of the model:

> Google version 1.0 searched Web pages. Google 2.0 has been reaching outward beyond Web pages, omnivorously. Books, news, and videos are three of the many categories of information that Google has added to its storehouses, bringing it into conflict with entire industries: book publishing, newspapers, and television entertainment. (Stross, 2008: 1)

Google 2.0 can compete with 'entire industries'. Its success has been remarkable and its dominance among competitors solidified (Hargittai, 2002; Stross, 2008). However, the assumption that the majority of web sites have been unobstructed in flourishing into Web 2.0 status should not be made. Neither are the technical and financial resources necessary for such restructuring always available, nor is the reorganisation of websites always the priority of activists (Chapter 8). In the case of coffee activism, many agencies are employing digitised repertoires, but it is crucial to remember that these diverse groups/organisations have different membership bases, within which there is a range of internet literacy.

The potential for inclusion in such a rapidly developing environment is relevant to concerns around digital divides (cf. Norris, 2001; Mossberger, 2009). In the realm of technopolitics asserting that disconnectedness equals remoteness and total breakage from the dominant social and political structures is not an exaggeration. A first approach to digital divides entails realising the issues of access between and within different countries and is regarded as the *global divide* (Norris, 2001). In the United Kingdom, the percentage of internet penetration is quite high at 79.8%[33]. A second approach to digital divides concerns user sophistication and literacy and is regarded as the *social divide* (Norris, 2001). The global and social digital divides remain critical to our understanding of internet potentialities. As Cammaerts states:

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[33] http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/uk.htm (consulted on 08/01/2010).

Many civil society organizations are... conscious that the use of the Internet is burdened with many constraints, of which access and fragmentation are the most obvious. As such, they diversify their media strategies to also include more traditional forms of media such as print or radio. (2007: 220)

This is common practice in groups which have a standard membership base and can diversify their strategies to already 'converted' parts of the citizenry (Chapter 8). Norris argues for a third type of digital divide, the *democratic divide*, which "signifies the difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize, and participate in public life" (2001: 4). This is a more micro-analytical outlook to inequality of inclusion and concerns the activation of online resources for political activism, or in other words the activation of cyberactivism. This notion of a 'divide' can serve to confirm the repetition of inclusion and exclusion online as well as offline. As there is a divide in inclusion of citizens in the dominant global digitisation forces, there is similarly a divide in the inclusion of activists in the Web 2.0 landscape. The internet exists within the social world, within 'sited materialities' (Sassen, 2004), thus its democratic nature can be curtailed by social, political or economic forces. Particularly in the case of coffee activism, the use of the medium for political communication and mobilisation is directly influenced by its relationship with offline groups and organisations, be they political or commercial.

4.4 Issues of Online Experience: Individualisation, Marketisation and the Quest for Attention

In the previous parts of this thesis, I suggest that the prevalence of individualisation is a social reality (Chapters 2 and 3). Individualisation has been institutionalised (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), but also marketised. By the latter, I refer to the illusion of empowerment through participation in the neoliberal marketplace. The empowerment through choice from an abundance of offerings suggests a more democratic process, which is an illusionary mechanism of a dictating marketplace (Schmookler, 1993). In this section, I further examine the ways in which

internet users organise their navigational experience. Online, individualisation is the fundamental modus vivendi. The ecology of information online presents less of a garden and more of a jungle. Misinformation, spam and cacophony are typical phenomena in online spaces (Terranova, 2004), as the absence of coherent regulation allows for virtually – and literally – anything to be articulated. As Davenport and Beck contend, "when it comes to information technology, most organizations have taken a hair-of-the-dog-that-bit-you approach. Just as alcohol consumption causes hangovers, the widespread use of technology certainly contributes to the information glut and resulting attention deficit" (2001: 73). The response to this is that, while the quantity of online information is rapidly growing due to immediate and cost-effective transmission and reception, the fragmentation of audiences is at work. The diversity of actors engaged in coffee activism (Chapter 5) exemplifies this.

In order to organise online information in a way that is relevant to them, internet users resort to modes of selective consumption of digital content. Because of the online information glut, *filtering* content has become a standard practice (Sunstein, 2002). Filtering is the process during which a user requires specific types of news and information from websites, mailing lists or other 'feed' channels customized to their personal interests and is discussed as the 'daily me' logic (Sunstein, 2002). This presents one of the reasons as to why the consumer of online information is always discussed as 'user' and not as generic consumer of otherwise determined content, such as television or even newspaper consumers. The agency of the internet user is thereby assumed to be more potent than that of any other media audience member. Internet users are able to customise their online experience through their choice of channels and issues to be exposed to and not to be exposed to. For instance, through the use of mailing lists, citizens involved in coffee activism are able to filter the particular information which they choose to receive. This capacity could be perceived as empowering because it enables internet users to be actively involved in the reception of online content.

However, the fallacy of empowerment through filtering is similar to the fallacy of empowerment through a choice of commodity consumption in the neoliberal marketplace (Schmookler, 1993). Sunstein (2002) maintains that one of the problems with the customised experience of perfect filtering and the 'daily me' logic of the internet is the problematic understanding of the notion of freedom and the relationship between consumers and citizens. Another problem which Sunstein

relates to filtering is that it is synonymous with "considerable difficulty in mutual understanding" (2002: 48), a problem which Kahn and Kellner also identify in the case of the proliferation of 'nanoaudiences' (2005: 93) in the blogosphere. 'Nanoaudiences' can be broadly defined as audiences of extremely specific and specialised common interests. They are particularly indicative of the blogosphere; as Kahn and Kellner argue, "it remains a problem that most blogs, while providing the possibility for public voice for most citizens, are unable to be found by most users thus resulting in the cyberbalkanization of so-called 'nanoaudiences'" (2005: 93). Therefore, in its seeming empowerment of the individual user, cyberbalkanization merely becomes further fragmentation and further individualisation online. Similarly, in the case of political mobilisation, collectivity is not an easily attainable target. The literature on the strand of internet politics with which I am engaging does not consent on the manifestations of online mobilisation. Della Porta and Diani (2006) argue that there is 'mixed empirical evidence' with regards to the impact of ICTs for mobilisation in the social movements realm. This thesis aspires to provide a coherent body of data regarding coffee activism and online mobilisation (Chapter 8).

The strong focus on individualisation does not always imply an egotistical relationship – or lack of relationship – with politics. There are arguments on the enhancement of a cosmopolitan connectedness which has been facilitated by internet technologies (cf. Carty, 2002; Bennett, 2003) (Chapter 3). Carty summarises this view by arguing that:

The Internet has proved to be a medium that enhances the interconnectedness and consciousness of groups and individuals on a global scale. This has opened up new possibilities for social relations between workers in developing countries and activists in core countries, and concerned citizens across national boundaries. (2002: 144)

This is particularly indicative of coffee activism, where activists and citizens in developed countries have been exposed to the issues coffee farmers are facing in developing countries and can be engaged in the search of information or communication through the medium (Chapter 9). Such a view has been criticised for favouring the enhancement of a 'specific class and territorial powers' (Harvey, 2000: 540). The realisation of the persistence of cyberbalkanization suggests that further

research on the processes of online content creation, organisation, distribution and reception is required; this thesis approaches such parameters methodologically with regards to the coffee activism online and offline.

There is a strong predicament in the cyberbalkanization thesis; according to this thesis, users consume content which slips through their filters. However, even if internet users manage to personalise the information which is intended to reach them, it is not guaranteed that they will consume this information. This is an argument extended from the 'attention economy' (Goldhaber, 1997) thesis. According to this thesis, attention becomes an organising driver of economy; this is a model intrinsically linked to the rationalisation and appropriation of the internet in contemporary life. An attention economy evolves around the essential sustainability of attention:

> Getting attention is not a momentary thing; you build on the stock you have every time you get any, and the larger your audience at one time, the larger your potential audience in the future. Thus obtaining attention is obtaining a kind of enduring wealth, a form of wealth that puts you in a preferred position to get anything this new economy offers. (Goldhaber, 1997)

Consequently, there is a quest for attention online which is becoming an economic model for success. Additionally, according to Goldhaber, attention has a tensional relationship with economy, as "money flows to attention, and much less well does attention flow to money" (1997: n.p.n.). Besides the economic quest for attention, there is significantly a political quest for attention. Couldry *et al* argue that "attracting and sustaining citizens' attention is a central challenge in modern democracies and a prerequisite for most political or civic action, from opinion formation or public discussion to voting or direct participation in democratic institutions" (2010: 23). The same tensional relationship therefore exists between politics and attention, as politics necessitates attention far less than attention necessitates politics. The notion of attention is thus valuable not merely to the business world that competes for consumers' attention (Davenport and Beck, 2001), but also the political world where citizens' attention is the absolute requirement for a vibrant civic and democratic culture (Bovard, 2006; Couldry *et al*, 2010).

The economic and political attention on attention signifies the liquid nature of the concept and echoes the conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). Attention is the elusive object of both political and economic conduct. If citizens do not pay attention, politics suffer. Similarly, if consumers do not pay attention, the economy suffers. Moreover, the slippery but necessary concept of attention is constantly swaying from public to private arenas. Political participation can thus become elusive. What Coleman and Blumler write about the mediation of parliamentary politics is also true of the mediation of extra-parliamentary politics:

> Too often e-democracy has been promoted in the name of convenience: vote from bed, text-message your MP while you're on the bus, press red buttons as a substitute for articulated opinion. There is hollowness about much of this interactivity... The elusive goal of democratic communication is not the quest for instantaneity, but the pursuit of mutual recognition. (2009: 167)

The 'hollowness' which exists, according to the authors, in the mediated forms of participation can be attributed to the lack of sustained attention. The substitution of continual forms of engagement by instantaneous media technologies allows for them to compete in a space where all forms of business and political agents constantly claim attention. The digital landscape can be characterised by constant beckoning of attention. While the winners of attention are not always the holders of capital, the process of competing for this 'economic' concept has resulted in the liberalisation of the internet.

Various political or economically charged narratives are contesting for civic attention online. In the case of coffee activism, a blend of political and economic attention is essential. Sustainability of this attention is crucial for the politicisation of the cause, as individual forms of action are meaningful upon their collective enactment (Chapter 3). The elusive nature of attention online and the fluidity of the act of consumption further signify the sensitive nature of civic attention. Beyond intent and sustainability, a necessary element of political consumerism is its influence (Halkier, 2004); influence is only possible when the previous two elements are present. Individualisation, consumption and attention are all typical of the form of participation in coffee activism. These are essential parameters, which are mediated in a space where their sustainability is never established or enduring, as political and

economic agents are all hunting for attention. The rationalisation thesis is relevant here, as the competition for attention creates dominant frames of action, which are often susceptible to marketisation (Chapter 7). In the next section, I explore the pervasiveness of an economic rationale online.

4.5 A Political Economy of Political Consumerism: The Marketopoly Online?

In this thesis, the internet is also examined with regards to the facilitation of narratives and structures for consumption (Chapter 8). As Michaelis (2000) notes, the medium has played a decisive role for ethical consumption, as it presents a substantial source of information around social and environmental impacts of consumption choices. She also argues that online mediation can directly influence consumer behaviour by portraying social norms for ethical consumption. Reisch contends that this is not a neutral role, but one which plays along according to the "'hidden agenda' of a consumer society; functions as feedback mechanism, reinforcing aspects of consumer culture; supports the transmission of Western consumer culture; and has structural effects on relationships, on real and virtual community building, and hence on consumption" (2001: 255). This argument resonates with the epistemological approach of the internet as embedded in particular social, political and economic contexts where the proliferation of information is influenced by specific contextual conditions.

Beyond the series of internet potentialities concerning political life in terms of the reinvigoration of activism and civic engagement, attention should therefore also be turned to the structural contexts of the medium. As Robins and Webster point out, "it is important to be engaged as much with the political economy of the information society as with the cultural politics of the virtual society" (1999: 3). Besides digital divides, there is another crude socio-structural dimension of capital distribution. This concerns the celebration of the dominance of the private individual bringing their market choices into the realm of activist practices. From a political economy perspective, the internet is viewed as a deeply commercial space where business is as usual (cf. Dawson and Bellamy, 1998; Schiller, 1999a; McChesney, 2000; Patelis,

2000). In a way, this is the equivalent of the rationalisation thesis for the market world. A political economy of new media focuses on power and how it is structured and differentiated, as well as its origins and renewal processes (Mansell, 2004). The phenomenon of invasion of markets in the spaces of the internet before and after the dot-com bubble has been identified as *digital capitalism* (Schiller, 1999b). A political economy of online communications can also concentrate on the inequalities which spring from the monopolisation of these communications by a restricted number of conglomerates which control information and communication flows on a global scale. A critique, therefore, can be based on the relationship between the economic structures of the dominant internet industries and the ideological content of the websites.

From a business perspective, the internet has been hailed as a quintessentially commercial medium (cf. Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Fog *et al*, 2005; Godek and Yates, 2005). Economic forces are looking into ways of employing the viral possibilities of the internet to articulate consumer narratives; marketeers are aware of the civic concerns of consumers: "Increasingly we are using the shopping-cart to "vote", expressing ourselves through our purchase. And story brands are becoming an important tool for communicating these beliefs" (Fog *et al*, 2005: 18). These arguments do not fail to stress the significance of the internet as a vehicle for 'communicative tools' such as brands. It is increasingly argued that the internet often operates as a loudspeaker for consumer culture (cf. Michaelis, 2000; Reisch, 2001; Karaganis, 2007). Barber argues that "the internet is a particularly powerful reproducer of consumerism because of its technical capacity to reproduce digital information, and both spread and preserve such information permanently" (2007: 248). Therefore, the same architectural characteristics which make the internet a carrier of hope for internet politics also make it carry hope to internet business. Poster (1997) accuses this type of critical argumentation for economic reductionism and argues that the issue of commodification in particular, limits the discussion on internet politics. However, it is becoming apparent that the internet is not a neutral technology, or one which equally balances a variety of voices. Sarikakis and Thussu contend that the internet is in itself a conflicting ideology:

On the one hand, the Internet offers a global marketplace for a global consumer with infinite possibilities of commodification and consumption. On the other, it

is seen as a liberating, empowering medium, offering new forms of community –bringing people together as citizens in the virtual global village. Although, in fact the Internet is simultaneously marketplace and forum, the ideologies of the Internet often tend to simplify this multifaceted and complex phenomenon in order to support one or other system of truth. (2006: 3)

Additionally, the understanding of internet users as both political beings and as consumers is critical (Sunstein, 2002). Especially in the case of coffee activism, the civic and consumer roles become interchangeable. The blurring of public and private, as well as civic and consumer roles, creates tensions which are further augmented upon their mediation.

There are contested debates on the internet's capacities to enhance civic engagement and deliberation, particularly with regards to the volatile relationship between the internet and the theory of the public sphere (Kellner, 1997; Sassi, 2001; Papacharissi, 2009). The theory of the public sphere is a traditional approach to active political engagement, deliberation and decision-making in liberal pluralism (Habermas, 1989, 1992). Sassi claims that the internet's most promising quality for democratic renewal evolves around its open and public nature, which offers "the potential to replicate the old ideal of a debating public" (2001: 90). However, she makes the case that "the idea of the Net as a political public sphere is hardly considered by the greater public ... as the medium is subject to increased commercialization and attempts at regulation by private and public bureaucracies" (Sassi, 2001: 102). Papacharissi (2009) questions the online interplay of public and private rhetoric and suggests that there are additional reasons to question the manifestation of a public sphere online; she argues that the individualised predisposition of online expression undermines the objectives of the public sphere ideal, and points out the semi-private becoming of online public spaces. Furthermore, the contemporary political context is not liberal pluralism, but rather the political project of neoliberalism. The changes in the political landscape are manifested in theorisations such as lifestyle politics (Bennett, 2004a) that echo the semi-private and semi-public nature of liquid politics.

Virtually moments before the dot-com bubble burst, Buchstein wrote that "the influx of private companies will change the character of the Internet, making it an instrument of further commercialization" (1997: 250). Similarly, there are concerns

about the manipulation of collective identities online; McCaughey and Ayers argue that these "may be solidified online only to be appropriated by capitalist interests that many online community members may take for more empowerment/collective identity" (2003: 9). The financial resources of online political actors should be treated as decisive in their course of action, especially in the case of online activism where the medium has been courted by commercial agents for as long as it has by political agents. Yilmaz further argues that "owing to insufficient funds, a growing number of social movements and NGOs cannot expand their struggle ... As long as the funding does not question the autonomy of social movements, there is no reason to worry" (2006: 41). The 'worry' to which he refers concerns external pressure towards the ideology, organisation and/or actions of social movements – and activist groups and organisations in general – by their financial supporters. He goes on to ask "what happens when such forms of funding induce relationships of subordination and dependence thereby obliging social movements to make concessions with regards to their guiding principles?" (Yilmaz, 2006: 41). This query raises vexing questions regarding the commodification of fair trade (Chapter 7). The repertoires of coffee activism appear entrenched in the celebration of consumer lifestyles, thus leading to criticism concerning its appeal to the middle-class (Frank, 2003; Littler, 2009) or the commodification of the movement (Low and Davenport, 2005a; Fridell, 2007). A critical approach to the medium should interrogate the relationship between the economic structures of the dominant internet players and the ideological content of the websites. In a following chapter, I explore the structures and narratives of coffee activists in order to discuss their interplay and impact on ethical consumers (Chapter 8).

4.6 Conclusion: Political and Economic Rationalisation and the Political Consumer

I have been referring to the medium in question as the *internet* with a small 'i', while the majority of relevant literature has been referring to it as the *Internet* with a capital 'I'. This reflects my epistemological approach towards the medium; if by discussing it as the *Internet* we distinguish it from other media such as *t*elevision,

*r*adio, *film* and so on, then by discussing it as the *internet* I latently make the claim that it should be treated as yet another medium. As Margolis and Resnick argue, "cyberspace is no longer a strange realm. It has become intertwined with everyday life (2000: 1). Though it has presented more sophisticated possibilities, the internet holds a similar disposition to social, cultural and economic frameworks. I take a reflexive social constructivist stance towards the internet and build an argument around its potentialities. At the same time, I reflect upon a political economy framework in order to understand the embeddedness of the medium in neoliberal capitalism, while taking account of the precarious conditions of liquid modernity. I argue that changes in the technological landscape potentially impact pluralistically on the political landscape, but strongly depend on the adaptations of these technologies. A purely celebratory or disapproving perception of internet politics cannot be argued for and sustained. In order to critically discuss internet politics, we must take into account the sophistication of the structures and uses of the medium, as well as the societal, cultural and political contexts in which it is embedded.

In terms of architectural opportunities there are potentialities for the amelioration of activist practices in terms of information flows, mobilisation practices and new forms of organisation to be facilitated by the internet. As Silverstone contends, "media are technologies which both connect and disconnect, but above all they act as bridges or doors, both open and closed, to the world" (2007: 18). On the one hand, the proliferation of information and the phenomenal liquidity of communication appear to be enhancing the outlets and choices for inclusion and engagement. The medium can offer structures for political expression and participation. On the other hand, there are numerous reasons to question these new types of opportunities offered by the internet. Particularly in terms of information, its plurality should not be considered the sole factor for enthusiasm. The production and dissemination of online information does not ensure its consumption by internet users. Mobilisation strategies and new forms of organisational patterns are not necessarily activated or followed. Moreover, the elusive nature of attention is a necessary prerequisite for a vibrant politics, but also a vibrant economy which threatens to commodify it. Therefore, there is a constant battle for citizens and/or consumers' attention online. Hence, there are serious efforts to appropriate the internet to mainstream political and economic practices. Under the light of a political economy perspective, the rationalisation thesis is therefore relevant for both political

and the economic forces. However, a reflexive vista is essential, and we should also attempt to account for creative uses of internet technology. Cosmopolitan concerns can be articulated online, although claims that the medium is bound to geographic banality are substantial (cf. Harvey, 2000). Technical and societal obstacles such as global, social and democratic digital divides, as well as fragmentation, cyberbalkanization and attention in online environments need to be taken into account.

In addition, the most eminent threat to the democratic conduct and context for cyberactivism appears to be the offline and online dominance of neoliberalism. A fundamental question of this project addresses the relationship between civic and consumer engagement. The politicisation of consumption remains a contested issue in terms of the sustainability of civic engagement and the influence of consumerism. Internet politics and internet markets share their historical descent. The year 1999 was decisive for the future of the internet; not only it can be argued that it signified the birth of cyberactivism by providing global attention to political protests in North and South America, but it is also the year of the climax of dot-com bubble, when online companies emerged and existing companies rushed to switch their online presences. There are various concerns about the corrosion of online public spaces by the pervasiveness of consumerist narratives on the internet. Similarly there are concerns about the potential pressure or appropriation of alternative political voices by their sources of finance. Therefore, there is also a potential economic rationalisation of internet politics in the case of coffee activism. In other words, perhaps the marketopoly has just gone online. The prevalence of neoliberalism is more pervasive than the prevalence of ICTs in the developed world. This should be examined as a parameter in any discussion of political life both online and offline. In this respect, the internet should be regarded as a fluid, customisable and potentially empowering medium, but one which is bound to a series of contextual limitations.

The examination of the case of coffee activism in the UK requires the scrutiny of all these parameters regarding the mediation of political and economic structures, narratives and roles, as well as their embeddedness in overarching frameworks of offline life. Coffee activism has been around for over five decades and manifests a rich offline and online presence. It is characterised by a plethora of types of cyberactivism and is a case where the public meets the private, as "previously perceived private spheres, such as food consumption, become a platform for political

mobilization" (Stolle and Hooghe, 2004: 272). In order to further assess internet politics a theoretical argument is not sufficient. There needs to be reflection upon the analysis of the specific contexts, structures, narratives and their mediation. The methodological approach should therefore accord to the epistemological approach to the internet; discussions on internet politics are bound to a number of binary oppositions which should be explored in the light of the cross-interrogation between their online and offline manifestations. Binary oppositions concern notions of the public and the private, civic and consumer-driven structures and narratives, individual and collective divides. I have been arguing that such distinctions are no longer valid, but that a constant interplay between them is. The following chapter elaborates on the analysis of the methodological approach, process and methods employed to interrogate these concerns in relation to coffee activism.

Chapter 5

Methodology Chapter:

Coffee Activism On and Off/line

5.1 Deconstructing the Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between coffee activism and online political mobilisation and, if so, how is it both facilitated and manifest?
2. What is the relationship between consumerism and activism and how is this manifest online and offline in the case of coffee activism?

These two questions are at the heart of this thesis. In order to examine their implementation in methodological terms, their deconstruction is essential. Firstly, the nature of such questions elucidates the core concerns of this project. This work engages with the intersections of the relationships between the internet and activism, the internet and consumerism, internet activism and political mobilisation, as well as those between political participation and political consumerism. In their turn, these sets of relationships revolve around the threefold of tensions of the internet, politics and markets. A combination of research methods is crucial, because of these complex relationships. The argument for mixed methods is not new (cf. Bryman, 1988; Williams *et al*, 1988). Williams *et al* argue that "although we consider possible research methods for new media as mainly extensions of existing methods, we propose that the new media researcher should ... attempt a triangulation of methods" (1988: 15). Triangulation is a research approach based on the employment of both quantitative and qualitative methods (Bryman, 1988). Hammersley (1996) extends Bryman's (1988) categorisation of combining methods in three different forms: triangulation, facilitation, and complementarity. Triangulation is the most commonly used form of a combination of methods where data from different methods are utilised to corroborate the findings of the analysis. Facilitation is, essentially, the use of

quantitative methods to assist the conduct of qualitative methods or vice versa. Complementarity is the use of quantitative methods to complement qualitative methods or vice versa. There are slight differences between these types of approaches. Deacon *et al* (1998) discuss issues of nomenclature in the literature on the combination of research methods. They argue that (planned or unplanned) triangulation has been used interchangeably with facilitation or complementarity, in order to validate the findings from different stages or points in the analysis in the overall analysis. In this thesis, I use unplanned triangulation in the sense of interrogating different stages of experiential life around the use of the medium for coffee activism. It is unplanned, because I do not use specific methods to question other methods conducted, but because I am interested in the different levels of internet use by the activists, by the spaces utilised, and by the internet users.

Secondly, the internet is not separate from social, economic and political contexts and any research around it should not be limited to the online contexts it facilitates. As I argue in Chapter 4, it is important to assess the internet within wider offline frameworks as it is a socially embedded medium. The epistemological approach to the internet is thus constructed according to this argument. While the nature of the medium is liquid and can reach 'escape velocity' (Dery, 1996), it does not escape the structural definitions of the social and cultural landscapes in which it operates. Therefore, as well as a triangulation of various kinds of qualitative and quantitative methods, a combination of both online and offline settings is regarded as useful for the empirical design. This thesis thus includes four stages of research and analysis and applies an attempt to coincide the online and the offline:

1. Website analysis of case studies in terms of structures and content.
2. Semi-structured interviews with coffee activists from these case studies.
3. Events observation and short structured interviews in the form of questionnaires with participants.
4. Semi-structured interviews with citizens involved in coffee activism.

A selection of case studies enables the examination of the various strands of coffee activism in the UK (for a definition, see Chapter 1). The endeavour of mending and minding the gap between online and offline phenomena grounds my methodological approach. In this chapter, I consider the debates and issues around 'doing Internet

research' (Jones, 1999), analyse the interpretation of research questions more extensively, delineate a research design, reflect on the sampling process and the data collection, elaborate on the selected methods and provide an epistemological approach to amalgamated online and offline research.

5.2 The Opportunities and Intricacies of Online Qualitative Research

All technologies were once 'new' before becoming 'old' by coming into the mainstream of our lives (Marvin, 1988). However, the constantly elaborating progress of internet-based ICTs has ushered in the development of methodological frameworks. Toulouse argues that "the rapid development of the Internet defies conventional research methodologies" (1998: 6). The argument for the necessity of new methodological approaches to new media is not in itself new (cf. Escobar, 1996; Brügger, 2009). In terms of architecture (websites, online forums, blogs, search engines, internet libraries) and in terms of products (online research software), the internet has presented researchers with a variety of new spaces and tools to examine both the online and offline world. This research is also embracing the argument for new methodologies for the online world, as it takes into consideration the history of coffee activism which has been set offline. There are numerous opportunities for data collection, analysis and recording that have been facilitated by the progress of communication technologies. (cf. Mann and Stewart, 2000; Best and Krueger, 2004). Robins and Webster (1999) point out that the celebration of the multiple advantages of the internet in terms of research opportunities dates back to the 1970s. The medium has impacted the research world by offering both a new setting for exploration and a set of new tools to explore the online and the offline world.

Internet research can be broadly regarded as two-dimensional. One dimension of internet research concerns object-based research of the medium (cf. Schneider and Foot, 2004; Brügger, 2009) while the other concerns internet-aided research (cf. Witte *et al*, 2000). In the first case, the internet is perceived as the object of research which takes place in online environments. In the second case, research utilises internet-based or computer-based tools and software for its conduct. The technological advances of internet tools and software can address all stages of research from data

collection to storage and analysis. This project is mostly concerned with an object-based research approach to the medium, although I have been aided by online software (i.e. Skype[34]) for the conduct of a few interviews. General internet research poses a series of new methodological issues; issues surrounding qualitative approaches to the internet involve the definition of the research setting, the degree of participation and engagement both from the end of the researcher and the community or communities which the research addresses, as well as authenticity in online contexts and validity of online data.

The internet can be regarded as "a research setting par excellence, practically irresistible in its availability" (Jones, 1999: 13). However, locating a tangible geography of this research setting is an elusive task. The notion of geographical specificity in an offline qualitative approach is typically standard. One of the complexities, therefore, of internet research lies in contextualising the online 'field'. The indeterminacy of the notion of locale heavily depends on the epistemological perspective of the research on the medium. Hine (2000) argues that the online field can be explored through two different lenses: as culture, and as cultural artefact. In the first case, the online environment is seen as a dynamic space of cultural negotiation, or as social interaction. In the second case, internet technology is seen as the product of specific cultural goals, or as the succession of culturally produced texts. The latter echoes perspectives on technologies as cultural artefacts (Woolgar, 2002). On the one hand, therefore, the internet is seen as *process* and on the other hand as *product*.

The perception of the internet as process includes the examination of cases such as online forums and other interactive spaces, where the content is, theoretically, constantly negotiated by internet users. The perception of the internet as product relates to the visible structures and 'static texts' which are met online (i.e. online versions of major newspapers) and are the products of culturally specific processes. Websites therefore can be understood and distinguished with regards to their amenity to editing. The idea of online texts as stagnant is contested by arguments which celebrate the developing, fluid and highly interactive nature of new media such as the internet (O'Reilly, 2005). The correlation between Web 2.0 and internet politics was

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[34] Skype (http://www.skype.com) is a peer-to-peer Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) software application developed in 2003 which supports decentralised communications between its users, such as voice and video calls, instant messaging, file transfer and conferencing.

discussed in the previous chapter (Chapter 4). What is of interest here are the dynamics of interactive agency in online environments representations. Figure 5.1 presents the basic schema of websites in the Web 1.0 model. The home page operates

Figure 5. 1: Web 1.0
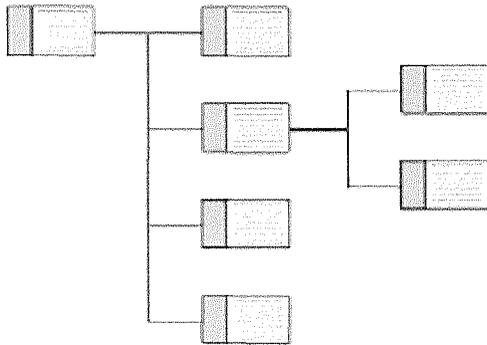
as the starting point which provides an itinerary to navigate the webpages within the site. The majority of the websites online operate under this basic structure. Web 2.0 perceptions, however, argue that rather than products, websites are processes where dialogue replaces dictation (Table 5.1). Hence democratic attributes such as deliberation are seen to dominate over content as inflexible information.

The revolutionary aspect of this approach is the breaking down of the divide between producer and consumer of online content (Bruns, 2006). While Web 1.0 is considered to be empowering to the internet user by offering a prolific environment of information, Web 2.0 is celebrated as empowering to the internet user by offering an environment of deliberation (cf. Gauntlett and Horsley 2004; Scott, 2005; Platon and Deuze, 2003). A key component, therefore, of all Web 2.0 theorisations is the notion of *interactivity*, both bilateral and multilateral. Bilateral interactivity refers to the possibilities of interaction between the website and the user, while multilateral interactivity also refers to the possibilities of interaction between users through the website. High levels of interactivity, hence, tend to be celebrated, as the democratic potential of self-publishing internet media is brought to the fore.

Table 5. 1: Web 1.0 versus Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005)	
Web 1.0	**Web 2.0**
Britannica Online	Wikipedia
websites	blogs
publishing	participation
content management systems	wikis

Table 5.1 portrays certain typical incidents of Web 1.0 vis-à-vis Web 2.0. Neither in Web 2.0 nor in Web 1.0 are websites static texts; websites are typically updated whether that is on a frequent or an infrequent basis. However, this does not imply that they are always liquid, let alone multilaterally interactive. As a starting point, I assume that the majority of websites in coffee activism are at least semi-static. Their analysis also demonstrated that the majority of the websites of the case studies are updated on a non-frequent basis. Therefore, the levels of interactivity in coffee activism are more likely to be quite low and the websites more prone to operating under Web 1.0 structures.

5.3 Reflections on the Sampling Process: A Typology of Coffee Activism

The selection of case studies was a starting point in the development of the research design. The choice of a case study approach was linked to the diversity of groups and organisations engaged in coffee activism. The population of groups and organisations actively involved in coffee activism in the UK includes a wide range of actors such as trade unions, not-for-profit cooperatives, charity organisations, NGOs, (ethical) businesses, associations of shops, churches and religious organisations, student movements, certification and standard setting bodies, as well as national and local campaigns. Determining a specific number of cases to follow through can illuminate the varied and dispersed modes and opportunities for citizens to express themselves in extra-parliamentary politics (Chapter 3). A case study approach grounds the setting of the research subjects and enables the exploration of specific sets of practices online and offline. In this section, I reflect on the sampling process as one that allows for a concise situated analysis.

This project attempts to initially examine the functionality of coffee activism as 'cyberactivism' (Chapter 4) and to interrogate emerging civic and consumer structures and narratives online. A useful way of selecting case studies to conduct research can be by conceptualising a typology of coffee activism which will indicate the essential parameters of selection for the units of analysis. This typology should reflect the digitisation of coffee activism, but such a typology does not exist. There is

only one currently existing typology for the variety of forms of internet activism. Vegh (2003) discerns between three broad categories: awareness/advocacy, organisation/mobilisation and action/reaction. He views these categories as "progressive steps of online activism leading from basic information seeking and distribution to online direct action" (Vegh, 2003: 72). The first type of cyberactivism (*awareness/advocacy*) corresponds to the online wealth of information pertaining to politically progressive activism. Awareness-raising is one of the core areas of activity for the Fairtrade Foundation. In terms of its active relationship with citizens and consumers, it is the only one. The second proposed category (*organisation/mobilisation*) concerns the variety of possible ways in which the internet is used for mobilisation (Chapter 4). The third category (*action/reaction*) refers to direct and tactical uses of the internet such as hacktivism[35]. Hacktivism is not typical of coffee activism, but ethical consumption is (Chapter 3) and can also be described as another tactical use of the internet. This typology can be mined to draw potential case studies.

While Vegh (2003) extensively explores mobilisation, he does not pay much attention to the notion of organisation. Useful parameters for conceptualising the agencies involved in cyberactivism and coffee activism in terms of organisation would be size, scope, and reach. Coffee cyberactivism can be addressed in terms of scale by accounting for agency: *small scale*, referring to citizen/individual activism, *medium scale*: social groups, interest groups/collectives, and *large scale*: social movements/official organisations. This categorisation of cyberactivism relating to social agency can be compared to Charles Tilly's (1994) classification of social movements, where he discerns between communitarian, unspecialised movements, 'ad hoc' community-based and specialised movements, and professional movements. Such a classification further clarifies the process of selecting units of analysis. The selection of case studies is undertaken according to the expressions of cyberactivism as outlined in the above typology. I elect two drivers of the process of selection,

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[35] There are various types of hacktivism ranging from culture jamming to e-mail bombs and Google bombing. Culture jamming is "a media practice [which] directly confronts the authority of corporate representation [and] which takes the form of certain words and images and their meanings circulating in the consumer marketplace and in society in general" (Carducci, 2006: 125). An e-mail bomb is a type of internet abuse where there is an attempt to overflow a mailbox or overwhelm the server where the address is hosted by sending huge volumes of e-mail to it. Google bombing is the tampering of Google results through the exploitation of the search engine's predisposition to present the search results in order of links.

which address the requirement for representing the diversity of coffee activists in terms of localities and scales, as well as diversity in terms of types of actors. Diversity in spatial distributions and the nature of groups and organisations produces a sample which characterises all the different manifestations of coffee activism. The first criterion suggests three categories of analysis based on local, national and transnational variations. The second criterion also suggests three analytical categories, which are relevant to the organisational aspect of cyberactivism (small scale, medium scale, large scale). Consequently, in theory, there are nine different categories of cyberactivism which typify these distinctions[36]. In practice, however, these categories are not absolute, separate, and stagnant, but rather collapse into merging categories.

Local and small scale coffee cyberactivism includes small groups or unofficial organisations operating with restricted resources and having a very tight and localised centre of action sharing strong ideological ties. Typical examples are blogs[37], which "emphasize the interpretation and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree" (Kahn and Kellner, 2005: 88). While this category of coffee activism is prolific in the US and includes cases such as Coffee Politics (http://poorfarmer.blogspot.com) and Green L.A. Girl (http://greenlagirl.com), during the sampling process I did not identify any similar cases in the UK However, there are unofficial groups which fall into this category, such as a small anarchist collective which goes by the name of the Active Distribution Network (http://www.activedistribution.org). *Local and medium scale cyberactivism* concerns activist groups and organisations dealing with local issues, such as the Reading International Solidarity Centre (http://www.risc.org.uk). *Local and large scale cyberactivism* includes movements in the form of clusters of organisations dealing with local issues. This is probably a category which validates the hypothesis that the nine different aforementioned categories are only theoretically useful, as examples are extremely rare, if in existence at all.

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[36] These would be 1) local and small scale, 2) local and medium scale, 3) local and large scale, 4) national and small scale, 5) national and medium scale, 6) national and large scale, 7) transnational and small scale, 8) transnational and medium scale, and 9) transnational and large scale cyberactivism.

[37] Blogging bypasses traditional media structures and allows for the potentially free distribution of voices and opinions, while allowing individuals to assume an active, and occasionally political, role. The phenomenon has assumed escalating popularity, as a highly interactive form of internet media. Technocrati report over 63 million blogs (http://technocrati.com/about, as of 25 Apr 2009).

National and small scale coffee cyberactivism refers to an analytical category which includes individual/community activism which addresses a national audience. Examples for this case are rare, although it can be argued that small trading groups, though based locally have a national span, as they ship products around the UK Therefore, the Active Distribution Network might also belong in this category. *National and medium scale coffee cyberactivism* refers to official organisations or groups carrying out action both online and offline and claim national reach. This is perhaps the richest category of coffee activism. The Fairtrade Foundation (http://www.fairtrade.org.uk) is an indicative case here. Other cases include the Christian trading company and development charity Traidcraft (http://www.traidcraft.co.uk), the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (http://www.cafod.org.uk), as well as the co-operative business Equal Exchange (http://www.equalexchange.co.uk) and the campaigning organisation World Development Movement (http://www.wdm.org.uk) which campaigns for trade justice among other issues, such as anti-poverty and climate justice. The common denominator across these cases is their national basis and presence as official types of organisations unlike local communitarian activist groups or large clusters of organisations. *National and large scale cyberactivism* refers to the latter, which includes nationally organised umbrella networks of organisations. Examples here include the Trade Justice Movement (http://www.tjm.org.uk), the British Association for Fair Trade Shops (BAFTS) (http://www.bafts.co.uk), and the People and Planet network (http://peopleandplanet.org).

Transnational and small scale coffee cyberactivism comprises of a variety of unofficial types of activism such as political blogging aiming for transnational reach and addressing transnational issues. Again the North American context offers more examples, such as the two MySpace profiles maintained by 'Fat Pat': http://www.myspace.com/sexualterrorist and http://www.myspace.com/fairganic, but there are no relevant identifiable cases in the United Kingdom during the time of the sampling. The category of *transnational and medium scale cyberactivism* incorporates social movement organisations with transnational reach and an issue-base. Such an example is Oxfam's Make Trade Fair transnational campaign (http://www.maketradefair.com). Finally, the category of *transnational and large scale cyberactivism* refers to alliances, larger groupings of activism, and clusters of organisations brought together under one umbrella campaign or movement, such as

the established fair trade network FINE[38] and each of the four organisations of which it is comprised.

This classification illustrates that certain categories include more cases than others. The least inclusive categories were local and large scale, national and small scale, and transnational and small scale cyberactivism. This is unsurprising considering that local level activism is typically primarily concerned with local contexts. The presence of an umbrella network would be an overtly excessive effort, unless the specific local context provided the basis of a global issue. Similarly, national or transnational levels of activism would seek to engage citizens through equivalently larger levels of organisation. This persistence in the structural technicalities surrounding agency in coffee activism is part of the meticulous process of delineating influence in terms of mobilisation. The nature of the politics of coffee activism, as well as a closer look at the examples of cases discussed above, suggest that this is a predominantly voluntary case of participation. Therefore, literature on the classification of the voluntary sector can be useful in delineating additional characteristics for the organisation and selection of structures relevant to the present research.

Voluntary organisations serve what Breton describes as 'pressure-group function' (1985: 12), which is devoted to policy advocacy or campaigning (Kendall and Knapp, 1995). It is, then, useful to employ some of the criteria that authors attribute to the voluntary sector for purposes of classification, in order to further define and refine the above nine categories. This theoretical 'borrowing' of ideas is justifiable due to the types of campaigning in coffee activism. Salamon and Anheier (1993) identify five basic features of the non-profit sector: size, internal structure, financing, relations with government, and relations with business. The 'size' feature is included in the nine-category distribution in terms of the small/medium/large scale of social actors. However, 'internal structure' and 'financing' are important elements which should be analysed in terms of coffee cyberactivists. They could provide interesting insights into the elaborate structures which support online activism. 'Relations with government' and 'relations with business' are parameters which are

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[38] FINE is an acronym for an transnational fair trade alliance and stands for four organisations whose name is formed by their first letters; these organisations are the Fair Trade Federation (http://www.fairtradefederation.org), the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) (http://www.ifat.org) the Network of European Worldshops (NEWS!) (http://www.worldshops.org) and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA) (http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org)

not directly analysed in this case. However, they are taken into consideration when examining the frames, repertoires and targets of coffee activism in relation to the commodification of a politics of consumerism. Kendall and Knapp (1995, 1996) supplement these features with the sophistication of the notion of membership. This refers to the 'staff' each group or organisation involved in coffee activism includes. They argue that the notion of labour in the voluntary sector must be rethought in terms of its labour characteristics. Therefore, there are questions about the internal structure of online activism regarding the types of members (be they full-time or part-time employed or volunteers) in the establishment of scale as a sampling criterion. These criteria were all taken into account throughout the process of selecting cases studies.

5.4 Case Studies

The research setting is primarily defined by specific case studies (Table 5.2), which have emerged during the sampling process and meet the selection criteria:

Table 5. 2: Case Studies		
Name	**Acronym**	**Website**
Active Distribution Network	ADN	http://www.activedistribution.org
Reading International Solidarity Centre	RISC	http://www.risc.org.uk
Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign	NSC	http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk
Ecocoffee	EC	http://www.ecocoffee.co.uk
Fairtrade Foundation	FTF	http://www.fairtrade.org.uk
Trade Justice Movement	TJM	http://www.tjm.org.uk
European Fair Trade Association	EFTA	http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org

In terms of diversity of localities and scales, the ADN is small and local, the RISC and the EC are medium and local, the NSC and the FTF are medium and national, and the TJM is large and national, while the EFTA is large and transnational. There also

is a range of types of actors covered; the ADN is a small, unofficial, non-profit collective, the RISC is a registered educational charity and a development education centre, the NSC is a registered limited company and charity, the EC is a small business trading unincorporated, the FTF is a registered company and charity, the TJM is an umbrella group of organisations and the EFTA is an 'association of eleven Fair Trade importers in nine European countries'. Table 5.3 offers an overview of the key characteristics of the selected coffee activists. In terms of opportunities for consumption, these cases are also assorted and offer various outlets for online, offline and mail order shopping. The criteria were selected to reflect diversity, as this research attempts to analyse actors and actions included in coffee activism while considering their variations.

There are qualitative and quantitative differences in terms of the background and practices of the case studies. The Active Distribution Network, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign and the Reading International Solidarity Centre are all politically active (though not directly campaigning for coffee activism) groups. In terms of qualitative differences, they differ heavily. In the words of its creator, the ADN is "the anarchist distribution of pretty much all things anarchist", influenced by the punk movement and Do It Yourself (DIY) culture. The NSC is a charity, limited company and permanent campaign linked to and in solidarity with Nicaragua and has a campaigning arm, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group. The RISC is an educational charity whose aim is "to actively support and promote the actions of people across the world working for equality, justice and sustainable development"[39]. All three groups have been around for over two decades, and therefore have a long history of involvement in alternative trade (Table 5.3). EC is an unofficial company, which plans to be trading limited in the near future. The Fairtrade Foundation is "the independent non-profit organisation that licenses use of the Fairtrade Mark on products in the UK in accordance with internationally agreed Fairtrade standards"[40]. The TJM is an umbrella group of over eighty organisations, campaigning for institutional changes in trade patterns, while EFTA is self-defined as an "association of eleven Fair Trade importers in nine European countries"[41].

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[39] http://www.risc.org.uk/about_risc.htm [09 Mar 2008].
[40] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_foundation.aspx [28 Mar 2009].
[41] http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org/efta/ [29 Mar 2009].

There are also multiple differences among the selected coffee activists in terms of internet use. The case studies demonstrate significantly diverse patterns of website content updates. Over the stage of data collection, the website which was updated more frequently was that of the Fairtrade Foundation. During March 2008, the website was radically redesigned quickly moving from a Web 1.0 to a Web 2.0 model. The background and navigation of the website changed completely, but the most drastic change was the building of a 'get involved' page, which was exemplary of directly multi-linear interactivity. Half of the rest of the case studies' websites (ADN, RISC and NSC) had bi-weekly or monthly news updates, while the remaining half (EC, TJM, EFTA) were hardly updated at all. Taking these variations into account, some analytical categories are drawn in order to capture structural and substantive aspects; these include technological sophistication (in terms of interactivity and user accessibility), information provision (in terms of the group/organisation, coffee activism/fair trade, and ethical consumerism), internal organisation and membership and mobilisation calls.

Table 5. 3: Key Features of the Selected Case Studies of Coffee Activist Organisations				
Coffee Activists	**Foundation Year**	**Type of Group/Organisation**	**Main Activity**	**Territory/Scale**
Active Distribution Network (ADN)	mid to late 1980s	small anarchist organisation	trading through the distribution	local/small
Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC)	late 1970s	charity, limited company and permanent solidarity campaign	solidarity campaigning	national/medium
Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC)	early 1980s	development educational centre & charity	awareness-raising & solidarity campaigning	local/medium
Ecocoffee (EC)	2006	unregistered ethical business	commercial service	local/medium
Fairtrade Foundation (FTF)	1992	non-profit organisation which licenses the Fairtrade Mark in the UK	certification, commercial relations and communications, 178 contracts licensing over 1.100 market products	national/medium
Trade Justice Movement (TJM)	1999	umbrella group of organisations campaigning for trade justice	trade justice campaigning	national/large
European Fair Trade Association (EFTA)	1987	association of eleven European fair trade importers	coordination, networking	transnational/large

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5.5 Research Design: The Four Stages of the Project

As indicated in the beginning of the chapter, in this project there are four stages which interrogate the research questions from different perspectives. These include website analysis, events observation, face-to-face survey questionnaires with participants, as well as offline and online interviews with activists and citizens all closely or loosely linked to the case studies outlined above. Firstly, an analysis of the websites of the case studies is undertaken in order to assess the online structures and narratives which form the online life of coffee activism. Secondly, a series of interviews with activists from the case studies is employed. These interviews are predominantly face-to-face and semi-structured, while a few are conducted online due to time and resources restrictions on the part of the researcher. These interviews explore the production side of the online content from the first stage; in other words they are behind-the-scenes rapports with the human agencies involved in coffee cyberactivism. Thirdly, a resemblance of mini-ethnographic multi-situated research is conducted offline in events observation; a participant observation of coffee activism events is also part of this research. This stage consists of a series of trips I took in various spaces where coffee activism was celebrated, promoted and advocated. By physically participating in such events and engaging citizens in short structured interviews, I was able to investigate the link between cyberactivism and offline mobilisation. These events were loosely linked to the case studies. Pragmatically, only two of the eight events which I attended were called for by two case studies. This was due to the lack of events on a frequent basis and a proliferation of events during the Fairtrade Fortnight. During this stage, I also recruited citizens engaged in coffee activism in order to interview them for the final stage. Fourthly, I interviewed citizens interested or immersed in coffee activism inquiring on the nature of their involvement in this particular type of politics. I now delve into outlining the methods used, a justification regarding their selection, as well as the implications of my choices.

i. Stage 1: Website Analysis

The website analysis applied interrogates the online presence of the coffee activists as "narratives can be seen inscribed in the public faces of organizations – in their websites" (Bennett *et al*, 2007: 2). Narrative analysis is not only useful in terms of understanding 'processes that are central to politics and protest' (Polletta, 2006: 21), but also in terms of understanding the differences between groups and organisations involved in a specific type of activism. Narrative analysis has been utilised to examine how networks convey stories for the purposes of organisation (cf. Bennett *et al*, 2007; Pentland and Feldman, 2007). Instead, I propose an analysis of the structural characteristics of the websites in addition to the narratives articulated. While I do not relate narratives to the formation and sustenance of networks, I engage with the narratives which project cyberactivism on a structural and content basis. If the "meaning and usefulness of stories is bound up in context" (Woodstock, 2007: 346) and "narrative is about stories and story structure" (Berger and Quinney, 2005: 4), then the architectural settings of the internet influence the narratives unveiled. Mansell and Silverstone (1996) have also argued that the media have double significance, both as structures and carriers of content. A key standpoint of this research is that object-based internet research can be analysed in terms of Web 1.0. In this sense, online content can be explored from the production side, as well as the consumption side. Such an argument sharply contrasts with theories about the 'newness' of 'new media' (cf. Derry, 1996; Gauntlett and Horsley, 2004; Chadwick and Howard, 2009). An analysis in terms of Web 2.0 would look at the online content as the outcome of user interactions. This does not imply that the internet has not been prolific in terms of new interactive spaces, but that the opportunities for interactivity in the specific research setting (the websites of the selected activists) are taken into consideration. The data show that with the exception of the Fairtrade Foundation there are virtually no multilateral features in the websites; websites thus cannot be perceived as cultural process, but as cultural products.

I perceive online communication as predominantly textual; the internet is understood as the architectural environment of a vast population of websites. I also assume the internet to be a succession of semi-static texts in the form of websites where sustainability is not granted and information is prone to editing. In order to

capture some of the changes of the websites, the period of data gathering for this stage of analysis was six months. This was selected to include two significant periods, during which information was likely to be updated more frequently: Christmas and the Fairtrade Fortnight. The Christmas period is a blatantly marketable period in Western economies and the impact of consumer culture on Christmas has been long noted (cf. Miller, 1993; Nissenbaum, 1997; Basker, 2005; Waldfogel, 2009). An argument against including Christmas could be that as it is one of the 'consumer-driver celebrations' (Schmidt, 1997: 12), the heavy consumer narratives with which it is associated will skew the analysis towards more consumer-narratives in fair trade as well. However, this concern is irrelevant as Fridell (2006) notes a dominant 'decommodification' perspective in the fair trade literature where coffee activism is seen as a challenge to the increasing commodification of goods under global capitalism (cf. Hudson and Hudson, 2003). Therefore, the positioning of fair trade within the commodification and de-commodification debates is also explored (Chapter 7).

The second period covers a fortnight, which typically spans over February and March and has been celebrated by the Fairtrade Foundation since 1997 as the 'Fairtrade Fortnight'[42]. The events taking place during the fortnight are organised by local fair trade grassroots groups with the aim of promoting awareness of fair trade and are advertised in the Foundation's website. Events typically organised throughout the Fairtrade Fortnight include coffee mornings, fair trade breakfasts, church events, school events, bazaars, stalls, sales events, fashion shows, art shows, talks, campaigns, craft fairs and fun days, among others. These events can be explicitly market-type events (i.e. bazaars, stalls, and sales events) or non-explicitly market-type events (i.e. talks, fashion shows, campaigns, and fun days). However, there is almost always a combination of the two, informing participants, while at the same time offering a chance for fair trade purchases. Coffee mornings, talks and church and school events are often accompanied by a stall. Promotion of awareness goes hand in hand with the possibility of its enactment in the form of an ethical purchase. The period of December-May appears more vibrant than the June-November period, during which there are hardly any events directly connected to fair trade. The

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[42] The Fairtrade Fortnight is an annual event where fair and ethical trading values are celebrated with the purposes of awareness-raising and the promotion of fair trade products to the public. The event was initiated by the Fairtrade Foundation (UK) in 1997 and spread in several countries such as Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

complete websites of the case studies were downloaded and processed throughout a period of six months (December 2008-May 2009). During this period, I monitored the websites on an almost daily basis and obtained six different snapshots of the webpages of each website on a monthly basis.

The main themes and architectures, as well as social, economic and political ideologies of the websites were explored through narrative analysis. Traditionally, narrative analysis is perceived as the macroscopic counterpart of qualitative content analysis, although the two are fundamentally different approaches. It is perceived as the analysis of a chronologically outlined story, while the focus is on the sequence of its elements. Narratives usually have a beginning, middle and end (cf. Taylor, 2001), but what really makes a story is direction towards a 'normative conclusion' (Polletta, 2006: 9). A story is richer and moves beyond a simple description, as it provides "an explanation for the events it describes" (Polletta, 2006: 10). Narrative analysis is useful in delineating the common or diverse patterns of communication across cyberactivists. Essentially, it concerns exploring the meaning of stories in order to understand the politics they advocate. At this stage of the research, I was interested in interrogating the structures and content of the internet as a facilitator of coffee activism online. The most fruitful methodological approach for this is narrative analysis. The narratives analysed drew from the profiles of the groups and organisations, as well as the parlance supportive of fair trade and ethical consumerism. An analysis of narratives proved useful in unpacking the political and consumption-related elements and highlighting the tensions between them. The types of mobilisation practices called upon are the focal point, where the 'get involved' sections vary from calls such as purchases to grassroots action. It was also crucial to read between the lines of the stories of coffee activism.

Criticism of this approach springs from the notion of narratives' ambivalence; the assumption that narratives portray truthful representations is often interrogated (cf. Phillips, 1994, 1997). The most important criticism of the method relies in the vagueness of the actual analysis (Baumgartner, 2000). In dealing with such criticisms, I rework this perspective on narrative analysis to accommodate both a structural and content-based analysis of the websites. A structural outlook influenced by such a research project in combination with narrative analysis marries approaches on form and content and seeks to advance a more holistic view of the online environments of coffee activists. By examining both the technological structures, as

well as the narratives involved in the content of these structures, this stage attempts to draw clear conclusions on the present situation of political participation. This stage is, therefore, also concerned with the delineation of the relationship between coffee activism and the internet; the democratic potential of the internet is explored in the coffee activists' online structures.

After delving into the online environments of coffee activists, the analysis is guided by open coding (cf. Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Initially, the basic structures of the websites were examined; these are the menus of the websites in their simplest form. As Lynch and Horton suggest, "the pattern of directories and subdirectories of the site files should mirror the major content divisions and structures" (2009: n.p.n.). The analysis began on the main menu, but expanded to the characteristics of the groups/organisations, such as history, size, internal structure, finances, employment and membership, as well as relations with government, and relations with business. This process led to the discovery of several analytical categories (Appendix A), which were partly informed by the codebook of an European University Institute (EUI) research project conducted around the potential of participatory democracy 'from below' through the new structures of Social Movement Organisations (SMOs)[43]. The analytical categories of the public faces of groups and organisations which have sprung from this process and concern structural characteristics of the websites are: 1) technological sophistication/internet architecture, 2) information provision, 3) internal organisation/membership, 4) mobilisation/calls for action, and 5) ethical consumerism outlets. These categories were not pre-determined, but rather dictated by the data. They correspond to various dimensions of online politics in terms of the technology itself. The category of internet architecture looks at the technological side of political communication and opportunities for participation. A triangulation of a structural and a narrative approach is at play at this stage. The structures and narratives of websites are explored as inextricably linked. They are also interrogated at the production level during interviews with coffee activists in the second stage.

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[43] The 'Codebook for the analysis of websites of social movement organizations' (available online at http://demos.eui.eu/PDFfiles/Instruments/wp2codebook_final.pdf, 21 Apr 2008) is part of the DEMOS (Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of the Society) Project (http://demos.iue.it/), which was funded by the European Commission and focused on six European countries (France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain and Switzerland). This project was undertaken by the European University Institute (EUI) during 2004-2008.

ii.   Stage 2: Interviews with Coffee Activists

The method of semi-structured interviewing was employed in order to enable focused but flexible, conversational but informative, two-way communication between the researcher and the research subjects. For each of the case studies, I contacted individuals from a variety of positions, as well as a few contextual actors involved in coffee activism (October 2008-May 2009). My respondents range from key articulators and personnel involved in decision-making processes, production of online texts to part-time staff and volunteers in the different types of cyberactivism. There were some setbacks in recruiting coffee activists from the specified cases. The initial plan was to conduct approximately thirty in-depth face-to-face interviews. However, I faced basic access issues and it was not possible to carry out offline interviews with all targeted members.   I, therefore, managed to interview three activists from the ADN, which were the only three members of the group; four activists from the NSC, which were also the four main members of the organisation; five members from the RISC, which included all the members involved in trade justice issues; one member from the Fairtrade Foundation (Appendix B). Oral consent was gained before the interviews, but nevertheless these are ensured anonymity during the analysis through the use of pseudonyms.

Unlike structured interviews, where there is a pre-established schedule of questions (the questionnaire), in semi-structured interviews with the use of an interview guide with a set of topics/themes, the researcher and the interviewee can converse freely and elaborate on the intricacies of the issues discussed (Blee and Taylor, 2002: 92). During this stage, I explored 'circumstantial evidence' (Deacon *et al*, 1999: 62) rather than explicit answers. My questions were not in the style of 'interrogative' interviewing, as one of the shortcomings of this method is asking questions in a way that produces specific answers, as "sometimes people give answers they think the interrogator(s) would like to hear" (Deacon *et al*, 1999: 62). While there is specificity in terms of thematic sections of the questions, most of them were adapted to the interview mode and the interviewee. In other words, the interviews I conducted with coffee activists can be described as 'conversations with a purpose' (Lindlof, 1995). Their purpose is to elicit particular pieces of information (cf. Berg, 1998; Blee and Taylor, 2002) without directing the discussion.

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The particular information which I pursued in my conversations with activists concerned their employment of internet spaces and tools. I wanted to discover how new technologies are brought to play in coffee activism, how the history of use of technological means for political ends is shaped, and how the processes of information production occur for online contexts. The interviews evolved around the theoretical frameworks of cyberactivism, as well as the tensions characterising the representation of activism and consumerism from the point of view of coffee activists. The thematic sections according to which my interviews were conducted were building around the nature and action of the group or organisation to which the activist belongs, as well as the role of that person in it, the specific instances of internet use which were deployed, and finally the coffee activism and ethical agendas of the activists. Therefore, this stage functioned as a supplement to the first stage. Scharnhorst *et al* maintain that "web data ... can be combined with an interview based qualitative approach ... to draw boundaries around the unit of analysis" (2006: n.p.n.). Issues in internet research, such as the chaotic nature of the 'field', are thereby addressed.

Qualitative interviewing in a semi-structured form can provide insights on issues regarding the uses of the internet as a political tool of resistance. These interviews were designed to shed light on questions concerning the nature, meaning and implications of online political campaigning content. Their perspectives are of value, particularly due to the path they open up in the investigation of the transformation of the relationship between the internet and activism. Moreover, these interviews allowed the motivations behind the cultural product (i.e. websites) to emerge; I was able to directly question the reasoning for the employment of internet technology and the opinions on its success or failure. The first two stages were explicitly concerned with the structures of cyberactivism and the agencies behind it. The next two stages are concerned with the relationship between cyberactivism and citizens.

iii. Stage 3: Events Observation and Mini-Questionnaires with Participants

During this stage, I was interested in exploring the relationship between internet activism and offline political mobilisation, as well as the nature of that

particular type of mobilisation in coffee activism. I sought to scrutinise the effectiveness of the medium in spreading the fair trade word and engaging people in offline activities, as well as deconstructing the notion of 'participation' through cultural citizenship. The methodological application of this stage operates the multi-situated participant observation of coffee activist events complimented by short standardised interviews in the form of structured interviews with participants. Participant observation of events addressed the consequences of the internet as a tool for mobilisation, and explored the physical settings of ethical consumerism. In this respect, this stage covered what has been traditionally perceived as the audience aspect of the research. What is at play here is the exploration of the recipients and consumers of information and goods, as well as the involvement of activists with consumers and the relationships between them. I was interested in attending events ranging from trade justice protest marches to fair trade mini-markets. This research took place at events which were informed by the web site analysis and the interviews.

The choice of the data selection process has two implications. Firstly, the majority of events during the period December 2007-May 2008 were either Christmas markets or happenings taking place during the Fairtrade Fairground. These types of events were skewed towards consumer-oriented occasions, such as coffee mornings, fair trade breakfasts, church and school organised events, bazaars, stalls, sales, fashion shows, art shows, talks, campaigns, craft fairs and fun days, among others. These can be explicitly market events (bazaars, stalls and sales events) or non-explicitly market events (talks, fashion shows, campaigns and fun days). However, there is almost always the opportunity of exercising ethical consumerism in these gatherings; often even coffee mornings, talks and church and school events are accompanied by one or more stalls. The promotion of awareness goes hand in hand with the opportunity of its enactment in the form of ethical consumption. Secondly, the selection of events for attendance became more complicated than expected, as the majority of them during this period were not so diverse in terms of their balancing civic with consumer elements. During the initial period of fieldwork (October 2008-June 2009), I was able to attend seven events and obtain 129 questionnaires. By this point, I had not found a single trade justice protest event and did not consider the number of questionnaires gathered to be sufficient. In my quest to attend more directly political events, such as protest marches typically organised by the Trade Justice Movement (Chapter 8) and to collect more questionnaires, I attended two additional events in 2009. The final list of

attended occasions is portrayed in Table 5.4, while the total number of questionnaires obtained was 186[44].

Table 5. 4: Events Features			
Event	**Date**	**Location**	**Organisers**
Fairtrade Market & Coffee Morning	23/02/2008	Streatham Baptist Church, Streatham, London	Lewin Fairtrade and Streatham Baptist Church
Fairtrade Fairground 2008	24/02/2008	Coin Street, Southbank, London	Fairtrade Foundation
Fairtrade Coffee Morning	27/02/2008	Green Living Centre, Islington, London	Islington Council
Lecture on Fair Trade: Sustainability & Food Production	27/02/2008	Institute of Education, London	Institute of Education
Fairtrade Market	01/03/2008	Eltham Centre, Eltham, London	Love That Stuff
Screening of 'Coffee-take it fairly' & talk by coffee producer from Nicaragua	10/03/2008	Conway Hall, Holborn, London	Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign
Fairtrade Fairground 2009	24/02/2009	Coin Street, Southbank, London	Fairtrade Foundation
Fairtrade Supporters Conference 2009	10/10/2009	King's College, Waterloo, London	Fairtrade Foundation

The evident lack of directly political events in my data should not deter the validity of my fieldwork, as it is typically argued that the practice of ethical consumption resembles a form of political participation (Chapter 3). Hence, the relationship

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[44] Out of the total 186 questionnaires, 60 were obtained from the Fairtrade Fairground 2008, 37 from the Fairtrade Fairground 2009, 21 from the Love that Stuff Market, 20 from the Fairtrade Supporters Conference, 16 from the Institute of Education event, 12 from the Islington council event, 11 from the Lewin Fairtrade event, and 9 from the NSC event.

between political and market-based events is not distinct, but rather entwined, in the case of coffee activism.

This method presented a useful way of approaching big audiences in offline settings and contextualising the nature of the events, while also gaining a demographic snapshot of the participants and their degree of participation in cyberactivism. By becoming a participant of these events, I was able to relate to the spaces, discussions and activities taking place, as well as the organisers and their agendas. My participation and experience was naturally subjective. Moreover, it involved a process of constant questioning of the scale of the movement, the individual personalised experiences of participation, as well as coffee activism's role in meaningful civic engagement. Even the similarities between the events attended raised questions of representation. The assumption for instance that what happens in a certain place also happens in a similar place with the same pattern, frequency and scope cannot be made; an event organised by the Streatham Baptist Church might not be identical in terms of turnout, activities and sustainability with an event organised by the All Saints' Church in New Eltham. This research project does not imply that the case studies are explicitly representative of similar cases over the United Kingdom, but rather that they project several types of events. A categorisation of the events attended can be drawn by their setting: these occurred in community settings (Fairtrade markets, coffee mornings with speakers and discussion), church settings (Fairtrade markets and coffee mornings), public settings (Fairtrade Fairground 2008 and 2009), and organisational or university setting (formal speaker events). The first objective of this method was to directly interrogate the effectiveness of the internet as a tool for political mobilisation. This question was indirectly coded in the interviews with coffee activists (*mobilisers*), when they were asked to explain the targets of their internet use. The same question was directly coded in the questionnaires with events participants (*mobilised*).

The structured interviews, which I conducted, covered a series of brief questions concerning the source of information on the event attended, as well as personal internet use (Appendix C). The short length of the questionnaires presented an advantage in approaching research subjects and attaining their answers. These questionnaires consist of basic demographic questions (age, sex, education), seven multiple choice questions concerning the nature of their participation and internet use, as well as one question regarding ranking of participants' internet activities in order of

frequency. The questions were straightforward, and did not interrogate sensitive issues such as work status or income. Especially with regards to the latter, this was another advantage for easily involving the participants in the research process, as a few of them initially stated that they would not fill in a questionnaire which enquires into economic status. If I had asked about the income variable, I would have been able to add to the debates around the correlation of middle-high income with fair trade consumption (cf. Basu, 2001; Frank, 2003) and fair trade consumption as luxury consumption (cf. Waridel, 2002; Soper, 2007). However, as I discuss in Chapter 6, the mainstreaming of the movement has impacted a popular understanding of fair trade goods as similar to others in terms of cost. Additionally, ethical consumerism has been predominantly connected to the parameter education rather than income (Goul Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004; Follesdal, 2004), thus suggesting that informed consumers, rather than wealthy consumers, are more likely to behave ethically in the marketplace. Moreover, in this case, I was more interested in the correlation between internet politics and political mobilisation. During this stage, I was able to get a sense of the civic interest in coffee activism by attending events which were different, as they were similar. They were different because of their setting, their operations and their vernacular, but they were also similar because of their fundamental subscription to the fair trade market and movement. A final function of this stage was to target possible participants for the next stage of the research.

iv. Stage 4: Interviews with Ethically Consuming Citizens

The final stage of analysis seeks to interrogate coffee activism at the civic level. The previous stages cover issues of activists' organisation, practices and directions, the mediation of information and action, as well as the enactment of engagement in fair trade events. During this stage, I wanted to address the nature of the engagement of citizens in coffee activism by directly interrogating them about their backgrounds, political affiliations, and habits and perceptions of political consumerism. Interviews with ethically consuming citizens were semi-structured so as to "allow space for interviews to describe in their own terms where they look for media resources to meet their needs as participants in that wider space" (Couldry, 2001: 10). Here, I was interested in what Couldry elsewhere calls 'the complexity of

action and talk' (2000: 62); for the author, 'action' refers to the literal consumption patterns and interpretations of such patterns, while 'talk' refers to people's discourse on their consumption patterns and their reflection on their relationship with broader cultural constructions. Similarly, I explore the constant interrelations between online and offline political consumerism practices and their interpretation in political terms. By listening to personal narratives on the relationships between internet use, political participation and mobilisation, internet use and political consumerism, as well as political participation and political consumerism, I was able to understand citizens' motivations, practices and general involvement in coffee activism.

Before deciding on the format and conduct of this method, a first planned approach was to conduct focus groups in the form of group interviews with citizens sampled from the mini-questionnaires. The aim of this was to cover questions around the consumption patterns of online information and online ethical consumption through group interrogation. In the spirit of triangulation, this appealed to me, because, as Kitzinger and Barbour argue, "even though focus groups are not the most appropriate primary research tool, including some focus groups in a study can be fruitful" (1999: 5). Issues around focus group research concern the recruitment process, the role of the researcher and the relationship between researcher and participants, the influence of the physical setting, as well as ethical issues, such as informed consent, confidentiality and peaceful interaction among the focus group (cf. Baker and Hinton, 1999; Green and Hart, 1999; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999). While focus group research is traditionally used for market research, the basic idea behind it is the exploration of "the ways in which people arrive at social knowledge through interaction with their peers" (Green and Hart, 1999: 21). A series of practical issues, but also the rethinking of the functionality of this method in the research design prevented the conduct of focus groups.

A practical issue was the securing of participation of those who opted for partaking in focus groups. After the initial completion of the fieldwork, forty-two people had agreed to be contacted for further participation in the research. However, the first wave of responses for arrangement of group interviews was fairly negative. Another practical issue concerned the potential grouping of participants. There could have been two ways around this, either by having groups allocated by the researcher or by interviewing pre-existing groups. In the first case, groups could have been categorised in terms of internet consumption. My intention was to appreciate the

consumption of online information and goods by different groups according to their patterns of internet use for coffee activism. One way of organising that would have been by drawing four categories and corresponding groups: non-internet users, light internet users, medium internet users and heavy internet users. In this way, people with common patterns of internet use would be grouped together and the discussion could deal with basic conversational obstacles such as very diverse online experiences. Another way of forming groups could have been to sort them by event attended, as pre-existing groups often present the advantage of overcoming the tension of interacting with strangers. Another reason for such a sampling model is the ease of a common and familiar setting (cf. Baker and Hinton, 1999; Green and Hart, 1999), such as the one at which the event they attended took place. On the one hand, a familiar setting might put participants at ease and allow for better interaction. However, finding a common familiar space for all participants of each focus group presented an intricate process. This would have had to be a venue chosen with the criterion of accessibility rather than familiarity of the setting for the participants, since facilitating physical participation would have been a priority. Ideally, focus groups would take place with both the conditions of accessibility and familiarity of the setting satisfied.

An epistemological issue which deemed personal interviews the most appropriate method at this stage is that focus groups can reflect the social construction of an opinion, which was not the desired outcome of this stage as the other stages were completed. The individual experiences of ethical consumers would prove more interesting at a stage of research when the detailed exploration of the correlation between the internet, activism and consumerism was at play. Therefore, I decided to conduct individual rather than group interviews with about thirty people who I had met during the participant observation of events. The people who had signed up for focus groups were contacted again and my change of approach was explained. After this decision was made, the rest of the mini-questionnaires were modified and the last question became whether the participant would be interested in being interviewed. I then contacted all the interested parties via email offering them a briefing on the research project and the methodology employed; ethical issues of informed consent were therefore covered. Most of the initially interested interviewees responded positively and in a couple of cases I asked them to enquire on their friends' interest in interviews. Between October 2008 and May 2009, I conducted interviews with thirty

citizens, while obtaining oral consent and providing brief information about the project via email (Appendix D). Quotes from these interviews are also presented by the pseudonyms which I chose for participants.

5.6 Mending the Gap between the Online and the Offline

I contend that the sampling, collection or analysis occurring in an online environment have consequences for an offline environment and vice versa. The epistemological claim of this chapter is to highlight the dynamic relationship between such environments through the choices of this research project. The purpose of this chapter is to underline that new media such as the internet have impacted on the ways in which we understand social phenomena, and that the connection between online and offline research must be bridged. There are claims for the 'discontinuity' and 'disembedding' of the new media (Brown and Duguid, 2000); 'discontinuity' suggests that they have had such an impact upon the historical continuity of society to the degree of breakage from historical processes forged upon the world, while 'disembedding' claims that new technologies are disconnected from any social contexts and exist autonomously. Notions of discontinuity and disembedding cannot apply to any perception of cyberactivism because it is the offline contexts of activism which enable social action and the demonstration of meaningful resistance. Another reason, as to why in this case online research is better employed in conjunction with offline research, is because their combination enables a more holistic approach to people's engagement in activism. Even if one is researching hacktivism, which is essentially bound in the terrain of the internet and where it might be possible to solely employ online methods, the need for offline interaction arises. Even hackers and hacktivists are not restricted to online presence; the Chaos Communication Congress, an annually organised meeting initiated in 1984, creates offline networks and interactions for the international hacker community. This suggests the importance of offline interactions, even among the most web-based and web-operating activists.

There is stark opposition to the 'discontinuity' and 'disembedding' theses; Miller and Slater argue that "we need to treat Internet media as continuous with and embedded in other social spaces, that they happen within mundane social structures

and relations that may transform but they cannot escape into a self-enclosed cyberian apartness" (2000: 5). The belief that online communities are embedded in the 'everyday physical world' has continuously been noted (Rheingold, 1993: 26; Sassen, 2004). The best way of making the connection among online and offline contexts and different methodological tools appears to be the examination of the case studies or, as Wilson and Atkinson call them, 'microsociological emphases' (2005: 281) which are more easily explored both online and offline. By focusing on the seven case studies, the field where coffee activism is enacted and consuming citizens, this thesis delineates the relationship between the internet, civic engagement and ethical consumption. In order to do so, I argue that no less than four research approaches are necessary. If there was only the stage of website analysis, a big part of the activists' perspective on internet use would be left out. If there were only the stages of website analysis and interviews, the link with physical mobilisation would not have been feasible. If there were the stages of website analysis, interviews and events observation, the views of engaged citizens would have been omitted. This is why the only way to approach the issues that lie at the heart of this thesis is by triangulation of multiple online and offline methods.

My argument is that the internet is part of the experience of existence and should be explored in parallel to its offline contexts. While websites are usually rich information resources, the story lines behind these resources still need to be delineated. The exploration of the potential of the internet for offline political mobilisation exemplifies this; the groups or organisations running the websites might upload calls for offline actions, but might also devote more time and resources to other types of calls for action such as pamphlets, lists of members' contact details or mailing lists. These selections cannot be found in a website, but through 'interrogation strategies' (Deacon *et al*, 1999: 62) with those very groups and organisations. In the case of explicit website analysis, the information published online is the only type of information available to the researcher. Although website analysis is a very useful tool, employed on its own it would lead to a one-sided analysis. Similarly, an explicit online methodological framework would move toward a rigid and techno-deterministic theory of activism.

5.7 Beyond Desire: The Need for On/Off Line Methodology

Developing research methodologies have a responsibility to keep up with technological advances. In terms of information, organisation and interaction the internet has facilitated both a new setting and a new set of research. I have argued for the need of an offline and online triangulation, as well as a combination of methods. Jones argues that "the connection we truly desire [is] the one between life on-line and its meaning in relationship to life off-line" (1999: 22-23). I would argue that the connection between life online and life offline is not simply one we desire, it is also one we very much need. In this chapter, I have addressed the issues related to doing online qualitative research and outlined a series of methodological and epistemological issues involved in object-based research of the internet. Methodological issues of internet research highlight the intricacy of locating the online field, as the medium is fluid, dynamic and prone to change. The issue of authenticity accompanies all online exchanges. The choices of this research are reflexive to such issues. The case studies primarily set the locus of the research, while the issues explored online are interrogated offline to ensure their authenticity and to account for their embeddedness. There are two epistemological approaches to the internet as an environment; it is seen as process and as product. The first perspective is more evident in Web 2.0 approaches where the medium's 'multi-linear' format is celebrated, while the perspective of the internet as product views websites as yet another type of communication outlet which reflects information as a 'top to bottom' production process.

The research design is developed to deal with the complexity of issues around a certain type of issue-based activism; informative, organisational and mobilisation-related uses of the internet, as well as patterns of ethical consumerism in individuals demonstrating the desire for civic engagement are scrutinised. The research design is comprised of four different stages which address the relevant spaces of actions and the ethical, political and consumer 'talk' of involved organisations and individuals. These include digital narrative analysis, which is the only stage undertaken explicitly online, where the online environments of the activists are explored and issues concerning object-based internet research rise. The other stages include semi-structured interviews with coffee activists, events observation and structured

interviews with participants, as well as semi-structured interviews with ethically consuming citizens. The interview stages are, in some cases, assisted by internet technologies, while the rest of stages though still interrogating the medium, take place in offline environments. Therefore, the need for triangulation of different methods is crucial in addressing the research questions of this project. This research is conducted online, offline, on the street and in the marketplace, in order to analyse the diverse agencies, repertoires, frames and targets of coffee activism.

Chapter 6:

A History of Coffee Activism:

Mainstreaming the Market and Movement

6.1 Narrating the Course of Coffee Activism

This chapter explores the processes through which the fair trade movement and market have been mediated and communicated to the UK public in a way that has placed coffee activism in the mainstream of public life. This chapter widely draws upon data from the case studies and interviews with ethical consumers. This exploration begins peripherally from contextual data on the growth of ethical consumption, which present significant differences between the fair trade market and other types of ethical markets. This observation necessitates the historical exploration of the fair trade movement, which dates back to the 1940s. The movement was later more rigorously advanced by socially motivated agencies in the 1980s, introduced in the mainstream market in the 1990s and permeated by dominant economic players in the 2000s. I trace this history in terms of key dates and cases, which mostly concern the final stage of the history of fair trade in relation to the traditional forces of free trade. At the same time, I engage with citizens' insights on these changes, in an empirically oriented approach to outline the mainstreaming of coffee activism. There have been various approaches dealing with the success of fair trade from marketing (de Pelsmacker *et al*, 2005), business (Nicholls and Opal, 2005), political (Micheletti *et al*, 2004; Stolle *et al*, 2005), and geopolitical (Mansvelt, 2005; Clarke *et al*, 2007), as well as anthropological (Jaffee, 2007; Bacon *et al*, 2008) and sociological perspectives (Sassatelli, 2007; Littler, 2009). The dominant argument across this literature is that participants in the market strand of coffee activism, in other words ethical consumers, remain part of a niche market, as they are already 'converted' political consumers, to which the market and movement speak to (Clarke *et al*, 2007). I argue that this is constantly being challenged by the strategic marketing of the

Fairtrade Foundation and the involvement of large commercial actors, such as supermarkets and multi-national corporations, which seek to address as large an audience as possible.

A revolution in the market has been foretold. The evolution of consumer activism demonstrates that since at least the late 1970s, consumers in the UK have been showing that they are concerned about something more than price (for a brief history of consumer activism, see Chapter 3). Moreover, our understanding of consumer culture is constantly being redefined. The act of consumption has become so sophisticated that a simple trip to the supermarket has become an expedition in a jungle of brands, reminders, hints and connotations of a range of (ethically labelled or not) choices. Supermarkets change their promotions and decorations on an almost weekly basis in accordance with promotional culture (Wernick, 1991) and under the competition pressures of the free market. Consumer citizenship is changing; the 'new consumer' (Lewis and Bridger, 2001) is a sophisticated consumer (Chapter 3). The dilemmas of ethical consumers are outlined, as they unravel through interviews with thirty citizens engaged in coffee activism. Through a variety of data gathered in the case studies including website analysis, and beyond, such as reports from contextual campaigning organisations and interviews with engaged citizens, I analyse the mainstreaming of the fair trade cause as inexorably linked to the growth of political consumerism.

As a starting point of the analysis, I illustrate the changes that fair and solidarity trade initiatives have undergone by reflecting on studies which have been concerned with the sociological consequences of the mainstreaming of coffee activism, as well as my data in order to identify the processes which have pulled coffee activism away from a niche and towards a normalised status. I discuss coffee activism as placed between the 'alternative' and the 'mainstream' through case study material and interviews with activists and citizens. There have been significant changes in terms of agencies, repertoires and targets in coffee activism. Firstly, the agencies of coffee activism have incorporated a diversity of political, but also economic, groups and organisations. Secondly, the repertoires have shifted gradually but dramatically from progressive oppositional, to progressive but less confrontational expressions. Finally, the targets of coffee activism have extensively expanded; coffee activism appears to not address the conscious few, but the conscious many. These changes in the historic landscape of coffee activism are delineated in this chapter.

6.2 A Brief History of Coffee Activism

Coffee activism is the term which I use to discuss the plethora of ethical or political efforts involved in what is more readily known as the fair trade movement. Besides official fair trade initiatives, there is a range of efforts concerned with justice in the chain of global coffee trade (Chapter 1). One might be involved in coffee activism through one's church, by supporting their Sunday stall of Traidcraft goods, or through one's local supermarket, by purchasing that brand of coffee with that blue and green design on a black background that is the Fairtrade Mark. Moreover, one can be more actively engaged by attending regular meetings at a borough campaigning group, a group concerned with bringing fair trade principles and accreditation to the local community or maybe attending a march organised by the Trade Justice Movement or a coffee morning during Fairtrade Fortnight. The fair trade movement has grown its roots in contemporary British society through a variety of organisations and means. More importantly, the majority of consumers across this country can now readily identify the Fairtrade Mark and its basic connotations. For coffee activism in the UK, the battle for the hearts and pockets of the public appears to have drawn to a successful close.

This type of activism has been concerned with the devastating consequences of trade agreements for coffee producing communities. The imposition of free trade rules has heavily impacted these communities in the most negative of ways. The Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) leave coffee growers in Central and Latin America and Africa penniless, starving, suffering and striving for survival (cf. Sick, 1997; Jaffee, 2007; Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Bacon, 2005; Bacon et al, 2008). Suffering here is a term which, as Jaffee contends, "is far from hyperbole" (2007: 45). Similarly, the democratic nature of free trade has been challenged by the coffee crises in 1989 with the fall of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) or in 1999, when the 'C' price of coffee in the stock market falls again. In coffee trade, the fundamental capitalist logic of supply and demand appears to be disparaging for the suppliers. Neoliberal politics has 'freed' the market in such a way that "the richer, stronger economy always wins – particularly in Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), which often remove the poor country's

right to use taxes to protect its own industries and farms from cheap imports"[45]. Even before the first crisis, the inequality characterising global coffee trade has not gone unnoticed. Movements which arose out of despair for the injustices in international trade were the trade justice movement and the fair trade movement. Campaigns and activist groups against the economic injustices of free trade have been directly lobbying transnational, as well as, national institutions to change the rules of international trade. Oxfam has been pressuring the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to end export subsidies by 2013[46]. In January 2009, the Fairtrade Foundation[47] urges citizens to send a template message to Douglas Alexander, Secretary of State for International Development pressurising him to consider the issue of fair trade. Douglas Alexander later appeared at the Fairtrade Supporters Conference in October 2009 and announced a £12 million government investment in the cause[48]. Resistance to neoliberal rules is at the heart of the trade justice movement, which has been increasingly interlinked with the fair trade movement.

Fair trade has become a global movement supporting "over a million small-scale producers and workers [who] are organized in as many as 3,000 grassroots organizations and their umbrella structures [stretch] in over 50 countries in the South" [49]. There are many different stories about the commencement of the movement, but a fairly linear historical narration of its progression can be identified. Nicholls and Opal (2005) discern four waves in the history of fair trade:

1) conception of the idea (1940s)
2) development of Alternative Trade Organisations (ATOs) and involvement of socially motivated groups and individuals (1980s)
3) introduction of fair trade to the mainstream market (1990s), and
4) market entry of traditionally dominant players in fair trade (early 2000s).

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[45] http://www.maketradefair.com/assets/english/mugged.pdf [03 Mar 2009].
[46] http://www.maketradefair.com/en/index.php?file=wto_pr18.htm [20 Mar 2009].
[47] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/news_events_and_urgent_actions/action.aspx [30 Jan 2009].
[48] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/october_2009/uk_government_announces_12_million_investment_for_fairtrade_on_15th_anniversary_of_the_fairtrade_mark.aspx [19 Oct 2009].
[49] http://www.european-fair-trade-association.org/efta [19 Oct 2009].

The first wave represents the conception of the idea of fair trade. It is generally accepted that the idea of fair trade rose in both sides of the Atlantic around the 1940s (Bennett *et al*, 2007; Parker *et al*, 2007). In the post World War Two UK, the fair trade movement was set up by charity organisations, such as one called the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, which is now commonly known as Oxfam[50]. Based on initiatives set up by this organisation, the movement took off in a more organised manner in the 1960s. During this time, handicrafts from producers in the global South to consumers in the global North were bypassing the middle-man and were sold for a fair price, which was considered to be representative of the labour behind them. The second wave represents the growth of this type of effort with the development of ATOs in the 1980s and the availability of fair trade products through printed catalogues, or in World Shops[51]. For instance, Traidcraft was set up in 1979 as a trading company and development charity. The third wave of the history of fair trade concerns the further expansion of the movement by the establishment of the Fairtrade Foundation in 1992[52]. The Foundation was set up by players which had been active since the beginning, such as Oxfam and Traidcraft, alongside like-minded organisations, such as the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), Christian Aid and the World Development Movement (WDM). Two years later, in 1994, the Fairtrade Mark was introduced in the market. The involvement of sympathetic retail businesses is also characteristic of the third wave in the history of fair trade, as well as the development of ethical brands like Percol in 1987 and Cafédirect in 1989. Finally, "solidifying growth in the mainstream has characterized the fourth wave of Fair Trade development" (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 20), evident by the market entry of dominant economic players, such as Starbucks, Sainsbury's, Costa Coffee and Sara Lee. At this stage, supermarkets like Tesco's and Sainsbury's have also developed their own-label fair trade products. Low and Davenport (2005a) argue that linear historiographies of the movement such as this one are not valid, because of the specific national socio-political circumstances. In this case, as I focus on the development of coffee activism in the UK, I understand this historical overview as fitting.

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[50] In the USA, similar types of action began by "Ten Thousand Villages (formerly Self Help Crafts) who began buying needlework from Puerto Rico in 1946, and SERRV who began to trade with poor communities in the South in the late 1940s" (EFTA, 2006).

[51] World Shops are specialised retail outlets concerned with promoting and providing fair trade products.

[52] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_foundation.aspx [20 Aug 2009].

The history of coffee activism has not been without turbulence. During approximately six decades, various political and economic transformations have impacted on the mainstreaming of fair trade from the 'business' of solidarity groups to the business of supermarkets (Chapter 7). However, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that there has been a fundamental shift in the status of the politics of coffee activism. The contemporary success of the fair trade movement in the UK mainstream is undeniable. Awareness of the Fairtrade Mark consumer label is arguably evident in the majority of the adult population; according to a report by the Fairtrade Foundation published in May 2008, 70% of consumers in the UK were aware of the label[53]. Also, to claim that fair trade sales have boomed during the 2000s sounds like an understatement (Tables 6.1 and 6.2). Since the beginning of the late 1990s the perception of fair trade as a niche market has been thoroughly contested by its growth. As demonstrated in Table 6.1, fair trade is among the top four types of ethical consumerism based on its market significance. In addition, its annual growth rate appears to be higher than the rates of the top two types:

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http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/may_2008/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/april_2008/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/april_2008/awareness_of_fairtrade_mark_leaps_to_70.aspx [10 Feb 2009].

Table 6. 1: Growth of Ethical Consumerism in the UK, 1999-2008 (£m) *			
TYPE	1999 **	2008	Annual Growth Rate (%) ***
1. Organic	390	1,986	18.0
2. Vegetarian Products	452	768	5.9
3. Fair Trade	22	635	37.3
4. Free Range Eggs	173	415	9.8
5. Dolphin Friendly Tuna	189	281	4.4
6. Farmers' Markets	131	220	5.8
7. Free Range Poultry	37	174	17.1
8. Sustainable Fish	N/A	128	53.9
9. Freedom Foods	N/A	51	43.7

* Table 6.1 is assembled on the basis of data from the Ethical Consumerism Report 2009.

** The types of ethical consumerism are ranked on the basis of their market value significance (%). Values in parentheses show cell values as percentages of column totals.

*** N/A stands for Not Available.

**** Calculated using the formula: [(ln2008 value-ln1999 value)/number of years] x100.

Fair trade has been moving into the mainstream, with even supermarkets promoting their own labels of ethical products and the concept of a green/ethical lifestyle gaining significant promotion and reach (Chapter 3). In order to examine fair trade's growth trend closely, we need to study the available data for the latest years in more detail. Table 6.2 illustrates the relative market share of each type of ethical consumerism in each year between 2005 and 2008. It also shows the actual growth rates in each period, 2005-2006, 2006-2007 and 2007-2008.

Table 6. 2: Growth of Ethical Consumerism in the UK, 2005-2008 (£m) *							
	YEAR				% CHANGE		
TYPE **	2005	2006	2007	2008	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
1. Organic	1,473 (35.9)	1,737 (36.2)	1,911 (35.8)	1,986 (34.7)	17.9	10.0	3.9
2. Vegetarian	639 (15.6)	664 (13.8)	826 (15.5)	768 (13.4)	3.9	24.4	-7.0
3. Fair Trade	195 (4.8)	285 (5.9)	458 (8.6)	635 (11.9)	46.2	60.7	38.6
4. Free-range Eggs	240 (5.9)	259 (5.4)	314 (5.9)	415 (7.2)	7.9	21.2	32.2
5. Dolphin Friendly Tuna	218 (5.3)	223 (4.6)	237 (4.4)	281 (4.9)	2.3	6.3	18.6
6. Farmers' Markets	210 (5.1)	225 (4.7)	220 (4.1)	220 (3.8)	7.1	-2.2	0
7. Free-range Poultry	100 (2.4)	116 (2.4)	130 (2.4)	174 (3.0)	16.0	12.1	33.8
8. Sustainable Fish	18 (0.4)	55 (1.1)	70 (1.3)	128 (2.2)	205.0	27.3	82.9
9. Freedom Foods	16 (0.4)	17 (0.4)	28 (0.5)	51 (0.9)	6.3	52.1	92.8
TOTAL	3,109 (100.0)	3,581 (100.0)	4,194 (100.0)	4,658 (100.0)	16.9	11.3	7.3

* Table 6.2 is assembled on the basis of data from the Ethical Consumerism Reports for 2007, 2008 and 2009. Values in parentheses show cell values as percentages of column totals.

** The types of ethical consumerism are ranked on the basis of their market value significance (%). Values in parentheses show cell values as percentages of column totals.

As depicted in Table 6.2, compared to the top two types whose upward trend is declining overall, fair trade follows a healthier upward trajectory. Specifically, consumption of organic goods follows a positive, but declining, growth trend. For

vegetarian products, a significant increase is observed in the second period, but in the third period the growth rate is negative. In contrast to all these, fair trade follows an increasing trend in the second period, and while its growth rate goes down in the third period it is still positive with its decline being comparatively lower than that of organic foods. For instance, the drop from 60.7% in 2006-2007 to 38.6 in 2007-2008 is relatively smaller than the corresponding decline of organic foods from 10.0% to 3.9%. The steady increasing course of the fair trade market is evident in these tables. Even during the economic crisis, fair trade sales did not wane as much as organic or vegetarian sales did, as the ethical citizens interviewed expounded unceasing support for the ethics of coffee activism (Chapter 7). The sales of fair trade products such as coffee and bananas are now booming in the mainstream market. In February 2009, the *Financial Times* reported that "retail sales of Fairtrade products, led by bananas and coffee, have risen to a record high of £700m"[54]. Fair trade has notably come into the market and the public mainstream. In the next section, I identify some of the processes which have contributed to this rise.

6.3 Fair Trade for All: Mainstream Coffee Activism

In order to assess the consequences of mainstreaming fair trade for the boundaries of the movement and the notion of citizenship (Chapter 7), it is important to identify the processes which have resulted in its proliferation. I proceed to explore the processes through which its mainstreaming has occurred and how it has been received by ethically consuming citizens. I argue that there are three basic steps in the process of mainstreaming fair trade, which perhaps are broad enough to be able to also be applied to other niche markets or cultures. These steps concern the spatial boundaries of the movement, the integration of intensified branding and marketing as part of the awareness-raising side of fair trade activism, as well as the impacts of the entry of major economic actors in the fair trade landscape. Firstly, the spatial expansion of coffee activism has been a double process, where access is widened on a practical and personal manner. Secondly, the utilisation of the Fairtrade Mark has impacted the acceptance of fair trade as a legitimate and trustworthy commercial

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[54] Wiggins, Jenny (2009) 'Fairtrade goods hit record sales,' *Financial Times*. February 19.

choice. Thirdly and perhaps most significantly, the involvement of large economic actors has irreversibly signified the passage of coffee activism at the storefront of social consciousness. By choosing to unravel the processes of mainstreaming coffee activism, I hope to advance an understanding of the impact of political consumerism on contemporary cultural citizenship. By investigating the processes of mainstreaming coffee activism, the civic and consumer-based advances of the movement can suggest directions of the present state of civic engagement.

Widening access to the fair trade market has been a key process to the popularity of the movement. There are two fundamental steps towards the expansion of the spatial boundaries of the movement; these include practical and moral access aspects. The first concerns the price issue; fair trade goods are typically more expensive than non-fair trade goods, because they have not benefited from large agricultural subsidies, but have entered the market through agricultural liberalization, which of course increases prices at the consumer's end (Stiglitz and Charlton, 2005). Moreover, the Fairtrade premium[55] must be met, hence the visible excess of the price of fair trade goods over other products. According to the lyrics of the 'Fair Trade bananas' song by the Scottish band Paddyrasta[56],

> people talk about equality
> and how the world should be but,
> when it comes to buying a bunch of bananas,
> they won't pay the extra thirty p.

The price debate is the most striking one; the 'extra thirty p' is a virtual price gap in the cost of fair trade bananas over non-fair trade bananas. This is not a negligible barrier of access for consumers. The fluid category of ethical consumers in the UK is regarded as typically including middle-class professionals and 'alternative lifestylers'

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[55] "The Fairtrade premium is a sum of money paid on top of the agreed Fairtrade price for investment in social, environmental or economic development projects, decided upon democratically by producers within the farmers' organisation or by workers on a plantation. The premium is fixed by the FLO Standards Unit in the same way as the minimum price and remains the same, even if the producer is paid more than the minimum price for the product. The premium fund is typically invested in education and healthcare, farm improvements to increase yield and quality, or processing facilities to increase income"
(http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/the_fairtrade_premium.aspx, 22 Feb 2010)
[56] Some Paddyrasta music is available online at: http://www.myspace.com/paddyrasta.

(Frank, 2003; Kennedy, 2004). Therefore, this category traditionally includes people with the resources or high motivation which are essential to actively supporting such a cause. Barnett *et al* also argue that:

> One recurring concern of those promoting ethical consumption is the worry that this set of practices is the reserve of a relatively privileged stratum of highly affluent consumers. This niche comprises those able to spend time, energy, and money to buy organic, drink fair trade, and invest ethically. (2005b: 22)

In order for a niche market to become mainstreamed, it has to be competitive with other markets in terms of cost. This is, therefore, one of the barriers seemingly lifted by mainstreaming. Most of the interviewees (20 out of 30) contested the idea that fair trade goods are beyond the reach of their pockets:

> Fair trade products aren't that expensive, but they get perceived to be expensive and then when you actually look at it they're not. (Susan)

> I think there is misconception about the cost of fair trade goods. I'm convinced that fair trade bananas are no more expensive than other bananas and I'm sure Cafédirect is no more expensive that the sorts of coffees people choose because they enjoy them. (Karen)

Almost all of the citizens interviewed (29 out of 30) consented to the idea that at least basic fair trade products like coffee and bananas are not considerably expensive than non-fair trade products any longer. All of these interviewees also suggested that they do not often engage in 'luxury' fair trade items:

> I guess I know it's really easy to buy fair trade bananas [be]cause in my local supermarket they're all fair trade. But for some things it's more difficult, and for some things that are more of a luxury item the fair trade price might make it even more expensive and then I might think twice about buying it, but then maybe I would just not buy it altogether rather than buying the non-fair trade option. (Joanna)

With the proliferation of fair trade products ranging from basic products (i.e. coffee, tea, bananas, and sugar) to 'luxury' products (i.e. clothing, jewellery, household items, and electronics), there appear to be two strong attitudes among the interviewees. On the one hand, 'luxury' items remain a niche market, due to their superfluous cost. On the other hand, however, as indicated in the previous quotes, on a fundamental level, the practical economic barrier to access to the fair trade market has been contested.

In parallel with the decrease of the cost of fair trade coffee, there has been an increase in outlets for the practice of ethical consumption. The Fairtrade Foundation offers a list of UK retailers categorised by ethically-traded products offered[57]. The internet has also facilitated an environment par excellence for ethical shopping not only because of the mushrooming of ethical online shops, but also because of the relevant consumer information websites, which have also burst into popularity (Berry and McEachern, 2005). However, on the websites of the case studies, online shopping is not so prominent. In terms of availability of ethical products and shopping services, the Active Distribution Network (ADN) and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) supply goods both online and offline, while the Reading International Solidarity Centre (RISC) maintains an offline shop. The ADN catalogue is printed and distributed for mail orders, while its online version was set up in 2000[58]. The NSC sources products from ethically sound companies and mainly sells them through the online Solidarity and Fair Trade Shop distributing them nationally and internationally[59]. The NSC also sells products offline in stalls at events such as trade union conferences and World Fairs, while their online shop was set up in 2004. The RISC is actively involved in creating spaces where ethical consumerism becomes manifest in the World Shop, which opened in 1997; the World Shop is a volunteer-staffed shop which "sells items from around the world that comply with BAFTS[60] guidelines for Fair Trade and Ethical Consumerism"[61] and which is,

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[57] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/products/retail_products/default.aspx [15 Oct 2010].

[58] The catalogue of the Active Distribution Network includes products which can be distributed online and which range from books, magazines music, videos and DVDs to T-shirts, badges, and posters, as well as coffee.

[59] Purchasing choices at the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign's Solidarity and Fair Trade Shop include coffee and chocolate, clothing and jewellery, music and movies, books and stationery, as well as Mexican, Guatemalan and Peruvian goods.

[60] The British Association for Fair Trade Shops (http://www.bafts.org.uk) is an organisation promoting fair trade retailing in Great Britain.

according to Bianca (a RISC shop volunteer) one of the biggest in the UK. Levi and Linton identify the first goal of the fair trade campaign as the provision of "a means by which it is possible and relatively easy for consumers to locate coffee that ensures a living wage to the farmer who grew the beans" (2003: 408).

Another key parameter of the process of widening access to the fair trade movement has been the strategic marketing of morality. Morality has been noted as both a driver of ethical consumption (Littler, 2009) and a cursor for economic development (Jaffee *et al*, 2004). A basic goal of the fair trade strategy is to 'create enough individual consumer demand' (Levi and Linton, 2003: 408). Ethical consumer demand is principally founded on the moral implications of such purchases. Boyle writes that people do not "expect moral purity", but they want to live their lives without "undermining [other] people or [the] planet" (2004: 16). The root of political consumerism is, thus, to be found in the wedding of morality and civic duty in ethical consumer culture:

I think it goes back to individual responsibility and also your individual experience, so I suppose I think any individual has got the responsibility at the very least not to make the world worse. (Claire)

I think a lot of trade in the world is morally corrupt and if we're going to buy food from the supermarket shelves, the fair trade logo at least says [that] somewhere along the line... some good comes out of it... and [that] I'm not personally responsible for the oppression and profiteering. (Patricia)

You're not just buying the product. You're buying something else as well, which could be the moral [dimension]... You're prepared to pay a moral premium that you think 'well actually I prefer knowing that this product is produced through fair-trading and, therefore, I'm prepared to pay that premium because that settles my conscience, so I know I'm doing that rather than buying something which could be the product of exploited labour'. (Nathan)

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[61] The World Shop of the Reading International Solidarity Centre stocks a wide array of products, ranging from household goods, books and magazines, world music and movies to fair trade gifts and world crafts.

This union appears to be functional. All of the interviewees are affectively engaged in coffee activism through the belief in their moral duties which can be exercised in their ethical consumption.

The story of coffee as an ethical product can be characterised as a successful one; Harrison writes that "the roots of its success lie in its focus on traditional commercial values like product quality, branding and marketing" (2005: 63). A second crucial factor in the process of mainstreaming has, therefore, been the success of the Fairtrade Mark. The Fairtrade Mark is the 'registered certification label for products sourced from producers in developing countries'[62]. It operates as both certification label, which clearly signifies the beneficial potentiality of the product carrying it, as well as brand, which people recognise, trust and support. Promoting fair trade products becomes analogous to advertising any other commodity. The proliferation of the presence of the Fairtrade Mark represents an advertisement in the sense that "its text lines up with an *attributed consumer-ego* (the 'you' to which the ad speaks) with a *symbolized commodity*" (Wernick, 1991: 31 [italics in original text]). Wernick (1991) attaches a third step in the process of placing ideology into advertisement which includes the coupling of the use-value with the symbolic value of the commodity. Similarly, in the case of fair trade, the product has value as a commodity, say a coffee we buy and drink, but also becomes infused with psychological value. Littler describes the appeal of ethical consumerism as an "integrated emotional effect through its association with 'a good cause'" (2009: 32). The impact of the utilisation of branding to communicate cause is further analysed in Chapter 7.

The third process which has significantly furthered the mainstreaming of coffee activism has been the most uneasy: that is the relationship between actors who are traditionally thriving on free trade and their gradual involvement with fair trade. This stage has perhaps been the most influential and has resulted in a central but not settled relationship between big businesses and fair trade. In the next section, I draw the trail from the initial conceptualisation of fair trade coffee as 'campaign coffee' to the present normalised state of fair trade coffee, in order to introduce the troubled history between 'business as usual' and the efforts to make business ethical. I also

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http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/the_fairtrade_mark.aspx [01 Mar 2009].

outline the symbolic compromises which have been made in the course of widening access to fair trade, marketing morality to the mainstream and involving big businesses.

6.4 The Trail from Campaign Coffee to Cappuccino Capitalism: Initial Resistance and Symbolic Compromises

For its proponents, the mainstreaming of fair trade has not impacted the movement in any compromising way (Lamb, 2009). However, a small number of critical studies have been devoted to the interrogation of the consequences of mainstreaming fair trade (Low and Davenport, 2005a, 2005b, 2006; Moore *et al*, 2006; Raynolds, 2009). As Low and Davenport argue:

> The pressures for fair trade to substantially increase market access for marginalized producers in the global South has resulted in strategies that move fair trade out of the niche and into mainstream markets and … these forces are reshaping the boundaries of the movement. (2005a: 143)

The transformation of the relationship of the fair trade movement with big businesses has been catalytic to its mainstreaming. According to a report by Oxfam entitled *Mugged: Poverty in Your Coffee Cup*, there was initially heavy opposition to the adoption of even the term 'fair trade', as it implied that all other trade was unfair; "Nestlé went so far as to produce a leaflet countering the Fair Trade claims"[63]. This was then followed by a change of mind in the form of 'if you can't beat them, join them' which resulted in corporations entering the market one at a time. The involvement of supermarkets and businesses which have bought into the fair trade market ranges from minor to major adoption of fair trade standards. For instance, the very company which initially opposed the term 'fair' trade offered a fair trade blend (Nescafe Partners' Blend). This constitutes an example of a company which has known a lot of controversy then assimilating into fair trade by exerting minimum effort in wholly participating in the cause. Further participation could entail

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[63] http://www.maketradefair.com/assets/english/mugged.pdf [03 Mar 2009]

committing to adhere to fair trade standards for other or more products, or promote awareness and campaigning. Moreover, this minimum involvement went hand in hand with a claim that fair trade should be treated as anything other than a niche market:

> Nestlé recognises that Fair Trade is a useful way to raise consciousness about the coffee issue and for individual consumers to express their solidarity with a group of coffee farmers in the developing world. However, if on a broad basis, coffee farmers were paid Fair Trade prices exceeding the market price the result would be to encourage those farmers to increase coffee production, further distorting the imbalance between supply and demand and, therefore, depressing prices for green coffee[64].

It is unquestionable that the Nestlé Company has had a disquieting relationship with fair trade from the beginning and that it does not support its distance from the niche and its proximity to the mainstream.

A different approach came from another controversial company. Howard Schultz, the founding father of the company Starbucks (notorious among the realm of anti-corporatism) visited London in November 26, 2008 to announce that 100% of their espresso-based drinks sold in the United Kingdom and Ireland will become Fairtrade certified by the end of 2009[65]. Prior to this, Starbucks had one space in its menu of 'flowery prose' (Holt, 2005) for Café Estima, a fair trade blend in the liquid form of freshly brewed coffee. Despite the company's strongly branded nature and lifestyle-oriented appeal, a narrative of social conscience has always been advocated by its CEO:

> We [Starbucks] began with the premise that we wanted to build a business that would balance the fragile issues of making a profit and being a benevolent

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[64] http://www.babymilkaction.org/pdfs/nestlecoffee05.pdf [10 Mar 2009].

[65] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/november_2008/starbucks_uk_and_fairtrade_foundation_announce_industry_leading_2.aspx [20 Mar 2009].

employer in a benevolent partner community - in the sense balancing the fragility of capitalism and a social conscience. (Schultz, 2008)[66]

Beyond the affection of the ardent coffee consuming masses and the abhorrence of the – metaphorically speaking – bean-spilling activists, the story of Starbucks might prove an interesting example for understanding the role of corporations in carrying a niche market into the mainstream. The fair trade coffee market was the niche and Starbucks was the mainstream in the 1980s, but this relationship has transformed dramatically since then. Most importantly, it is difficult to classify the fair trade market as a niche anymore. According to the discussion in the previous section, it is apparent that the growth of this market soundly contrasts this.

Nestlé's response to fair trade has not been the typical response of businesses. Demonstrating perhaps not as extensive commitment as Starbucks, most companies have sought to become a part of this market, as its promotion grows and its reception becomes more positive. The other end of the spectrum includes companies such as Tate& Lyle and Starbucks which made the commitment to switch entirely to fair trade at the end of 2008 and 2009 respectively. Cadbury's has committed to tripling its fair trade sales by switching its dairy milk chocolate entirely to fair trade[67]. Supermarkets have also been getting on board; Sainsbury's claims to be the biggest UK retailer of fair trade goods, supplying exclusively fair trade bananas and having its own-label tea and sugar explicitly as fair trade since 2008[68]. Additionally, Marks & Spencer's (M&S) is becoming involved in fair trade by offering increasingly more fair trade products and complying with certain ethical standards by adopting a five-year 'eco' plan in 2007. M&S call this Plan A 'because we believe it's now the only way to do business. There is no Plan B"[69]. Perhaps, then, there is a fifth wave in the development of the fair trade movement, which is characterised by the solidification of traditional players, such as multinational companies and supermarkets. This has resulted in the voicing of the argument that corporations themselves along with shareholders, retailers and consumers have a new social role in

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[66] Excerpt from Howard Schultz's Lecture 'How Starbucks Built a Global Brand' at UCLA Anderson School of Management, September 26, 2008.
[67] http://www.cadbury.com/ourresponsibilities/ethicaltrading/Pages/fairtrade.aspx [01 Mar 2009].
[68]

http://www.sainsburys.co.uk/food/foodandfeatures/our_values_make_us_different/values/fairtrade.htm [22 Feb 2009].
[69] http://plana.marksandspencer.com/about [20 Feb 2009].

global capitalism as agents of justice (cf. O'Neill, 2001; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008) (Chapter 9). This is a big debate around the notion of justice in late capitalism, but for the purposes of my study I interrogate the opportunities for citizens to act as agents of change. The involvement of corporate actors can be attributed to the long-standing campaigns of groups and organisations which have helped establish the movement. An example of this sort is the *Change the Rules* Campaign by Christian Aid in the late 1990s which directly lobbied supermarkets to stock fair trade goods[70].

As a result of successful campaigning, but also promotion, the estimated annual UK retail sales of Fairtrade products reached half a billion pounds[71], thus making any reference to the fair trade market as niche sound outdated. The exponential rise of awareness indicates a major shift of perception about the movement. The notion of awareness, however, here applies to basic understanding of what fair trade stands for. There seem to have been a series of shifts from the initial conceptualisation of fair trade as a movement campaigning for an alternative trade model to its more recent perception as awareness-raising activism. Out of the selected case studies, the Active Distribution Network and the Trade Justice Movement present divergent cases to the rest. The ADN employs its catalogue (an anarchist tool) to distribute coffee from the Zapatistas and has the ring of a more alternative, solidarity-based way of trading goods than the Ethical Superstore or any other online or offline venue for fair trade. The ADN is, therefore, closer to the radical nature of the movement, reminiscent of its alternative character during the 1980s. As a mobiliser of groups and organisations, the TJM enjoys a different status in relation to coffee activism, which is more demonstrative of its contentious side. The rest of the cases cannot be categorised as alternative, therefore presenting virtually no opposition to a neoliberal (in both political and economic terms) agora. It is my contention that in the process of reaching larger audiences certain compromises have been made.

A first approach on potential compromises concerns the politics of the fair trade rhetoric. Before the adoption of the establishment of a consumer label and the macroscopic promotion of coffee activism across the UK, the term 'campaign coffee'

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[70] Christian Aid (1996) *The Global Supermarket: Britain's Biggest Shops and Food from the Third World* and (1999) *Taking Stock: How the Supermarkets stack up on Ethical Trading.*

[71]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/feb_2008/fairtrade_fortnight_launch.aspx [20 Feb 2009].

had been used to market ethically produced coffee during the 1980s[72]. Some interviewees (5 out of 30) were familiar with that first blend of ethically-traded coffee. They particularly remembered it being off-putting even to those who were in accordance with the cause:

> Campaign coffee; that was the first fair trade coffee that came out, wasn't it? It was disgusting. It was like instant mud! It tasted like mud! Don't ask me how I know! (Brian)

The choice to replace the term 'campaign coffee' with its branded as 'fair trade' coffee has been criticised as constituting a symbolic compromise in a narrative which underlined the initial 'radical side of the movement' (Moore *et al*, 2006: 330). This is a compromise nonetheless and it has played a role in neutralising the distinct political vernacular of the picture of the movement in the 1980s. Root argues that on a wider level politics has been driven "into the soft-focus of kitsch" (2007: 70). More alarmingly, Low and Davenport argue that "going mainstream carries with it the danger of appropriation of the more convenient elements of fair trade by the commercial sector... and loss of the more radical edges of fair trade" (2005a: 143). It can thus be argued that the change in the promotional label of a product which was originally traded directly by an ATO (i.e. Equal Exchange) and then traded through a more official organisation (i.e. Fairtrade Foundation) have been altered to correspond to the goals and strategies of each structure. The 'kitsch' political focus of latest narrative depictions of fair trade hints the banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and banal cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2006) of coffee activism. Similarly, the discussion on appropriation of elements of fair trade brings to the fore the extent to which neoliberalism can potentially co-opt resistance by repackaging its narratives (Frank, 2000; Leys, 2003). This discussion is further elaborated in Chapter 7.

Another symbolic compromise evident in the change in the rhetoric of fair trade was the transformation of its original inception as 'alternative trade' to the politically milder term 'fair trade' (Moore *et al*, 2006). Fair trade has been promoted

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[72] Equal Exchange dates 'campaign coffee' back to the late 1970s; "the origins of Equal Exchange stretch back to 1979 when three voluntary workers returned to Edinburgh after working on aid projects in various parts of Africa. Along with a sister organisation in London, Campaign Co-op, they started buying instant coffee from Bukoba on Lake Victoria in Tanzania. As a result, Campaign Coffee was born" (http://www.equalexchange.co.uk/about/index.asp [25 Mar 2009]).

under this very phrase, in an attempt to highlight the positively charged term 'fair'. In this rhetoric, thus, a political narrative is not directly evident in the mainstream promotion of fair trade. This transformation is a result of the compromises directed by mass marketing. While the movement was characterised by the term 'alternative', contemporary discourse in the 1990s brought upon the movement's popular discourse the replacement of this term by the term 'fair'. 'Fair' is certainly a politically milder word than 'alternative' or 'campaign'. This change in the narrative is not total. Rob of the ADN does not classify the coffee he trades as 'fair trade', but 'rebel trade' and highlights that 'it is actually supporting something that is pro-active'. The distinction which he poses between 'rebel' and 'fair' trade concerns the political narrative of the first term, as opposed to the extensively used term 'fair'. This perspective is characteristic of the alternative politics of a strand of coffee activism which was more evident in the 1980s and is more tied with a radical political ideology. This is the type of narrative, however, that has been waning, as the term 'fair trade' is now rationalised across the mainstream marketplace. 'Rebel' trade is contested, as it contests the structures of trade. On the contrary, 'fair' trade does not inject the politicisation of cause into the narrative; it rather emphasises a less contentious form of trade, which exists as a powerful alternative to the mainstream market, but which is gaining impetus as an alternative. It can be argued that 'rebel' trade or 'campaign' coffee were etymologically synonymous to political support to coffee activism, while 'fair' trade or coffee are synchronous to the beat of consumerism with a conscience. The question of whether such transformations have resulted in further and more serious compromises to the core of the movement is not uncommon (Moore *et al*, 2006). Alongside these sceptical approaches, which are concerned with the neutralisation of the political vernacular of fair trade, these changes have impacted on a widened reception of the movement.

While 'campaign coffee' remained a beverage of choice for a few, 'fair trade' coffee reaches a wider caffeine-thirsty audience. The manifestation of this mainstreaming can be informally described in the words of journalist Sarfraz Manzoor as "cappuccino capitalism; it accepts that most of us want nice things and rather than berating us, it suggests that there might be ways in which our consumerism could help others" (quoted in Littler, 2009: 30). It can, therefore, be argued that specific types of ethical consumption can be found in the variety of fair trade coffee blends ranging from americanos to cappuccinos and beyond. In this case,

customer satisfaction and ethical coffee consumption are synonymous. There are seemingly striking differences in product quality between 'campaign' and 'fair trade' coffee. The persistence in emphasising quality over politics has been understood as another symbolic compromise of the process of mainstreaming fair trade (Raynolds, 2009). In terms of product quality, interviewees (5 out of 30) made a stark distinction between 'campaign' and 'fair' coffee:

> When you compare now [campaign coffee and fair trade coffee], I mean the quality of stuff, that's the main thing. We went to an event in London two years ago and they had representatives from one of the big consultancy firms ... and they turned all their canteens (the tea and coffee) to fair trade. But they hadn't just done it overnight, they posed it to the staff and said we're thinking about doing this and they got a lot of resistance 'oh we are used to our Nescafe and Maxwell House and it tastes horrible', because they remembered the earlier version [campaign coffee] and so they did long tastings over a period of time and they found that most people they like fair trade coffee better. So that was it, they won them over that way. Now all their tea and coffee is fair trade. (Brian)

> I think coffee was the thing we found out about first. Was it called campaign coffee? That's what it was called ... and an awful lot of people said it was ghastly. Certainly Cafédirect people enjoy... I mean I'm not a coffee drinker but I've never heard people complain about coffee that's on sale now. (Karen)

Campaign coffee is described as of low quality, but perhaps high politics, whereas the average fair trade coffee today is of high quality, but 'low politics'. By the latter, I mean that the motivations for consumption are not evident and neither is further involvement in the political bowels of the fair trade movement. In this capacity, the shift from niche to mainstream has resulted in the gradual sweeping away from the radical political side of the movement. This is an example of how structural changes of coffee activism have influenced the ways in which people understand and experience fair trade in their daily lives. The infiltration of promotional narratives in coffee activism has further privatised the political narratives of consumerism. In the following chapter, I discuss the wider consequences of these processes (Chapter 7).

6.5 Conclusion: Understanding the Changes in Coffee Activism

Coffee activism has known a variety of alterations in terms of its growth. It originated as a social and trade justice movement offering an alternative model for international trade and transformed into a mix of 'campaigning traders' and 'trading campaigners' (Harrison, 2005; Jaffee, 2007). Then the movement transformed again and embraced the benefits of actors who previously seemed the unlikeliest of bedfellows. The entry of supermarkets and multinational corporations has impacted most in the transformation of the movement and consumer citizenship. The resolve to provide an alternative way of trade has been gradually transformed into the resolve to seek moral justice in the free marketplace. Moreover, it would appear that the combination of product quality and moral attributes is the recipe for the success of coffee activism. The awakening of a moral conscientiousness through the promotion of fair trade goods is also evident in the affective dimension of ethical consumption; Littler (2009) calls this 'cosmopolitan caring' (Chapter 9).

The mainstreaming of fair trade can be regarded as empowering for ethical consumers, but also as restrictive of civic engagement in a marketplace dominated by powerful economic actors. Literature around the consequences of mainstreaming hints to the potential neutralisation of the political nature of coffee activism. The political potential of coffee activism appears to be neutralised through strategic and symbolic compromises. An argument can be articulated for the increasing commodification of citizenship. The repackaging of the main narrative of the definitive terms of coffee activism occurred during its historical turbulence. Coffee activism went from being described as 'alternative' trade to 'fair' trade, a change which consisted of a symbolic compromise of the movement. Terms such as 'campaign coffee' and 'alternative trade' now belong in the history of coffee activism, despite some rare initiatives which adhere to the contestation of free trade through 'rebel trade', such as in the case of the Active Distribution Network. In the meantime, the politically milder term 'fair' has been expansively circulating in newspapers, magazines and even some television advertisements as customer satisfaction reigns over political engagement. In this sense, the question of a product's quality which is related to its consumption is prioritised over the question of the social and ethical

aspects which are related to its production. The success of coffee activism is, therefore, connected to the significant changes in its structures, actors and repertoires in a manner that is more familiar to and more compliant to the mainstream marketplace. The question that remains is whether an alternative way of supporting fair trade still exists; we have to look beyond political consumerism as an alternative way of enacting politics, since the consequences of mainstreaming fair trade will have an impact in favour of the already powerful actors. In the meantime, rhetoric of consumption and market-based action is growing. In the subsequent chapter, I provide an argument for the impact of the transformations of coffee activism on civic engagement and the nature of forms of participation in the politics of the pocket.

Chapter 7

After Mainstreaming:

'C' is for Citizenship or Commodification?

7.1 The Revolution will be Marketised?

In the previous chapter, I outlined the transformations which coffee activism has undergone since its inception. The consequences of such substantial structural transformations of the fair trade movement for citizenship remain to be examined; here I undertake such an examination. As coffee activism has progressed, so has the notion of engagement in it; forms of participation in coffee activism have transformed drastically over time. Throughout the turbulent period outlined in Chapter 6, a major theme of research and concern has focused on the decline of citizenship in the form of the decline of traditional types of participation on both sides of the Atlantic (Chapter 2). Participation in parliamentary politics includes, for example, voting or party membership and in conventional types of extra-parliamentary politics engagement such as marching and lobbying. However, some articulations of new understandings of politics, particularly such as the one offered by Dahlgren (2009), contend that there is more to explore in a picture of declining parliamentary political participation. In other words, there seems to be a diffusion of political life in realms beyond the public space. Whether coffee activism supports arguments for an alternative politics is, in this chapter, interrogated through its relationship with the neoliberal marketplace.

In Chapter 3, I discussed political consumerism as a new form of market choice, which is entrenched in attempts to carry ethics into the marketplace. If this correlation between political consumerism and political participation stands, then the restructuring of the terms of political consumerism affects the restructuring of political participation. My exploration stems from the idea that, if fair trade is succeeding in a neoliberal marketplace, then it is to a certain extent commodified to comply with neoliberal rules and therefore colonised to a certain degree by

neoliberalism. In Chapter 2, I argued that a neoliberal rationale reduces all aspects of life to their economic imagination and enactment. Hence, it is possible to assume that a certain commodification of the very notion of political life is at play; this is explored in this chapter through a variety of historic and structural variables in coffee activism. Data is drawn from the case studies, interviews with coffee activists and citizens involved in coffee activism, as well as the narratives of websites. I argue that the very notion of citizenship is being forged into a palette of acts of civic engagement in a neoliberal framework. Cultural citizenship is, therefore, associated with and restricted by a particular set of economic rights and responsibilities. By reflecting on the consequences of the processes of mainstreaming coffee activism, I draw conclusions for the contemporary nature of consumer citizenship and the tensions involved in acting politically in the marketplace.

7.2 Coffee Activism and Neoliberalism

The roots of the tensions inherent in a politics of consumerism in the case of coffee activism are to be found in the relationship between fair trade and neoliberalism. Fridell (2006) identifies three emerging perspectives in the literature which explores the efforts of the fair trade movement in relation to the effects of neoliberal globalisation on the countries of the global South. Firstly, there is what he terms the *shaped-advantage* perspective which views fair trade as a project "that assists local organizations in developing the capacities and infrastructure required to help offset the negative impact of globalization" (Fridell, 2006: 9). In this sense, coffee activism is seen as a nongovernmental reply to institutional market practices; by addressing a market niche (i.e. ethical consumers), fair trade aspires to poverty alleviation in the coffee-producing global South through developing their 'institutional capacity' to participate in the global market (cf. Blowfield, 1999; Littrell and Dickson, 1999; Renard, 1999; LeClair, 2002; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Stiglitz and Charlton, 2005). Fridell finds this perspective more suitable to describe the overall aims and directions of the fair trade movement. This is where the majority of the literature on fair trade lies. In the specific context in which I discuss neoliberalism, this perspective is not overly pertinent, as it is engaged in the debate of

the usefulness of the movement for its beneficiaries. The second perspective is of more relevance to the impact of the politics of coffee activism in the context of neoliberalism.

Secondly, Fridell discusses the *alternative* perspective, according to which fair trade is "an alternative model of globalization that, in contrast to the neoliberal paradigm, seeks to "include" the sectors that have thus far been "excluded" from the benefits of international trade" (2006: 9). The alternative perspective regards fair trade as a systemic alternative to the neoliberal paradigm (cf. Lappé and Lappé, 2002; Raynolds, 2002; Waridel, 2002; Jaffee *et al*, 2004; Parker *et al*, 2007). In light of this perspective fair trade presents an alternative pathway to neoliberal economic policies. This signifies an alternative and secluded resistance to certain strands of the systemic power of neoliberalism, but not to the capitalist system in general. Therefore, the political goal of the movement remains vague and only can oppose to certain policies, rather than the politics of neoliberalism. I argue that this view was historically evident in the 1980s and to a much lesser degree nowadays. While Heath and Potter (2005) argue that the fair trade movement is not revolutionary, as it does not present a real challenge to free trade, I demonstrate that, in its early stages, coffee activism portrayed more democratic potential than it does today. While coffee activism in the 1980s presented an alternative way of resisting free trade, coffee activism in the 2000s presents another consumer choice in the free marketplace. The increasing correlation of political consumerism as the most prominent form of engagement in coffee activism (Chapter 8) has lead to the enactment of consumer citizenship as bound in the neoliberal marketplace.

Finally, the third perspective identified by Fridell (2006) is the *decommodification* perspective; this suggests that fair trade is a challenge to the commodity commodification thesis (cf. Elson, 2003; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Luttinger and Dicum, 2006; Lyon, 2006). The commodification of goods under capitalism is a Marxist interpretation of the relationship between production and consumption; in this light, the exchange value of products overpowers the use-value of commodities and renders them to their commercial externalities. This perspective claims that, by re-embedding commodities, the fair trade movement illuminates the specific processes of production behind the products. Thereby, coffee activism appears to be freeing consumers from 'mental colonialism' (Waridel, 2002: 23) or 'thought traps' (Lappé and Lappé, 2002: 27–31) which conceal these processes in

capitalism as normal. This is a valid observation. Traditionally, commodification has signified the reduction of economic transactions to material concerns. The reach of commodification is even evident in the history of consumer action (Chapter 3), where until recently consumer concerns were based on product quality and reliability. The sophistication of material transactions has arguably extended beyond the qualities of products to the inequalities of their origin. In this chapter, I further discuss coffee activism as placed between 'commodification' or 'decommodification', in order to address the overarching frameworks of everyday political operations.

7.3 Fair Trade Fetishism? Branding Coffee Activism

The process of branding has been characterised by the affective connection with coffee activism as mediated by the Fairtrade Mark (Chapter 6). This attachment to a brand is often related to notions of the 'good life'; Soper terms the reconciliation of moral action in the form of ethical consumerism with personal fulfilment and 'alternative hedonism' (2004: 115; 2007: 205). The 'good life', however, is seen as disconcerting; over half of the activists interviewed (7 out of 13) expressed concerns over the power of the feel-good factor in ethical consumption.

I think people like to feel that they're visibly doing something. That's a great thing when you buy a product and you think 'yeah, this equals happiness and great joy in another world'... It's like putting on a coat and saying yes, I'm part of this grand crusade to save the world. (Jennifer, NSC)

These days, because everything is so messed up with advertising and lifestyle choices and blah blah blah, whilst there are some qualitative things involved in making those decisions, they become so divorced from any ... actual real choice in people's minds. I think it's more like 'well, I see myself as this kind of person who will buy this kind of thing'. It's almost like buying clothes. (Sean, ADN)

For these activists, the strength of the immediate feeling of 'alternative hedonism', which arises from ethical consumption, allows for the notion of completion of responsibility and does not demand further action. In this sense, the potential of engagement in coffee activism is exhausted to being based and enacted in the market. This is regarded as disconcerting, because they are seen as 'divorcing' sustained attention to the cause beyond the marketplace.

Moreover, fair trade belongs to a branded lifestyle (Bennett, 2004a). The main difference between branding and ethical consumption is that, in the case of branding, non-ethically certified commodities the symbolic value is usually exhausted at the psychological level. On the other hand, in the case of branding ethical consumption, the symbolic value has positive psychological side-effects for the coffee consumer, but also practical implications for the coffee producers. Since September 2008, the design and the use of the Mark have changed in order "to scale up both the impact and size of the Fairtrade market in the UK and create a stronger, harmonised Fairtrade movement internationally"[73]. Before, it used to be a consumer label which was strictly used on products that have been certified as fairly traded according to the standards set by the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO). Afterwards, the design was simpler and lighter, and not only found on certified products, but also on all materials produced by the Fairtrade Foundation, so as to promote a homogenous understanding of fair trade as directed by the Foundation. This strategic use of the Mark has resulted in its positive reception by all the different types of ethical consumers, from the converted to the unconverted. The majority of interviewees consumed ethically by the guidance of the Fairtrade Mark, while only a few were willing to overlook the absence of the Mark in cases where they were confident that the product they were buying was in fact fairly traded. While there are other fair trade consumer labels, people are not so positively engaged in other ethical brands discourse. Dorothy asserts characteristically that "just because it has the Rainforest Alliance [label] that doesn't mean that I'll buy it". The Rainforest Alliance has different characteristics than the Fairtrade Mark and its moral aspects, as it concerns the relationship between consumption and the environmental impacts of production, rather than that between consumption and the social or humanitarian impacts of

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[73]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/mark_change.aspx [01 Mar 2009].

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production (for further discussion, see Chapter 8). Branding the fair trade market has been crucial in soliciting solid public support to the movement.

There are two advantages to employing branding as a vehicle for the cause of coffee activism. Firstly, it enhances ease of choice and availability, aiding the widening of access, as outlined in the previous section. Secondly, branding builds relationships of trust between companies, products and consumers. The reception of the Fairtrade Mark has been more than welcoming, as discovered in the all of the interviews with citizens:

> I think [the Fairtrade Mark] has become a very recognisable brand now. ... I think it's very important and it's a clear labelling design. People understand what it means for the most part, and it's easy to see in a shelf in a supermarket or a shop. If you've got four different products of the same type, you can pick out immediately which is the fair trade one. It's an easy decision. (Rachel)

> [Branding] is really important, because I think it just makes it easier for people. Everybody knows that you can make a difference, but it usually takes an effort to make a difference. [The Fairtrade Mark] is a recognised brand and something which can be marketed. It just makes commercial sense really. (Claire)

The success of a brand lies in its acceptance as trustworthy and the simplification of the shopping process. The link between the success of the Fairtrade Mark and the success of the fair trade movement is evident. The Fairtrade Mark is a new type of brand and one which promotes a moral option.

Branding potentially poses risks to the agonistic politics of coffee activism. It might make 'commercial sense', but whether it makes 'political sense' is doubtful. On a first level, this could be the case particularly because the commercial elements of fair trade can anaesthetise its political elements. The commercial success of coffee activism lies in the repackaging of its narratives from more to less contentious ones (Chapter 6). By adopting and adapting ethical narratives, businesses can claim legitimacy from the authenticity of a cause (Boyle, 2003). Moreover, branding is a strategic tool of capitalism. Its implicit role is to mediate the connection between consumers and commodities (Fog *et al*, 2005; Holt, 2006). Brands are devices which

attempt to encapsulate the symbolic and material attributes of a product and the process of its consumption. Anti-consumerist accounts of the conniving tactics of consumer culture have scrutinised its manipulation of branding to elicit the illusion of value, quality, origin, choice, satisfaction and emotion (Lasn, 1999; Frank, 2000; Boyle, 2003; Barber, 2007; Boorman, 2008; Lawson, 2009). In this fashion, branding is able to produce a powerful and convincing hold over consumers. In the case of coffee activism, the commercial power of branding can be regarded as threatening to the political power of the movement.

An example of businesses appropriating the rhetoric of ethics infusing coffee activism relates to the third process of its mainstreaming, which includes the involvement of key economic players. In his discussion of branding potent strategies, Danesi (2006) brings the example of co-branding employed by Starbucks. The technique of co-branding concerns associating a company with something else, in order to draw from its authenticity. The author points out that Starbucks has employed co-branding with various bookstore chains to combine "the connotations of intellectualism (symbolized by books) with coffee consumption" (Danesi, 2006: 95). Similarly, Starbucks has been co-branded with airlines (i.e. EasyJet) and train companies (i.e. Virgin Trains) perhaps in an attempt to combine the leisurely connotations of travel with its coffee culture. Relevance to the co-branding strategy is suggested by a member of staff from Tate and Lyle, who expressed that:

> From the very origins of the company through to the way we've always done business and the way we trade with our partners ... we tick an awful lot of those boxes that people would regard as being ethical, but have never talked about it. Then [we] found we didn't really have permission to talk about it on our own behalf, because people were cynical about big companies. So, I started to look at how a third party endorsement, such as Fairtrade [Foundation] would work for us better. And, once we started to talk to [the] Fairtrade [Foundation], we realised that that was probably the way to go forward, maybe because 'fair trade' is a short-hand for ethical business. People don't really understand everything it represents, but they understand enough for them to be happy about it. So, there's a lot of trust and there is a huge amount of awareness. So, rather than us battling around ourselves trying to persuade people to change their mind

about us, if we could put the Fairtrade Mark on our packs we felt would achieve that much more quickly. (Amanda)

According to this statement drawn from a contextual interview, a direct link between the legitimacy of the Fairtrade Foundation and companies' quest for ethical voicing is made. The Fairtrade Mark is perceived as an indicator of awareness, trust and consumer happiness, thus making it the best label to attract all these attributes to the company. For businesses, ethical branding appears to offer a shortcut to achieving consumer acceptance. Because the Fairtrade Mark has been so widely accepted by the general public, there appears to be no meaningful reason to contest its acceptance or present a new ways of branding and packaging its ethical connotations. By gaining a hold over consumer desire for ethical trading, the label operates as a commanding brand in ascertaining that the product that carries it also carries its ethics.

Branding can function as a guarantee for consumers and businesses satisfaction alike. It could be argued that the extensive embracing of the Fairtrade Mark can reproduce a feeling of the 'good life' (Chapter 6) and in this way absolve the desire for civic engagement beyond ethical consumption (Chapter 9). Moreover, it allows companies to utilise an established label in order to capitalise on its consumer legitimacy. An extension of this perspective on co-branding could produce an argument according to which Starbucks is being co-branded with fair trade in order to draw authenticity from its appraised humanitarian and cosmopolitan sensitivities. In such a case, Starbucks could be cleansed from its contested trade history. As Wild notes:

> Starbucks is the company that many people love to hate: its employment practices (anti-union, pro part-time), its predatory property acquisition, and its heavy-handed defence of its feel-good trade mark have all exposed the iron corporate fist beneath the Peruvian yak-wool glove. Perhaps, more than anything, it is the company whose lead product lays bare the ever-widening gap between the First and the Third World. (2005: 281)

Investing in a moral cause can potentially purify previous corporate controversies. However, despite the motives of companies becoming involved in fair trade, the entry of traditional dominant economic actors in the fair trade market has undoubtedly

impacted on its size and scope (Low and Davenport, 2005a). However, besides highly controversial companies (i.e. Nestlé), where there are mixed feelings (Section 7.4), converted and unconverted consumers alike welcomed changes such as the introduction of fair trade products in supermarkets wholeheartedly. If branding creates a relationship of trust between companies and consumers (cf. Nicholls and Opal, 2005), then the fact that companies are embracing fair trade is making consumers more likely to shop ethically.

In terms of resistance, the risks in employing branding to carry the message of the movement are based on the argument that branding strategies belong to the toolkit of capitalism. Holt argues that "branding is a core activity of capitalism, so must be included in any serious attempt to understand contemporary society and politics" (2006: 300). This strongly clashes with alternative perceptions of the fair trade movement and invokes questions around what could be discussed as 'fair trade fetishism'. Fridell (2006) makes the point that the majority of literature on fair trade, while not directly asserting this, are arguing that fair trade challenges the 'fetishism of commodities' (Marx, 1978: 319-329). The idea of commodity fetishism suggests that things can only be understood in terms of their exchange value, rather than their actual use value. In extent, even the social relations among people are founded on the material value of commodity exchange that goes on between them. Commodity fetishism is directly pertinent to the orthodoxy of economism, which entails the negation of relationships between people as well as the relationships of things between them (Chapter 2). According to Taussig, commodity fetishism "denotes the attribution of life, autonomy, power, and even dominance to otherwise inanimate objects and presupposes the draining of these qualities from the human actors who bestow the attribution" (1980: 31). The broad consensus on the debates on commodity fetishism is that it heavily ignores – and actually conceals – the socio-economic conditions which have resulted in the production of these commodities (cf. Mulvey, 1996; Wayne, 2003). As outlined above, branding, therefore, can further commodity fetishism, by operating as a synoptic guarantee of commodities quality and origin, and by simplifying consumers' understanding of all the processes which have led any commodity to a supermarket shelf.

On the contrary, mainstream literature on this issue argues that fair trade actually defetishises commodities by uncovering the processes of production and minimising intermediaries between producers and consumers (cf. Waridel, 2002;

Elson, 2003; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Lyon, 2006). This seems a valid argument. However, it is one which only directly interrogates the impact of consumer culture on a previously niche market which 'makes it' to the mainstream. The existence of all the central and peripheral conditions of capitalism in the contemporary ethical marketplace, however, signifies that such an argument is relevant to the fair trade market, but not necessarily the fair trade movement. It could be argued that neoliberal capitalism is, in fact, fetishising the politics of fair trade. Changes in the promotional narratives of coffee activism (Chapter 6), the variant ranges of businesses' commitment to fair trade, the employment of the increasing consumer-driven mobilisation calls (Chapter 8), as well as the constant diminution of political participation (Chapter 9) are reasons to propose that the politics of fair trade are being – to a certain extent – fetishised. In other words, they are becoming more connected to ethical consumption rather than political forms of participation. This strongly challenges literature to date, as I offer an alternative way of understanding the consequences of sustaining attention to the ethical marketplace, but secreting the agonistic, campaigning and resisting attention which could be placed to the politics of justice.

Moreover, the symbolic dominance of commodities can be interrogated peripherally with regards to their 'values' in coffee activism events. Commodity fetishization is also occurring in the fields of coffee activism in an indirect manner. During my attendance at the Fairtrade Fairgrounds in London's South Bank in 2008 and 2009, I was struck by two conditions relevant to the branded nature of the movement: both have to do with the proliferation of commodities relevant to the cause and cloaking the experience of attending these events. Firstly, the presence of brands and their commodities was strong in both events. In 2008, the usual suspects included Cafédirect, Nestlé, Percol, Liberation, Divine Chocolate and the Cooperative (Figure 7.1).

Figure 7. 1: Commodity Presence in the Fairtrade Foundation 2008

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 depict the promotional materials distributed freely at the Fairgrounds. From samples of coffee and tea, chocolate and nuts to pins, badges and fridge magnets, the souvenirs gathered were not the ones you would expect in a political event, but the ones you might expect in a fair or festival (for a further discussion on political festivities, see Chapter 8). These were the first two Fairgrounds organised by the Fairtrade Foundation as events open to the public. Thousands of people of all ages, who walked the Queens Walk by the Thames on the days of the Fairgrounds, came across a series of stalls where samples and products were handed out. Therefore, the explosion of commodities at an event intended to raise awareness of fair trade and engage citizens in an entertaining manner echoes the contemporary British consumer culture, which has been criticised as demonstrating the illness of 'turbo-consumerism' (Lawson, 2009). In other words, the political imagination of coffee activism in these events appears to be encapsulated in the commodities which accompany their experience. Fetishisation, therefore, appears to surround the very – decommodified – fair trade commodities.

Figure 7. 2: Commodity Presence in the Fairtrade Foundation 2009

The second thing that held my attention was the fact that in the same event in 2009, the number of brands had increased drastically. Brand names included most of the participants at the 2008 event, such as Cafédirect, Percol, Divine Chocolate, Liberation and the Cooperative, but also additional actors such as Starbucks, Marks & Spencer's, Burnt Sugar, Waitrose and Clipper. Along with the increase of brands, there was a parallel increase in promotional materials. Apart from the variety of product samples, a voucher for unlimited free Café Estima coffees for the period of one month, courtesy of yours truly Starbucks, a travel card holder, an orange-shaped key ring and a pencil by the Co-op, along with a shoelace from Christian Aid were offered. The apparent increase in material commodities handed out in the Fairgrounds signifies something dissimilar to what the literature on fair trade argues. While there are arguments on the defetishisation of commodities by fair trade, the prominence of promotional materials enables a different argument to emerge; the growth of consumer freebies and such memorabilia suggests a commodified notion of citizenship in the case of coffee activism. This does not imply that the

decommodification perspective (cf. Elson, 2003; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Luttinger and Dicum, 2006; Lyon, 2006) is not valid. Fair trade has significantly illuminated the peripheral contexts of production and trade of commodities, thus challenging their explicitly commercial elements. However, in an attempt to engage a mainstream audience, the fair trade market has become more prone to use avenues and strategies belonging in the mainstream market.

Therefore, it could be argued that 'fair trade fetishism' occurs not directly, in terms of fetishising fair trade products, but indirectly, in terms of fetishising the promotion of fair trade products. In this way, commodity fetishism is apparent in coffee activism, as the products are not understood in terms of their use value for poverty alleviation, but as products enabling 'alternative hedonism' (Soper, 2004, 2007), as discussed above. Hence, ethical consumption can generate a feeling of hedonistic altruism; this concept suggests that the completion of a morally driven act of consumption allows a feeling of economic altruism to emerge (thinking of how coffee farmers deserve the extra cost you are paying for fair trade coffee) along with a feeling of pleasure drawn from this minimal monetary sacrifice. There is such a notion as fair trade fetishism, and it demands attention. This critical outlook on the relationship between commodification and decommodification of fair trade should not completely overrule the transference of politics into everyday arenas such as supermarket aisles. The symbolic compromises of the latest waves of coffee activism (Chapter 6) have allowed a much wider number of people to support and engage to a significant global issue, such as coffee activism.

7.4 Politics in the Supermarket Aisle, Business as Usual? Active Readings of Ethical Consumption

The Fairtrade Mark is now naturalised among the coffee shelves in the majority of UK supermarkets alongside the rest of the consumer labels and brands available in the mainstream marketplaces. These changes in the 'business as usual' model are certainly not overlooked by the consumers. As Claire notes:

The rhetoric of supermarkets has changed considerably. It is rhetoric and it is actually political the way they're using the words, in the [same] way politicians use words to gain support for their projects.

Conversely, ethical consumption is "a slippery, multifaceted and often apparently contradictory subject" (Littler, 2009: 92). As outlined in Chapter 6, this is particularly evident in the case of corporate adoption, where there are different types of demonstration of commitment to fair trade on the behalf of businesses. There are more controversial companies such as Nestlé, which adhere to the fair trade cause to a minimum degree. Then, there are businesses like supermarkets which make several degrees of commitment on their shelves, such as Sainsbury's and M&S, who stock several basic goods explicitly as ethically certified. Finally, there are companies such as Starbucks and Tate and Lyle, which have made that maximum commitment to fair trade. Interviewees (16 out of 30) expressed a variety of concerns with regards to their ethical consumption and the ethical business landscape:

> Big money is involved when the supermarkets come on board. All they can see is pounds. They don't care about anything else as long as they make profit and, if that's for the benefit of people that we're trying to benefit through fair trade, then good! (Patricia)

There is a primary sense of the symbolic 'exploitation' of the fair trade movement by 'big money', which is read cynically, but accepted as beneficiary to the producers of commodities.

Predominantly, however, the gradations of corporate commitment are the source of uncertainty. Citizens declared feeling unable to answer the question 'to boycott or to buycott this company?' This suggests a mild confusion of citizens towards the role of businesses in fair trade. Specifically, there is confusion around positioning oneself with regards to the partial adoption of fair trade; Nestlé is the notorious case in question. For the majority of citizens (28 out of 30), there is at least minor hesitation in celebrating Nestlé's Partner's Blend:

> I tend to not buy many Nestlé products if I can avoid it. Sceptical or not, it seems a very cynical way to say 'well we'll target those consumers, so that we

get the ethical consumers on board', but I think a lot of people if they know anything, even just the tiniest thing about fair trade, I don't think they'd be buying the Nestlé brand. I think, for someone that buys fair trade, I certainly look for a fair trade brand, Cafédirect or something like that. I won't get a big global brand that has a fair trade version. ... I'm sure that some companies think 'there is a whole generation of people or generation that we can make money from'. (Sophie)

Sophie is an ethical consumer who can distinguish between 'a fair trade brand' like Cafédirect and 'a big global brand that has a fair trade version' like Nestlé. Therefore, the minimum adoption of fair trade standards is met with scepticism from ethical consumers. A similar distinction is also made by another interviewee:

Starbucks don't get everything fair trade, but my view is that as long as they are making a start... Obviously it would be wonderful if they did get everything fair trade, but until they make the decision to switch everything, I don't have a problem with them having some of it and I know some people are saying 'well they don't have everything', but they are trying. I don't know a massive amount about the Starbucks brand, but I'm not as adverse to them as I am adverse to Nestlé with the whole ethos of.... Their business's just rubbish really. (Katherine)

It is apparent that citizens are often able to make a clear-cut distinction between the companies that make a minimum and those who make a maximum commitment to fair trade standards. Mixed feelings were also expressed by Wendy, who argued that this kind of distinction is based on demonstration of 'tokenistic' or 'authentic' behaviour:

In my mind, there is a difference between companies like People Tree, that have fair trade at the core of their ethos and it informs everything they do, and Topshop, which stock half a dozen of People Tree items. So, I think there is a distinction that needs to be made between those two types of organisation ... Sometimes it can seem a bit tokenistic, you know, 'we'll do a few things to sort of satisfy the tree-huggers and tap into that market which is growing' ... and

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you do question their overall ethos. I tend to be dismissive of it being such a small effort, just trying to be fashionable.

The idea of authenticity is important, as it informs the choices that consumers come to make. Boyle (2003) argues that there is a quest for authentic and ethical food, as there is for authentic and real life. Fundamentally, there is sensitivity towards the changes in the growth of the fair trade market. Within a period of five decades, the history of the movement has shifted from the stage of corporations being disparate from the niche fair trade market to the present where the interplay of fair and free trade can even be confusing (Chapter 8). Besides confusion, one respondent blamed 'patronising marketing' for the current state of the movement and the lack of involvement with active political campaigning. Claire remembered why she cut her donation to Oxfam:

> The reason I cut my donation to Oxfam is because they sent me this little bracelet thing with this photograph of this family. I felt patronised, really, really patronised. I don't need to know that, if I give £50 or something, I'm going to put a smile on their faces. It's not about that, it's about something bigger for me. There are some aspects of marketing which I personally don't like.

This quote suggests that patronising marketing is recognisable by active readings of the campaigning rhetoric. Similarly, Patricia mentioned an encounter with a person trying to 'sell charity' to her:

> You know these people the charity people that go up and down? You get them particularly in central London, in Tottenham Court Road, they're always there. And I had my fair trade badge on and one of these blokes came up to me, who was trying to sell charity, and he said 'oh you've got a banana badge on'. So, I stood there for a good ten minutes talking to him about fair trade and what it meant and why I wore the badge.

The need for honest and non-patronising rhetoric also relates to the new consumers' quest for authenticity (Lewis and Bridger, 2001; Boyle, 2003). It, therefore, becomes

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obvious that the strategy of co-branding (Danesi, 2006) is not impervious to the scrutiny of citizens. Interviewees actively expressed the sense that companies are attempting to wash their bad reputation clean and draw from the legitimacy of the fair trade movement.

Notwithstanding, the reality is that while citizens are able to comprehend the perplexities of the contemporary ethical marketplace, they are also aware that their daily practices are also bound to these. Littler (2009) interrogates an idea of 'ecologies of green consumption'; this entails the balancing of ethical consumption, minimised consumption and recycling. Everyday engagement assumes many faces in ethical consumption of which fair trade is only one field. The idea of 'ecologies of green consumption' can be expanded to include other markets such the organic market, the locally-produced market, or the environment-friendly market. Ethical consumers do their shopping in a jungle of ethics and are very aware of this:

> Shopping becomes a whole new experience when you look at everything and think is it better to buy fair trade or organic, is it better to buy organic or local? Should we buy that because it's all packaged or should we buy those even though they're exported or non-organic haven't got packaging on it? You just have to weigh everything and take the best decision you can, given what you know and your knowledge and time really. (Patricia)

A significant percentage of interviewees (22 out of 30) mentioned often feeling perplexed in the choices they had to make; the idea of locally produced goods versus fair trade goods, which are traditionally flown from developing countries, is confusing because of the air miles and the domestic economy support issues. The idea of organic versus fair trade goods is also engaging; preferably, consumers would like to support both. All of the interviewees defined themselves as ethical consumers and the majority of them (25 out of 30) were quick to stress how – given the choice between fair trade and organic products – if they could not have both in one product, they would choose fair trade:

> I stopped buying organic vegetables, because they were too expensive, but I still buy fair trade, so it's more that ethical political kind of decision rather than organic [which] is more about you. And I know it's the environment as well,

but, when eating organic, you're thinking more about what it does to your body. (Joanna)

I would go for the fair trade because to me that's more ethical. But there's ethical issues with organic and issues with the environment and things, so I just tend to think about buying fair trade which is going to be organic! (Susan)

There is a certain altruism which resonates with these testimonies. There is a collective sustained effort to support the fair trade market. The recent instability of other ethical markets (Table 6.2 in Chapter 6) is, therefore, recognised by the interviewees. The price difference of fair trade goods has not yet been considered as disruptive enough to the growth of their sales, while the need for 'cosmopolitan caring' (Littler, 2009) survives during and despite the financial crisis.

In order to justify their sustained support to the fair trade market, all of the interviewees emphasised a story with normative moral imperatives. Their standpoints underlined the significance of fair trade as providing a just living to producers in the global South:

People in other parts of the third-world get paid a decent wage for picking tea leaves, growing coffee beans, cocoa beans, staples in other words and making things. (Harriet)

My perspective [on fair trade] is [that it is] more of a moral issue... Just in terms of using all these products that come from a different country particularly, making sure that people producing these products have a right, decent standard of living. (Susan)

These concerns are often tied to religious opinion (Chapter 9). Generally, the interviewed citizens appeared to be positively positioned towards fair trade mostly through their consumption rituals and were keen on expounding support for relevant social justice issues. A few respondents (6 out of 30) made a point that is relevant to perceptions of fair trade not from an ethical, but from a 'sovereign consumer' (Sassatelli, 2007) point of view:

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Businesses are successful because they sell a good product, like, for example I know fair trade coffee. I'll buy it because it's good coffee. As it happens it is fair trade. (Edward)

The sovereign consumer is not influenced by hype in the marketplace, but makes a selection of judicious choices in his/her purchasing decisions. Edward buys fair trade not because of the label, but because of the quality. He is also a sovereign consumer in the sense that he makes claims for the business world, criticising the moments of its success. But, this also applies vice versa; consumers who have incorporated ethical consumption in their daily, weekly or even monthly practices and have supported the companies which were founded on fair trade principles have now more spaces for enacting their ethical consumerism.

The normalisation of fair trade in the mainstream market has been mostly aided by the involvement of key economic actors such as supermarkets and big businesses. In 2008, following the joining of supermarkets, fair trade sales doubled from the previous figure and reached £635m (Table 6.2 in Chapter 6). So, when the financial crisis, which started in the second term of that year, threatened the dominance of business as usual and the arrogance of neoliberalism, it was also assumed that it would affect the fair trade market. This was an instant correlation: as the mainstream market seemed weak, it was only natural that the fair trade market would also seem weak. However, while the percentage growth of fair trade sales in the 2006-2007 fiscal year was 60% which then fell to 38.6% for the 2007-2008 year it was still less dramatic than the 10% to 3.9% annual growth for organic sales in the according years or the negative growth of food and drink boycotts or vegetarian sales (Table 6.2 in Chapter 6). The economic crisis has been rewiring the way concepts such as free trade and capitalism are understood. There is no way of telling whether the increases in fair trade sales are going to keep growing or whether they were a burst of enthusiasm in briefly embracing the alternative. An argument against free trade goes like this:

The fluctuation in commodity prices, combined with the downward pressures of prices exerted by powerful companies on commodity markets, results in starvation wages and does not generate the means for sustainable development

in developing countries, forcing them into debt and poverty. (Parker *et al*, 2007: 91)

With the active involvement of 'powerful companies' on the fair trade market, there are two direct consequences. Firstly, the ubiquity of 'starvation wages' in developing countries is theoretically closer to being avoided, although it would require more than Starbucks, Cadbury's and the usual suspects to make a meaningful change in terms of real development and secondly, capitalist players finds an ally in fair trade and an opportunity to be redeemed from their past through co-branding with it. Arguably, the case could be that – despite the narrative and structural alternations of coffee activism – the mainstreaming of fair trade has first and foremost benefited the dominant economic players.

Therefore, a question posed during the interviews with citizens in early 2009 inquired as to whether the credit crunch had been influencing the way they consumed ethically. Besides two cases, where citizens claimed that fair trade would be the first thing to come off their shopping list, the striking majority of interviewees (27 out of 30) appeared determined that their ethical consumption habits would not be threatened:

> It doesn't influence the way that I consume. ... I wouldn't change negatively my fair trade spending habits. (Wendy)

> I don't think it [the credit crunch] will stop me [from] buying fair trade really. I don't think it will, because I think that, because things are starting to get really expensive generally, even before this credit crunch came along, so you might feel you have to cut back generally. I think that I'd still buy the coffee and tea for example. (Dorothy)

> I haven't really found that it's [the credit crunch has] affected me too much ... like I said [with] fair trade goods ... There's only a difference of maybe twenty, thirty pence and I'm not interested in that when it means so much difference in terms of where the products come from and the quality. (Karen)

Interestingly, this enthusiasm was only demonstrated for 'basic' commodities (coffee, tea and bananas) and not 'luxury' ethical goods. At least in emotional terms, fair trade is dissimilar to any other type of trade in the sense that, as mentioned before, it appeals to consumer morality, hedonism and altruism at the same time. For Luetchford, this is the case because such goods "are especially powerful reminders of our sensory attachment to the world' and therefore comprise 'more obvious vehicles for critical consumption than other goods" (2008: 155). This attachment could also be the result of more exposure around the historic and present conditions of coffee or banana production. Several popular reads such as Anthony Wild's *Black Gold*, Stewart Lee Allen's *The Devil's Cup* and Harriet Lamb's *Fighting the Banana Wars and other Fairtrade Battles* have been dedicated to these products and this cause. Moreover, documentaries such as Nick and Marc Francis's *Black Gold* have reached beyond their niche, unlike documentaries such as Anita Sandhu's *Coffee- take it fairly* which have not been promoted with such intensity.

There is another parameter which renders the marriage of fair trade with big business a commercial success. Fair trade is definitely out there. From children and senior citizens to local groups and large companies, the majority of people now know – and generally support – fair trade. Heather characteristically states:

> The fact that my 87 year old mother who has never really been really green, is like 'just have fair trade!' if you knew my mother you would find [this] very amusing. So, in other words, it's gone from what was this little thing ... to all the multinationals now.

The most important factor which led to this development is the ease of access which the mainstream market can provide. Going out of one's way in order to consume ethically is not the norm for the majority of interviewees. Most of the respondents (20 out of 30) mentioned ease of access as a definitive factor to their ethical consumption patterns.

> I guess I know it's really easy to buy fair trade bananas, [be]cause in my local supermarket they're all fair trade. (Joanna)

The food in the supermarket I will always choose, it's my policy now. But if I'm buying oranges or mango or whatever... it's easy, it's easy for me... I'm not going to walk around with my pineapple all day long, you know? (Abigail)

The emphasis on the effortlessness of ethical consumption in familiar commercial spaces echoes the notion of liquid politics and fleeting participation (Chapter 2). The combination of the Fairtrade Mark with dominant economic players in what seems an ever-widening market is increasingly causing a strong connection between fair trade and recognised brands. Dorothy contends that:

As long as you can trust the Fairtrade Mark, which I think you can still at the moment, I don't think it matters whether it's [from] Sainsbury's or Marks & Spencer's really.

Dorothy makes the connection between fair trade and companies such Sainsbury's and M&S, which have demonstrated a moral public face. Again, while understanding some of the controversies in the market entry of supermarkets into fair trade, none of the interviewees was negatively positioned towards this. This can be understood as the influence of the ease of consumer access, as suggested above. Involving large commercial actors such as supermarkets and multi-national corporations has been invaluable to the process of mainstreaming fair trade and one of the very real consequences of this process has been its market growth. However, a consequence of this ease of ethical consumption might be limiting steps beyond hedonistic altruism. There is an increasingly strong commercialisation of fair trade which is tied to and resulting in the projection of less political but more morally engaging narratives (Chapter 8).

7.5 Conclusion: Fair Trade in a Free (Market) World

This chapter has addressed the consequences of the structural transformations of the fair trade movement. In my analysis of the relationship between the fair trade movement and neoliberalism, I do not adhere to either the shaped-advantage, the

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alternative or the decommodification thesis (Fridell, 2006). The shaped-advantage perspective does not take into consideration the impact of the facilitation of civic engagement through the marketplace in the first world or evaluate the entry of business in the fair trade market. The alternative perspective romanticises the fading politics of resistance in coffee activism which were evident in the 1980s-1990s, but which have been replaced by a different vernacular. Finally, the decommodification perspective appears valid and relevant to the reformed landscape of mainstream coffee activism where even corporations can act as agents of social change. However, this position fails to take into account the increasing peripheral commercialisation to which fair trade is exposed through its promotion and marketing where a latent and indirect form of commodity fetishism takes place. I argue that the empowerment of the ethical consumer has been at the expense of the political or critical consumer. The experience of attending events is surrounded by the presence of branded commodities. The mainstreaming of the sentiment of morality and the cosmopolitan obligation to the distant producing other through an easy form of consumption downplays the political potential of coffee activism.

There has been a reconfiguration of the politics of fair trade particularly since the 1980s. The processes of marketing, branding and capitalising fair trade have impacted on the mainstreaming of coffee activism. The market entry of the dominant economic players is met by enthusiasm due to a boom in ethical sales and awareness, but there are variations to the adoption of fair trade standards and commitments by big businesses ranging from minimum (i.e. Nestlé) to maximum adoption (i.e. Starbucks in the UK). Citizens expressed opinions which suggest that they are severely sentient of the various tendencies and tensions between businesses and coffee activism. Their support was not waning despite the economic crisis, while this sustenance can go beyond convenience. Moreover, while fair trade is sometimes related to the notion of and concerns about 'alternative hedonism', it is also prioritised over other types of ethical consumption, such as the organic market, thus paradoxically demonstrating certain altruism through ethical commercial choices. The dynamics of individualisation are, therefore, part of a simultaneously selfish and selfless citizen. The next chapter explores the role of the internet in communicating coffee activism, in order to engage with the present mediation of the movement and market. The argument on the penetration of neoliberalism is further examined through the stories which coffee activists narrate online and offline.

Chapter 8

Mediating Coffee Activism Online:
Civic and Consumer Structures and Narratives

8.1 Ethical Coffee Stories as Frames

Contemporary stories about coffee attempt to bring out multi-dimensional aesthetic aspects of the beverage through sensual art, advertising, and the interplay between the two. The chains of coffee shops around the high streets of the United Kingdom cover their walls in opulent black and white or vibrantly coloured, traditional or modern pictures or art of coffee beans and coffee drinks. While coffee is promoted in the mainstream market as an experience of the senses, coffee activists have been offering more elaborate frames of the act of consuming coffee. These types of stories centre on the origin, production, and processing of the product, thus touching upon all stages of its trade chain. However, the sensual consumption of coffee is becoming intrinsically linked with ethical consumption (Chapters 3 and 9), which, as I argue in this chapter, is, in its turn, becoming the most common type of civic engagement in coffee activism. The rhetoric of commodity lifestyle, product quality and ethics has permeated the politics of coffee activism (Chapter 7). In this chapter, I analyse the mediation of coffee activism online, as I am concerned with the importance of storytelling in coffee activism and the 'power of a communicating text' (McQuail, 2002). I employ the term digital storytelling to interrogate the shape and substance of political narratives online. An important aspect of storytelling is that it becomes public in various ways. This attribute carries the potential of ameliorating mobilisation practices by widening a common awareness of the cause (cf. Pentland and Feldman, 2007), which can be virally transmitted online. From posters and leaflets to e-mails and forums, narratives are created, printed, attached, forwarded or sought after to a potentially global audience that mediate coffee activism in particular ways.

My analysis demonstrates that the types of websites considered recreate linearity and, thus, do not correspond to perceptions of online content as multi-linear and highly interactive, as well as ubiquitous and instantaneous. This incongruity is argued for throughout this chapter. Internet architecture is questioned directly through the analysis of websites and interviews with activists. I focus on the structures of the technology employed to convey and project information through narratives in order to discuss what Chadwick (2006) calls 'e-mobilization' in the case of coffee activism. E-mobilisation here refers to the use of the internet by coffee activists for purposes of information-spreading, organisation and political recruitment. In this sense, it corresponds with Vegh's (2003) classification of cyberactivism which discerns between information, organisation and mobilisation as the threefold of online activism. A structural textual perspective is therefore important in order to bring the possible operations of civic engagement to life. By widening the analysis as such, I attempt to highlight the power of the communicating structures behind the texts analysed. Content and form are two key words for understanding the research method (website analysis) and the units of analysis (websites) in this chapter. An argument is articulated for the importance of online structures in the expression and interpretation of such narratives. I assert that the form of the content is shaped by the form of the medium and that narratives are influenced by the way they are expressed online. The narrative analysis employed uncovers linear forms of digital storytelling in the majority of the selected websites, in direct contrast with dominant arguments on the fluid and participatory nature of new media (Chapters 4 and 5). Storytelling in alternative politics is based on the need for different people to reach a common understanding about what that politics is (cf. Polletta, 2006). In coffee activism, this has resulted in the creation of certain types of narratives. These revolve around solidarity and social justice, and particularly around development and lifestyle. In this chapter, I explore how online structures carry narratives, what kinds of stories these narratives articulate and why an exploration of online framing is crucial to the understanding of online mobilisation potentialities. This is an attempt to situate politics and ethics, their spaces of appearance and their framing within coffee activism.

8.2 The Unbearable Lightness of Internet Coffee Politics

The argument developed in this chapter concerns the elaborate structures of participation online and how these are imprinted in technological and narrative patterns in the public versions of coffee activists' websites. Chadwick argues that the internet "has spurred changes that allow groups to capitalize on its potential for recruitment, fund-raising, organizational flexibility, and efficiency" (2006: 115). In order to map out uses of the internet by coffee activists, I employ a narrative analysis of websites complemented with interviews with activists. Narrative analysis is wielded here via a two-dimensional approach towards both structures and narratives, while, in the spirit of triangulation, interviews are also utilised (Chapter 5). Therefore, prior to the analysis of the mediation of political communication rhetoric, I explore the structures for information, interaction and participation available in the websites of the case studies. The enquiry into interactivity in political communication is furthered with respect to these websites in relation to the levels of technological sophistication through the existence or absence of certain electronic features or services. Features linked to interactive use of websites include the presence of an internal search engine, a menu/site map, a newsletter or mailing list, as well as an electronic form or forum. These are central to notions of *bilateral and multilateral interactivity* (Chapter 4).

Bilateral interactivity concerns the direct engagement of internet user with the website of a group or organisation. This is made manifest through the provision of at least general or specific email addresses or electronic forms, typically found in the 'contact us' webpage. Such basic contact information was provided in all the case studies. Another general dimension of user-website interaction concerns user friendliness or user accessibility. This includes the presence of an internal search engine or a site map in the websites. Here, other determinants of internet architecture, such as the possibility of adjusting the font of the website, are also considered to be important. User accessibility was taken into account in the development of the websites, at least in basic terms, as they all feature at least a basic menu or a site map. Another important element in the majority of the websites examined was the existence of mailing lists, which might be more frequently put to use in order to inform interested parties of latest news or events. The use of mailing lists is further examined

in Chapter 9. In terms of these provisions, the internet merely offers an additional channel of communications for the variety of activists. The difference, however, between the internet and other media has been its ability to facilitate synchronous or asynchronous interactions between multiple users (cf. Chadwick and Howard, 2009).

Multilateral interactivity concerns the platform-like function of the website. Relevant indicative features include forums, mailing lists or chat-lines. In the websites examined, multilateral interactivity was not facilitated. Only the case of the Fairtrade Foundation's website was exceptional here. In March 2008, the Foundation launched a 2.0 version was launched featuring an 'Interact Online' site[74], which included two forums (discussion groups on Fairtrade Towns and Fairtrade Faiths), three groups in popular social networking websites (YouTube, MySpace, Facebook) and a discussion service on the organisation's vision for the next five years[75]. However, within the first three months of the 2.0 website launch the numbers of participation in online interaction remained quite slim[76]. This updated version of the website resembles contemporary ideas of how the web operates. It is exceptionally rich in micro-structures that aid the journey though the website, from internal to external navigation through links, while it also shows consideration of user accessibility. In this sense, the potential of the website for online engagement in the form of deliberative interaction appears to be broadened.

The parameters of Web 2.0 which include offering multilateral structures for deliberative engagement (cf. O'Reilly, 2005) are not fully realised in the striking majority of the websites examined. After a primary analysis of the themes invoked online, I determined four broad categories which guide the investigation of the dimension of information. The first two relate to general information about the coffee activist and the specific case study's involvement in the field. The first concerned information about the groups and organisations and was typically found in the 'about us' sections of almost all the websites[77]. The second examined type of information

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[74] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/interact_online/default.aspx [18 Apr 2008].
[75] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/tipping_the_balance.aspx [18 Apr 2008].
[76] The Facebook group had 1,751 members, the MySpace profile had 74 friends and the YouTube channel had 17 transcribers. The Fairtrade Towns discussion group had 358 members, while the Fairtrade Faiths group had 23 members. The organisation's vision for the next five year had 19 comments. These numbers were documented on May 4th, 2008, three months after the transformation of the website.
[77] An exception here was Ecocoffee, which did not have a single mention of what the group stands for or when it was founded, as it is new to the field. Following an email discussion with the main person

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about coffee in unofficial (informal narratives) or official form (reports by the organisation or by other organisations) and involvement in coffee activism. Information about coffee activism takes on many shades of official and unofficial sources and forms, accenting the diversity of the field of coffee activists[78]. There are many different standpoints on what coffee activism is, highlighting the tensions discussed in terms of the political rhetoric of the movement (Chapter 6). The official perspective of the Fairtrade Foundation is that:

> The trade debate has been polarised; sometimes this is free versus fair. It's free trade versus fair trade and I see that that's kind of a false dichotomy I think. I think there are dangers in adopting a dogmatic free trade mantra, but there are aspects of free trade which people who have advocated fair trade and trade justice have very much supported. (Olivia, Fairtrade Foundation)

This perspective echoes throughout the rhetoric of the fair trade movement (cf. Lamb, 2009). The fundamental position adopted by the beacon of the movement suggests the fruitful interplay between free and fair trade, echoing the 'shaped-advantage' perspective (Fridell, 2006) (Chapter 7). In a following section, I elaborate on this type of information in terms of the analysis of stories constructed, narrated and transmitted.

The third category explored information concerning the dimension of membership, which includes the frequency of and details on meetings held, as well as information about staff, roles and volunteers. The use of the internet for political recruitment, in the sense of attracting active involvement, is not homogenous among the case studies. Out of the seven case studies, two groups offered citizens the possibility of acquiring membership online, signalling the internet's potential for political recruitment[79]. Two organisations are virtually open for collaboration with

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responsible for the commercial group, I found that at the time of the data collection they were trading unincorporated, but had plans to be trading as Ecocoffee Limited.

[78] The types of information provided indicated a variety of interests and sources ranging from unofficial material, such as Blur's music video 'Coffee and TV' (http://www.ecocoffee.co.uk/id30.html [19 April 2008]) to official documents such as academic articles (i.e. 'The Role of Fair Trade' by Alex Nicholls) (http://www.risc.org.uk/pdf/Role%20of%20FT.pdf. [20 Mar 2008]).

[79] RISC recruits volunteers by advertising this possibility online and NSC offers internet users the option of becoming members online. In terms of membership, the NSC charges a small one-off fee. This fee is different for waged individuals (£25), unwaged individuals (£7.50), households (£25), and

other organisations[80]. The websites of the latter provide relevant detailed information in their websites, thus projecting a more professional attitude towards organisation. In this context, the term 'professional' refers to tendencies to use the internet for internal non-public organisation, while internet use for public communication includes mostly official reports and information regarding the bureaucratic nature of the organisation. There seem to be two levels of interest in participation by activists, which are on an individual level and an organisational level. On the individual level, smaller types of groups encourage civic engagement either online or offline, while on the organisational level larger groups are concerned with engaging in inter-organisational communication and action. This is a typical form of recruitment, but is still restricted to the basic adaptation of the medium for spreading information.

Finally, the fourth category concerns information on ethical consumption (in and between the lines of the websites). Information about ethical consumption was also explored through the opportunities offered in the websites. The presence or absence of either online or offline or by mail order commercial services is targeted in the analysis. Although they do not all directly facilitate ethical consumption, a similarity between the websites examined is that they provide some kind of commercial service[81]. In terms of such services, two groups (ADN and NSC) supply goods both online and offline, one (RISC[82]) maintains an offline shop, while another (Ecocoffee) is itself an online shop. The Active Distribution Network's catalogue is printed and distributed for mail orders[83]. The NSC sources products from ethically sound companies and mainly sells them through the online Solidarity and Fair Trade Shop[84]. Two cases (NSC and EC) therefore use the internet as a standard selling

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trade union branches/labour party branches/student groups (£40). This is one of the NSC's main sources of income.

[80] The Fairtrade Foundation invites organisations to join as licensees of fair trade goods, while the Trade Justice Movement invites organisations to join as members of the movement.

[81] This is not applicable for the TJM and the EFTA due to the nature of the organisations.

[82] The shop of the RISC (http://www.risc.org.uk/worldshop/shopindex.html [09 Mar 2009]) is certified by BAFTS and stocks a wide range of products, from household goods, books and magazines, world music and movies to fair trade gifts and world crafts.

[83] The catalogue of the ADN (http://www.activedistribution.org/index.php?PHPSESSID=d70b5f768ef1ac79d18758ae60842727 [09 Apr 2008]) includes products which can be distributed online and which range from books, magazines music, videos and DVDs to T-shirts, badges, and posters, as well as coffee. The online version of the catalogue dates back to 2000.

[84] Purchasing choices at the NSC's Solidarity and Fair Trade Shop (http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/shop/index.htm [09 Apr 2008]) include coffee and chocolate, clothing and jewellery, music and movies, books and stationery, as well as Mexican, Guatemalan and Peruvian goods. The online shop was set up in 2004 and distributes nationally and internationally.

point, while they also occasionally sell products offline in stalls at events such as trade union conferences, World Fairs and market bazaars. The RISC founded the World Shop in 1997 which is staffed by volunteers and is described by one of them as one of the largest ethical shops in the United Kingdom. The Fairtrade Foundation's 2.0 website offers an electronic promotional materials and other merchandise service, addressing sourcing and campaigning groups which can order promotional material (usually gratis) for events they organise through the website. It also contains merchandise products with the Fairtrade Mark such as mugs and T-shirts. Online ethical consumption is thus facilitated by most websites.

By building a picture of structural frames, I address the practicalities of online navigation in coffee activism, as well as the opportunities for awareness-raising online. Most of the agents involved in coffee activism have not yet entered an interactive Eden. In terms of technological sophistication, the majority of websites are utilised in a quite basic, linear manner; basic contact information is provided, mailing lists are available, and a simple left hand or top menu is present, but there are no directly multilateral features such as a forum, blog or a chat service. For smaller scale organisations involved in coffee activism, it appears that political communication has not been revolutionised by the internet. Their strategies remain rooted in traditional mechanisms of interacting with their membership base, particularly evident in linear bilateral communication through magazine subscriptions, mailing lists and telephone calls. As the majority of the websites operated merely as virtual leaflets, coffee activism appears fragmented both online and offline. For most coffee activists, the decision not to accelerate the digitisation of their cause usually corresponds to the specificity of the audiences with which they communicate. Preaching beyond the politically converted is not often the case (Clarke et al, 2007). Most of the smaller groups engaged in coffee activism have a set audience with which they communicate through different channels, including electronic ones such as email, but not by using this web-as-platform standard for their websites. The vibrancy of the Fairtrade Foundation's website is the only exception. The leading organisation in coffee activism in the UK bloomed into the Web 2.0 garden during the course of this research. The fragmented adoption of internet channels is evident. The next section further explores the online structures for ethical consumerism in the websites examined.

8.3 One-Click Politics: The Bearings of Structures for Consumption

There was both a reluctant scepticism and a positive outlook towards the use of online commercial spaces in the chosen websites. On the one hand, there is an appraisal of the time and resource-saving capacities of internet technologies. According to members interviewed from the NSC, the shop is 'very well used' and has been significantly growing. The two groups which maintain online shops regard such allowances quite positively, as the costs of printing or otherwise promoting products have been minimised. However, while the internet has facilitated the spurring of ethical consumption outlets, it should not be assumed that it has necessarily facilitated an increase of resources or supporters. There was a suggestion that the creation of online spaces for ethical consumption does not bring about some grand change in the number of their supporters or in the way in which they operate. Members from the NSC and the RISC mentioned that their online sales appear more prominent before the Christmas holidays and not on a yearly basis. While these sales seem to be gradually growing, there are some concerns around the consumer patterns developing, which in market terms are discussed under the term 'customer loyalty'. The impression that activists are left with is that:

> Sometimes the people who are buying by filling in a form they're more solid. They'll buy again and again, we recognise the names, whereas the online ones [sic], they buy and for a couple of years I've tried to get their email addresses and then send them promotions by email and I find they don't really go for it. So, they don't seem as concerned as the people who are bothered to sit down at the table and write a check and fill in a catalogue. (Linda, NSC)

Jennifer, from the same group, also spoke of "a lack of coherency in consumer habits". This relates once more to ease of access in a liquid online environment where participation can be fleeting and not sustained (Chapter 4). Sustainability of interest is crucial to the politicisation of ethical consumption (Halkier, 2004). Therefore, the lack of the permeability of ethical consumption by fragmented participation in online outlets threatens the continual dimension of political participation in coffee activism.

However, the use of ethical consumerism outlets seems empowering for the coffee activists who employ such outlets. For two case studies, the basic motivation behind setting up a shop, either offline or online was income generation: sales from the Solidarity and Fair Trade Shop sustain the action of the NSC and the World Shop is one of the main sources of income for RISC. The NSC activists interviewed suggested that approximately half of their income comes from memberships and the other half from sales. The following statement encapsulates this:

> We totally rely on a fair trade shop as an income generator, so you could say that fair trade saves us so that we can continue to campaign. (Beatrice, RISC)

In this sense, the financial autonomy of groups such as these is ensured and they can carry out their work without risks of appropriation in terms of their messages being dictated by financiers (Yilmaz, 2006). The Active Distribution Network is based on a similar but slightly different logic. While the NSC and the RISC both practise solidarity activism, the ADN functions as an anarchist distribution. The group has also been historically involved in the Do It Yourself (DIY) movement (cf. McKay, 1998). However, the designer of the Active Distribution Network website suggested that:

> It [the distribution] is not going through a traditional shop, even though it's still a version of a shop, whether it's online or whether it's through his catalogue or whether it's through the Infoshop; it's still somewhere you can go buy something. (Sean, ADN)

Hence, while the culture of this group is based on direct action and protest, there is a similarity in its involvement in coffee activism with solidarity-based groups, as the Active Distribution Network also operates certain autonomy through its involvement in 'rebel trade'. Online ethical consumption enables groups and organisations to sustain their action, whatever political affiliation or direction they might have.

However, there is also reluctance from the point of view of coffee activists towards the employment of the internet. What appears to be appreciated is the small increase of sales, although it is perceived as somewhat insignificant for wider participation. Their concerns include customer loyalty, online security and skewed or

confusing political information. The latter is considered the most important drawback of ethical consumption. In combination with the potential for political action and more substantial novel types of participation, such as political consumerism, relevant, substantial and well-researched information appears to be of key significance. Issues allowing for scepticism which have arisen in some of the interviews involve activist concerns for user access, accessibility and online fraud. The ADN was not so focused on simplifying the process of buying through the online catalogue. Although payment is expected through the online payment service Paypal, there is no shopping basket. This is, according to Rob (ADN), because he wants users to "use their brain a little bit" when buying online, and underlines that he does not want the website to reach "that level of store convenience". Online security and the danger of fraud were also emphasised during the interviews, in the spirit of scepticism towards the growth of online ethical consumption. Moreover, issues of user sophistication with regards to information provision and assessment were raised. An activist from the only organisation which does not have an online shop explains that the main problem with the internet is a general "over-reliance on just clicking a button" (Beatrice, RISC). However, it is important to note that opportunities for online purchases might constitute some of the few opportunities for engagement with the organisation since, as mentioned before, the membership dimension is quite closed in certain cases.

Further fragmentation of the opportunities for enacting one's politics online can be seen in the rates of participation in the online environments of the websites. Table 8.1 portrays an investigation of citizens' interaction with fair trade websites in the questionnaires during fair trade events:

Table 8. 1: Incidence of Visiting Fair Trade Websites		
	Frequency	Percentage %
Never	74	39.79
Sometimes	41	22.04
Seldom	26	13.98
Frequently	23	12.37
Often	22	11.82
Total	186	100

The largest group of participants in fair trade events (39.79%) had never visited a fair trade website. While they might have fleetingly visited such a site, blog or a part of an online newspaper dedicated to the issue is a different question, they have not pertinently interacted with it. 22.04% claimed to sometimes visit such websites, 13.89% claimed they seldom go online to look for fair trade, 12.37% visit fair trade websites frequently and 11.82% do so often. This table illuminates the lack of general public awareness and contact with coffee activism online. This result can be interpreted by accounting for the high frequency of the random attendance of passerbys in the events attended (Table 8.3).

The internet appears to be an integral, but underutilised, tool for the majority of examined websites and perhaps for coffee activism in general as demonstrated by their reception in Table 8.1. There are some allowances for arguing that the internet has been particularly beneficial for coffee activists. For instance, the medium enables smoother internal communications. The majority of activists interviewed stated that the internet has assisted their internal communication, as many use email daily and tools such as Skype for teleconferences. Moreover, the internet has allowed for a slow increase in the numbers of sales among the selected websites and has not revolutionised preaching beyond the converted. The mediation of political consumerism, however, augments questions around fragmentation and sustainability. In an economy of attention, political and economic actors compete for our attention (Chapter 4). In order for political consumerism to be conceptualised as a substantial alternative form of political participation, there must at least be sustained focus for a certain period of time. So far, in relation to coffee activism, there is little evidence of the internet's ability to capture and sustain political individuals. This is further explored in Chapter 9, where the potential of the internet for recruitment is inspected through interviews with citizens involved in coffee activism.

The important aspects of online mediation of political consumerism are information, debate and education. This assertion comes not only from activists, but also from academics (cf. Halkier, 2004; Kennedy, 2004; Stolle and Micheletti, 2005). While there is evidence for a proliferation of information online, the data suggest that there are very few significant structures for debate online; consciousness of and education about ethical consumption appear to be its most prominent dimensions. However, what one-click politics suggests is that citizens are not significantly drawn to the internet to delve in debate, but are sometimes fleetingly involved in

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consumption practices online. This is the nature of liquid politics where sustainability should always be examined and never assumed (Chapters 2 and 9). Next, I analyse the structures and narratives of mobilisation calls online in order to highlight how the internet is used to engage citizens in coffee activism.

8.4 Technologies, Repertoires and Reception of E-Mobilisation

A fundamental question of this project concerns the relationship between coffee activism and online political mobilisation. Here, it is directly interrogated through the online structural frames of mobilisation, as well as the questionnaires conducted with 186 participants in fair trade events. Online calls for action are considered in terms of the opportunities offered in the websites and the types of online or offline action called for. The questionnaires inquire into the direct impact of online mobilisation calls. By interrogating the online structures and repertoires of the mobilisers, as well as the discourses of the mobilised, I approach e-mobilisation in coffee activism from different positions. A repertoire of consumer-driven entertainment is rising in the politics of coffee activism. In this section, I explore the types of offline events of coffee activism and the relationship between online mobilisation and offline engagement.

The escalating absence of more political events on a macro scale and the presence of more market type events on a micro scale is an interesting observation. The Trade Justice Movement campaigns for trade justice and has been organising political events such as rallies since 2001. However, over this time the calls for action have been fewer. In 2001, 8,000 trade justice campaigners rallied in London for trade justice at the World Trade Organisation[85]. Then, in 2002, over 12,000 campaigners put trade justice high on the political agenda when they converged on Westminster for "the biggest ever mass lobby of Parliament"[86]. In 2005, there was a series of cross-national events during the 'global week of action for trade justice' (10-16 April)[87] "with over 25,000 trade justice campaigners descending overnight on Whitehall and

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[85] http://www.tjm.org.uk/events/parade.shtml
[86] http://www.tjm.org.uk/masslobby/index.shtml
[87] http://www.tjm.org.uk/wakeup/gwabackground.shtml

Westminster on 15 April"[88]. Finally, in 2007, campaigners staged first ever simultaneous lobby of all European Union embassies during the 'Global Day of Action against Europe's Unfair Trade Deals' in London[89]. In parallel to the limited organisation of trade justice events, there appear to be increasingly more calls for local fair trade events, such as bazaars and coffee mornings. The rise and frequency of micro level commercial types of events correspond to arguments concerning the growth of alternative forms of civic engagement, which are increasingly taking place in the market arena (cf. Scammell, 2000; Micheletti *et al*, 2004; Hozler, 2006). The increasing equation of civic engagement and ethical consumption is evident in the case of coffee activism. When it comes to encouraging action, activists tend to prioritise the increase in awareness and the preference for ethically produced and traded goods by providing the relevant structures and calls on their websites.

Moreover, the proliferation of ethical consumption and the gradual processes of mainstreaming fair trade have reconfigured the notion of participation in coffee activism. Only two coffee activist groups (ADN and TJM) call for alternative political action. The anarchist ADN encourages participation in events in a section titled 'DIY, Politics and Action'. These types of events include helping at a volunteer-run café, getting involved in the local Infoshop, or participating in gigs or book fairs; these calls are indicative of a deep political commitment, although they are not very closely linked to trade justice activism. As for the TJM, while it campaigns for exactly that issue, there have been calls for protest marches almost every two years, so on quite a loose basis. A reason for this was offered by a member of the Fairtrade Foundation:

> Yes, the Trade Justice Movement had big demos and there are still big demos. I think … you [need to] look politically at where trade negotiations have gone to and the NGOs are saying 'What can we do? The trade negotiations have collapsed. What's the point of marching in the streets? We need to be in the corridors of where these deals are negotiated. Let's get in there'. But there's nothing to hook on to hardly at the moment. But I'll tell you something; when they call a demo, it's the people that buy the fair trade products who are on those demos. (Olivia, Fairtrade Foundation)

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[88] http://www.tjm.org.uk/wakeup/index.shtml
[89] http://www.tjm.org.uk/event2007.shtml

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The configuration of mobilisation calls according to political climate is a sound argument, according to which social action transforms alongside the political needs of societies. However, the fact that social action is currently limited in the realm of the market questions its ability to adapt to a political reality outside the market. For instance, the growing replacement of the rhetoric of 'fair' rather than 'alternative' trade signifies the appropriation of coffee activism to a more free-trade friendly movement (Chapter 6). In conclusion, even these types of political calls are still neither highly engaged with the issues behind coffee activism nor frequent. The shift from mobilisation of a civic nature to mobilisation of a consumer nature is evident from the structures and repertoires of online coffee activism. This is particularly evident in the nature of the calls for mobilisation presented in the websites examined.

There is an abundance of forms of engagement in coffee activism. These range from direct involvement in a borough campaigning group, a local church or faith group, school or university, local business, or cafés, which campaign on the growth of fair trade awareness, to attending fair trade events and consuming ethically. Fair trade events vary greatly in their spaces and repertoires (Chapter 5). Mobilisation, therefore, concerns a range of action, from 'soft' practices such as awareness and market practices, like ethical consumption, to 'hard' – but less frequently observed – calls for participation in protest politics, such as demonstrations and marches. As demonstrated in Table 8.2, online mobilisation calls equally concern the target of increasing awareness, the option of volunteering, the offering of donations and the encouragement of participation in events, while ethical consumption follows closely:

Table 8. 2: Online Calls for Online and Offline Mobilisation				
Case	*Action*	*Volunteering*	*Donations*	*Commercial Services*
ADN	gigs & events	volunteer for local café	-	online shop & mail order
NSC	solidarity tours & events	volunteer for organisation	donations by cheque, standing order or online	online shop & mail order
RISC	events	volunteer for organisation	online donations	offline shop
EC	-	-	-	online shop
FTF	campaigns & events	volunteer for organisation	online donations	online shop
TJM	mass demonstrations & lobbying	-	-	-
EFTA	-	-	-	-

This concurs with arguments on the assistance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in fund-raising and possibly mobilising (cf. Chadwick, 2006). The types of mobilisation practices advocated suggest both online and offline action. The most common calls for action typically concerned ethical consumption and participation in fair trade events, such as coffee mornings, bazaars and fêtes.

The majority of appeals on participation in coffee activism appeal to participation in 'fun' events, which allow extra-parliamentary politics to entertain citizens (cf. Scott and Street, 2001; van Zoonen, 2005). The Fairtrade Foundation launched its first public event (Fairtrade Fairground) in 2008, and a member from the organisation which was interviewed suggested that a drive in setting that up was that:

We wanted it to be fun, because people walk along the South Bank to kind of divert themselves on a Saturday or a Sunday and ... we wanted to have

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something that would engage people, so it wasn't just straight sampling but there was kind of a variety of things people could do. So that's the Fairground. We wanted people to have fun, so we set a challenge for our NGO and licensing partners who wanted to book a stall. You have to think of some device that's more interesting than handing people leaflets or samples. (Olivia, Fairtrade Foundation)

There is a clear insistence on making fair trade more accessible and making fair trade events more engaging. The Fairground can be regarded as a carnival; Scott and Street suggest that "carnival now appears to have been taken as a paradigmatic model for many recent social movement campaigns" (2001: 42). I argue that it resembles more of a consumer carnival, as mobilisation revolves around the promotion of ethical consumption. This is concurrent with the mainstreaming of the movement (Chapter 6). The poster call for the Fairtrade Fairground as the first big public event in 2008 put forward by the Foundation read:

Come and enjoy a traditional helter skelter, tea cup rides, Fairtrade coconut shy and candyfloss using Fairtrade sugar. Visit market stalls, competitions and crafting. Talk to a farmer involved in Fairtrade and visit the Choose Fairtrade Bus before it leaves on its tour of the UK.

This mobilisation call places a leisurely dimension at the forefront: helter skelters or tea cup rides are exciting playground-type activities for the entire family, the same as enjoying coconut shy and candyfloss. Market stalls are engaging, competitions are thrilling, and crafting is creative. Talking to a farmer from the global South who participates in the fair trade scheme is a more intense activity and makes it directly evident to the ethical consumer why buying fair trade is important, as it stirs up a feeling of cosmopolitan sensitivity. Visiting the bus is another way of becoming further informed about the cause. The citizen is approached from a place that does not threaten their comfort zone. Going to such an event is a pleasurable activity (Figure 8.1).

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Figure 8. 1: Snapshot from the Fairtrade Fairground 2008

The information provided both online and offline appeal to a politics of emotions: joy (which can be achieved through the participation in such an event) and empathy (Beck, 2006). Coffee activism can thus be related to affective forms of civic engagement. This should not imply that the politics of pleasure are not to be associated with forms of political participation such as the attendance of campaigning events. Rather, this argument echoes the scepticism expressed by activists related to 'alternative hedonism' and the boundaries which an affective political experience might pose to the further politicisation of the cause. In this thesis, I further investigate this in terms of the extension of action from the marketplace to the political space (Chapter 9).

The question of how, if at all, online information leads to offline mobilisation is one of the core concerns of this project. In the questionnaires conducted during participation in fair trade events, the participants revealed their sources of information on the attended event. Table 8.3 summarises their responses:

Table 8. 3: Information Source on Event Attended		
	Frequency	Percentage %
Word of Mouth	73	39.25
Website/Email	36	19.35
None/Passing by	28	15.05
Leaflet/Poster/Printed info	24	12.9
Part of Organising Committee	10	5.38
Borough-based Group	9	4.84
Church	5	2.69
Other Media (radio)	1	0.54
Total	186	100

As demonstrated in this table, the second most common response (19.35%) of citizens attending fair trade events was that they were physically present at the event because of an online piece of information. The majority (39.25%) claimed that they had been informed and mobilised through word of mouth, an oral piece of information given to them. The third most common response was that they just happened to be passing by (15.05%). This is more applicable to the case of the Fairtrade Fairgrounds, which, as outlined in a quote above from one of the organisers, was part of the rationale of choosing the illustrious setting of the South Bank in London. This is not the case for the smaller types of events, which are more closed and acknowledged through personal communication with the organising committee. E-mobilisation does not appear to be the most efficient form of engaging citizens in offline action.

The political side of coffee activism appears to be waning online and offline. There is a minimisation of the traditional political types of action that are called for, which relates to the major tendencies of the mainstream fair trade movement. These structures recreate popular consumer-driven suggestions for involvement in coffee activism, which provoke civic engagement through attendance of fair trade events and the practice of ethical consumption. The actual participation in fair trade events is, in its turn, more indicative of consumer-based engagement. Here, the politics of popular culture come into play at the intersections of consumer culture and civic engagement. E-mobilisation in the case of coffee activism is not as successful as traditional offline forms of mobilisation, such as word of mouth spreading of information. So far, the

internet appears to be dysfunctional in terms of facilitating offline connections in a movement as mainstream as coffee activism and, when it appears to be functional, it carries the ethics of consumption rather than its politics.

8.5 Digital Storytelling in Coffee Activism: Reading between 'Civic' and 'Consumer' Lines

Jaffee argues that there are two main directions in the fair trade movement which are "a 'development' strain and a 'solidarity' strain" (2007: 12). The development strain of the movement is almost exclusively the business of churches and charity organisations, while the solidarity strain is, in its turn, what more politically active groups were concerned with. Correspondingly, there seem to be two types of stories narrated among coffee activists. These can be labelled as the 'trade justice through solidarity' story and the 'development through lifestyle' story. Previous research argues that from the consumer viewpoint, narratives can either be purely consumer-driven in its entry level or involved in a social justice at a higher level (Bennett *et al*, 2007). The data informed by the websites of the selected coffee activists indicate that there are gradations between the two stories. There is interplay between official and unofficial types of groups and organisations involved in a multifaceted type of activism, which concerns both a civic and consumer standpoints with regard to the issue of coffee trade.

The *trade justice through solidarity* story is overtly political and highlights solidarity and social justice as the bases for involvement for both activists and consumers in coffee activism. Altogether, this type of story is rooted in a historical political process of support to a struggle or injustice. It is typically found among the websites of small and medium types of organisations. One of the core elements of this type of narrative is support for a specific political cause. Here, coffee activism is employed as a tool to convey this type of support: "We have no doubts about the value this coffee plays in supporting the revolutionary struggle both in Mexico and worldwide"[90]. Such a narrative is found in groups/organisations with a long history of involvement. The NSC has been campaigning for solidarity to Nicaragua since the

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[90] http://www.jonactive.free-online.co.uk/zapatistacoffee.html [15 Apr 2008].

late 1980s and its involvement in coffee activism directly corresponds to its political work on the region: "At national level in Britain we work with organisations and coalitions ... highlighting Nicaragua as an example of the devastating consequence of trade injustice on the majority of the population, and the benefits of fair trade"[91]. Attention to details about the places of production, cooperatives and political work are emphasised in this story, although this is not necessarily an indicator of this type of story when the element of direct political action is projected: "We are campaigning for trade justice - not free trade - with the rules weighted to benefit poor people and the environment"[92]. The Active Distribution Network, the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, the Reading International Solidarity Centre and the Trade Justice Movement are groups which emphasise such a narrative in their online façades and their offline action. The role of the consumer in coffee activism is another crucial element of this narrative. The RISC points out the power of the citizen consumer: "By changing our patterns of consumption we can help to change the unsustainable system of world trade which increases inequality, destroys the environment and threatens our future... Consumer power can bring about change"[93]. As previously mentioned, the aim of the articulators of such stories is usually to generate income in order to achieve their political goals. Groups such as the NSC and the RISC depend on their shops in order to keep on campaigning and promoting solidarity and awareness. Beatrice from the RISC suggests that "you could say that fair trade saves us so that we can continue to campaign". As a movement of eighty groups and organisations the TJM is a slightly different case as it is explicitly concerned with campaigning for trade justice. The TJM does not directly promote ethical consumption, but co-operates with organisations which do so. Here, the consumer story is matched to the civic story, as it becomes aligned with protest and political mobilisation. Therefore, this type of story entails a strong correlation between ethical consumerism and political participation.

In the 'trade justice through solidarity' story, the role of the ethical consumer is therefore deemed crucial and not void of any potential political ramifications. In contrast to Fine (2006), who argues that consumer politics mainly address the marketplace and its limitations and do not necessarily engage on a discourse in the

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[91] http://www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/campaigns/index.htm [10 Apr 2008].
[92] http://www.tjm.org.uk/about.shtml [26 Apr 2008].
[93] http://www.risc.org.uk/ethicalcon.html [09 Apr 2008].

name of social or political change, I contend that through the interviews coffee activists clearly made the point that the link between active political campaigning and ethical consumption is the only viable form of consumer politics. John from the RISC describes fair trade as "a useful way of mobilising opinion". Activists from groups articulating this type of story expressed similar opinions:

> Just selling fair trade and not highlighting the issues behind it … is what you call soft as far as I'm concerned, because if it's not connected up to campaigns to make a fairer trade system that isn't dominated by the rich countries and the rich elite, then … fair trade isn't the solution to world poverty. It's such a small part of the market. It has to be aligned with proper information about trade systems. (Beatrice, RISC)

> I would hope that the ethically minded people would be part of some group or would take action in addition to just going out and buying something. (Carol, NSC)

The 'trade justice through solidarity' storyline underlines the necessity for a combination of political with market-based action.

The reasons presented for such a requirement of civic and consumer engagement concerned activists' scepticism of the domination of an overarching capitalist modus vivendi. Terms such as 'capitalist enterprise' and 'capitalist economy' were explicitly mentioned in interviews with activists from the anarchist group ADN:

> Fair trade means nothing, because it's still a capitalist enterprise. It's just a new kind of way of capitalism protecting itself and continuing itself, remarking itself, repackaging itself just like capitalism … repackages everything, repackages anti-globalism. (Rob, ADN)

> Obviously, using purchasing power as your tool will always leave you within the structure of a capitalist economy. You could say [that] it will never really make a massive qualitative change, because it will always be within the same structure. (Sean, ADN)

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Implicit, but direct scepticism about the neoliberal modus operandi was also presented as indication against the mere expression of ethical consumption as a political act. The ease of access into the marketplace to cast an economic vote is regarded as a potential restriction to the development of the political action around fair trade:

> Sometimes I'm a bit suspicious … It's more about 'oh, let's all do good in a really British way and buy fair trade. Let's buy fair trade and that's great'. (Jennifer, NSC)

> It's easy to get the message that [if] you buy fair trade and these happy families will benefit, they can send their kid to school… That's a relatively easy message to sell and people buy into that, because it doesn't really hit them in the pocket. But if you're saying that you need to go beyond that, it's a much more difficult message and requires you to spend time at the very least, you know, writing letters to your MP, or … having a much more campaigning role as a consumer, most people just aren't interested. I mean, my feeling is that people will be as ethical as is comfortable. (John, RISC)

The comfort level of British consumers is therefore criticised by activists of this 'alternative' perspective towards fair trade (Fridell, 2006). The interrogation of further political engagement follows in Chapter 9. While opportunities for trade justice action are rare, opportunities for consumer-based engagement are multiplying. The latter are embraced by the second type of story.

The *development through lifestyle* story is evident in cases such as Ecocoffee, the Fairtrade Foundation and the European Fair Trade Association. This type of story is typically bound in official information and adopts an organisational narrative. However, it is also the most popular, as it has reached a very wide audience in places as mainstream as supermarkets, through very simple storylines such as "Hatch Yourself a Fairer Easter" [94], "Tell Your Mum You Love Her with Fairtrade

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[94]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/march_2008/hatch_yourself_a_fairer_easter.aspx [22 Nov 2008].

Flowers"[95], or "Fairtrade Has All the Ingredients for a Very Merry Christmas"[96]. This is explicitly indicative of the infiltration of ethics in consumerism. Ecocoffee's website claims that:

> You can buy cheaper coffee elsewhere... but if you do we doubt you will be told much about its origin, quality and age- often a mix of cheapest beans available from time to time from wherever. Nor will you have any sense of the social effects of your purchase on those who have produced it, and on the environment and ecology of the growing region[97].

The social and environmental effects of the produce are underlined here. The lifestyle aspect of this story, the presence and encouragement of political consumerism are clearly highlighted. The consumer story is the 'entry level' (Bennett *et al*, 2007) into coffee activism and merely requires the purchase of ethical goods for participation in a wider phenomenon. This is relevant to arguments on 'life politics' (Giddens, 1991), 'sub-politics' (Beck, 1997) or 'lifestyle politics' (Bennett, 2004a) (Chapter 2). In this sense, the narrative is addressed towards the citizen on the consumer level and does not necessarily make the link between civic and consumer duty. As Delli Carpini and Keater assert, "citizenship is not just another lifestyle choice" (1996: 285).

The Fairtrade Foundation's 2.0 website is a good example of how an elaborate story that includes a variety of elements ranging from trade injustice, environmental responsibility, third world development to consumer action, can be visualised in a single picture (Figure 8.2).

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[95]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/march_2008/tell_your_mum_you_love_her_with_fairtrade_flowers.aspx [20 Nov 2008].

[96]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/archive_2007/nov_2007/fairtrade_at_christmas.aspx [30 June 2008].

[97] http://ecocoffee.co.uk/id1.html [15 Apr 2008].

Figure 8. 2: Visual Representations of Coffee Activism
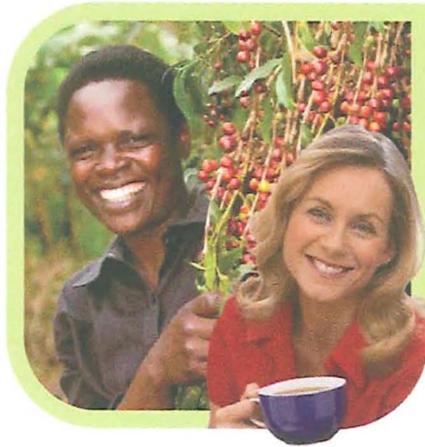
One of the most common images in the site, which is also commonly used as campaigning material nationally, is one of two smiling people. One of them is a male and quite likely a coffee farmer, as he holds a coffee plant, while the other is a female holding a cup of coffee. This image corresponds to the general fair trade idea of bridging the gap between producer and consumer, and the smiles in the faces of the people depicted connote the positive effects it brings. The background is a coffee plantation, where there is an underlying message of environmental consciousness, while the notions of trade justice and development are more latent. Consumer action is summarised symbolically in the coffee cup the woman is holding. In other words, action, according to this image, is seen as bound in the marketplace.

Moreover, this type of story tends to weave a pattern of sub-stories relating to changes in farmers' lives brought upon by fair trade. This is particularly visible in the Fairtrade Foundation's 1.0 and 2.0 websites, where the story is divided into sections. In its most elaborate form, the story has various sub-sections, in the 'introduction' the general history and state of the farmer is described; the 'setting' is a section where the environment he/she resides and works in is given; a 'his/her' life section expands more on the farmer giving details of education, employment and relationship to farming; a 'daily activities' section is concerned with portraying the schedules of farmers; finally, a 'product and Fairtrade' section outlines the benefits of fair trade, while a 'today and the future' section offers a view into the future concerns and policies of the Foundation. The EC's less sophisticated website still includes a few case studies of cooperatives and developing projects. Elaborate storytelling on the effects of fair trade is an element characterising the 'lifestyle/development' story; in

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contrast with the more action-oriented 'solidarity/social justice' version, this type of story tends to publicise research on the personal benefits of fair trade. Once again, storytelling about coffee farmers concludes with the same impression as the picture analysed above: buy fair trade and you are helping farmers live a better life. This appeals to individuals and personalises one's sense of political involvement.

While it might appear feasible to separate two distinct types of narratives, in reality, the two stories entwine and are hardly ever met in their pure form. With the exception of the TJM, the other organisations portray either more 'trade justice through solidarity' elements, or 'development through lifestyle' elements. One way of designating the selected organisational structures in a continuum is depicted in Figure 8.3:

Figure 8. 3: A Continuum of Stories in Coffee Activism

← *Trade Justice through Solidarity* →   ← *Development through Lifestyle* →

| TJM | ADN | NSC | RISC | FTF | EFTA | EC |

In this continuum, the TJM is on the very left edge, more focused on trade justice than any other aspect of fair trade. The ADN follows closely after, as its reason for involvement in coffee activism is declared to be solidarity to the Zapatista cause, while the NSC is next as it is quite similar in the sense of campaigning for solidarity towards Nicaragua. The RISC is next and the FTF are somewhere in the middle of the continuum. While the FTF has a very rich 'get involved' page, which includes soft types of action for fair trade, it leans more towards the 'development through lifestyle' story. The EFTA also tends to project 'development' rather than 'trade justice', while the EC is clearly the most 'lifestyle'-oriented.

Certain conclusions can be reached from the analysis of these emerging and merging narratives. Coffee activism is either considered a side-issue, an entry point into causes which are at the heart of activist organisations or a core-issue which idealises awareness-raising. In the first case, consumption of ethical commodities is accepted as a mode of finance for the organisations, while, in the second case, it is an act of political import. Large-scale organisations such as the EFTA tend to either be quite pro-active and in line with a political agenda, or more professional and leaning towards a 'development' agenda. Professional organisations are also interested in

political challenge, as the TJM is concerned with "campaigning for trade justice - not free trade - with the rules weighted to benefit poor people and the environment"[98]. There are many groups and small businesses such as Ecocoffee, which lightly touch upon the injustices behind coffee, but heavily focus on ethical consumption as a personal experience of indulgence grounded in life politics (Soper, 2007). The FTF exhibits an intricate storyline which includes both narratives. However, because of the nature and shareholders of the organisation and the foundation of a consumer label which it is responsible for, it tends to lean towards the 'development through lifestyle' narrative. As for the rest of the coffee activists, which are all medium scale organisations, they are mostly found nearer to the solidarity-based narrative. This is why the idea of separate stories is often not useful, whereas the continuum suggested above can be applied to any case. Recognising the entwined narratives further asserts the point that the relationship between consumption and activism cannot be directly identified, and that the correlation of neoliberal with activist politics is strong. Moreover, there are different approaches towards the parameters for participation in coffee activism. The 'trade justice through solidarity' story perceives meaningful participation in the movement as a combination of civic and consumer action, while the 'development through lifestyle' story assumes faith in consumer power and equates ethical consumption to civic engagement.

8.6 Conclusion: A Consuming Mediation of Civic Engagement

The analysis of the online mediation of civic engagement in coffee activism has been concerned with the structure and content of the case studies' websites. The structures of participation and the repertoires of action have been considered from the perspective of both the activists as well as the citizens involved in coffee activism. The notion of e-mobilisation has been interrogated accordingly. I have attempted to cross-analyse the structures and repertoires of coffee activism as well as their civic and consumer elements. Two fundamental inferences can be drawn from this analysis. The first one relates to the functionality of the internet as a medium for e-mobilisation, while the second relates to the functionality of the medium as a tool for

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[98] http://www.tjm.org.uk/about.shtml [26 Apr 2008].

communicating cause. A broader conclusion concerns the limitations of the internet in supporting the structures and the narratives of a movement which tiptoes the line between political spaces and marketplaces. A series of further points are raised in the analysis that follows.

Internet structures for participation are limited, as the majority of the examined groups and organisations quite literally operate their online environments as virtual pamphlets. The notion of e-mobilisation is viewed as positive in terms of information-spreading, fund-raising, flexible organisation, and political recruitment (Chadwick, 2006). However, the analysis draws a contrasting picture. Chadwick argues that "on the surface" (2006: 115) political uses of the internet do not differ from traditional forms of repertoires, but I demonstrated how several aspects of the internet appear to be empowering activists, in terms of providing an additional readily available outlet for collecting funds through sales or donations. Moreover, there is a range of offline political practices which do not depend on online platforms for their conduct. In terms of information-spreading, the internet is not employed to its full potential and not visited by the majority of citizens interested in coffee activism. It appears to be useful for internal communications between activists, but not the online multilateral interaction of citizens. There is a certain degree of flexibility and adaptation to different current campaigns, but there is a cost to that. For instance, the Trade Justice Movement, which was one of the very few organisations to mobilise on large-scale trade justice action, has diversified its course of action, leaving a gap in the landscape of opportunities for 'hard' political action. The internet has not been particularly instrumental to political recruitment, as activists voiced concerns over sustainability of internet visitors due to the fleeting nature of navigation online. Online mobilisation in coffee activism did not appear influential in engaging citizens in action, as the majority of participants in fair trade events declared never to have visited a fair trade website and stated word-of-mouth as their source of information on the event which they were attending.

Another deduction suggests that the politics of coffee activism are also not transmitted online. Ethics are transmitted through online market structures for participation in some activist websites and throughout the narratives of ethical consumption. The most common calls for action typically concern ethical consumption and participation in fair trade events. The escalating absence of more political events on a macro scale and the presence of more market type events on a

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micro scale can be related to the mainstreaming of fair trade. There is both unwilling doubt and an optimistic stance towards the use of online commercial spaces among selected activists. While the sustainability of online ethical consumerism is not guaranteed, online and offline ethical consumption outlets generate the income which is necessary for several coffee activists in order to continue their operations. This strand of activists carries the tradition of the 'alternative perspective' of fair trade, while the other strand takes a 'shaped-advantage perspective' (Fridell, 2006). Two corresponding types of stories narrated among coffee activists can be identified: the 'trade justice through solidarity' story and the 'development through lifestyle' story. While in the first story ethical consumerism is regarded as essentially complemented with political campaigning, in the second story it is seen as empowering and equal to political participation in a mainstream market arena. There is an overwhelming tendency to celebrate ethical consumerism at the expense of further political engagement. This also ties in to the argument presented in Chapter 7 on the fetishisation of the politics of fair trade. The neoliberal marketplace appears to be numbing opposing voices or opportunities.

A neoliberal perspective on politics is emerging in contemporary forms of coffee activism. This is detaching free trade antagonism from offline political action. The oppositional rhetoric of the fair trade movement has become blurred through the processes of its mainstreaming: accessibility of price and product through market competitiveness, branding and strategic marketing, as well as the involvement of corporations on the national level. A ubiquitous consumer narrative is present in all commercial settings of coffee activists and beyond. This blurred political narrative calls to the power of the pocket and, through labels, beckons on an emotional level which is appealing to the cosmopolitan citizen of the mediapolis (Silverstone, 2007) (Chapter 9). The migration of coffee activism online is not enabling the politics of fair trade to develop. It is rather still bound in the bearings of underdeveloped internet settings. Ethical consumption, on the other hand, is best promoted online, even through it is not revolutionised. The battle for civic and consumer attention is meddled with the one-click frivolity of the internet experience. However, a notable increase in civic consumption is observed, while a relevant increase in civic engagement is not. This chapter has analysed coffee activism online and highlighted the increasing lack of civic structures and narratives in contemporary coffee activism.

The next chapter attempts to replenish the question of the politics of this type of activism by examining the space and place of citizens' politics within and beyond it.

Chapter 9

The Politics of Space and

The Space of Politics in Coffee Activism

9.1 'Spatialising' a Liquid Politics

This chapter explores the politics of space and the space of politics in contemporary coffee activism. The politics of space is examined through the virtual and physical interactions of citizens with coffee activism, while the space of politics is regarded through the participation of citizens in traditional political arenas, as well as in non-traditional political activities of coffee activism. By exploring these actions and interactions, I underline the role of mediation in the creation and sustenance of a political interest and present both a 'solid' and a 'liquid' picture of politics in the conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). The fundamental difference between a 'solid' and a 'liquid' politics is that in the first case politics is understood as an institutionalised and sustained practice, whether that is in the realm of governmental politics or in that of civil society. In the second case, then, politics is perceived as the sum of expressions and actions which are not typically acknowledged in official categorisations of civic life. Liquid politics is a non-standardised politics which varies according to the environment, the motivations and the targets which it is set in and which it sets. Liquid politics is also not officially inscribed in bureaucratic articulations of political life, although it demonstrates affinity to articulations of civil society at its most fluid, everyday, non-sustained expressions. Moreover, the term 'liquid politics' concerns the need to theorise the expansion of civic life in a variety of arenas through a variety of means.

In this chapter, liquid politics is examined in relation to space. The politics of space is investigated through the exploration of the spaces of initial contact and the spaces of maintaining contact with information on fair trade. These are typically defined by community ties which can include the church or local campaigning groups,

or by the market which can include the local store, café or the supermarket. The exploration of media spaces concurs with the analysis of information sources, in terms of ports of call and subscription to mailing lists. These are examined in order to discern the patterns of information and how these impact upon citizens' involvement. I argue that both online and offline context impacts on the targets of coffee activism. In a sense, the liquid nature of politics appears to be compatible to the liquid nature of the internet (Chapter 4). However, the offline spatial groundings of coffee activism appear to be more prominent in the crystallisation of involvement and action. Moreover, the spatial dimensions of fair trade politics point towards the individual and cosmopolitan nature of liquid politics where the marketplace appears to be facilitating political expression. These types of political expression are both symbolic and material; as symbolic expressions they articulate a certain moral opinion regarding the ethics of production and consumption, while as material expressions they accelerate the growth and work of fair trade networks which aid producers in the global South through trade.

The space of politics is examined with regards to the exploration of traditional types of involvement in party politics or political groups and organisations, as well as other social or political issues. I further interrogate the 'civic side of consumption' (Trentmann, 2007: 147), while examining the focus which citizens place on politics generally and fair trade politics specifically. The political narratives of engagement in coffee activism are explored from the points of view of the ethically consuming citizens interviewed. An exploration of the spatial variations of fair trade politics in terms of locality is at play. The geopolitical variances which characterise involvement in coffee activism differ at local, national and international levels (Chapter 5). Notions of cosmopolitan citizenship (Stevenson, 2003) are also explored here. Ethical consumption is related to 'cosmopolitan caring' (Littler, 2009), but is also bound by the paradox of 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2002). The notion of liquid politics is hence associated with fleeting interactions, cosmopolitan concerns and individualised types of action; in this chapter, I argue that there remains a strong tendency of quiet withdrawal from national, official and institutionalised politics.

9.2 Making Contact: Entry Points and Liquid Associations

I have argued that mobilisation in coffee activism is not facilitated by the internet as the majority of participants in fair trade events claimed that they never visited fair trade websites generally or specifically to find information about offline events (Chapter 8). As a matter of fact, online structures for civic engagement appear to be fragmented. This section explores how mobilisation occurs in coffee activism and how the spaces of such information might influence the progress and sustainability of citizens' interest in the fair trade cause. This is an attempt to understand the evolution of civic engagement by addressing the offline spaces of contact with the movement and an examination of the ways in which people move about, within and around the mediation of coffee activism. I examine how the initial environment of involvement impacts the spaces of engagement through interviews with ethically consuming citizens. Ranging from public spaces such as community centres, to market spaces, like local and independent ethical shops, there are various entry points which aim to engage and mobilise citizens into action.

The entry points in order of met frequency in the interviews included the *social space* (i.e. friends and family) (11 out of 30), the *space of worship* (i.e. church or church organisation) (8 out of 30), the *education space* (i.e. school or university) (5 out of 30), the *local space* (i.e. council or local group) (4 out of 30), the *work space* (2 out of 30), as well as the *political space* (i.e. trade union conference) (1 out of 30) and the *market space* (i.e. supermarket or shop) (1 out of 30). The internet was not mentioned once as an initial space of communicating fair trade. The least common entry point in coffee activism was through a political space, such as a trade union conference:

> When I was working with trade unions, [in] a lot of the major conferences they had fringe meetings or lunchtime and stuff, so you can go to different ones [and] there's always one on fair trade. They've always got a stall with their stuff. (Edward)

The rarity of a previously directly political space operating as a platform for the introduction of fair trade to citizens is relevant to arguments on the death of public

space (cf. Sennett, 1974). Interestingly, the market was also the least mentioned entry point in coffee activism, with only one interviewee asserting this:

> It's weird, because no one really ever explained to me what fair trade was, but in a way I always knew what it is. I don't know how, it was just obvious to me. It was probably about eight years ago, but I can't remember where I saw it or how I found out. It's been very gradual in a way. It's been growing in the market. So, it hasn't been any obvious advertisements… I honestly can't remember. (Anthony)

This quote illustrates the political forgetting of the fair trade cause and its concurrent displacement by the market. However, the case of loss of this particular memory is rare among the interviewees, as the rest of the entry points in coffee activism relate to grassroots mobilisation and the offline networks, which the Fairtrade Foundation is linked up to.

The Fairtrade Foundation has been proudly attributing its success to grassroots campaigning. This includes the organisation of people into Fairtrade Towns[99], Universities and Colleges, Schools, Workplaces and Places of Worship campaigning groups[100]. I outline the various spaces in reverse order as mentioned in interviews. Because of their occupations, two interviewees came across the issue. Through universities, colleges and schools, more interviewees (5 out of 30) have become aware of fair trade.

> I wouldn't be able to pinpoint the first time I heard of fair trade, or when I bought my first fair trade product. I think, probably, when I first started going to university I sort of got more aware of groups that were active. I suppose I became more aware of the importance of fair trade, but I think for a long time I've been aware that it's existed and it's a good thing to buy. (Betty)

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[99] The history of Fairtrade Towns dates back to 2000 when Oxfam activists in Garstang, Lancashire declared that their town was to be the Worlds first Fairtrade Town ('Making Garstang a Fairtrade Town': http://www.garstangfairtrade.org.uk/history/index.html [20 Jul 2009]). This decision was quickly converted into a mechanism for grassroots mobilisation and the idea of Fairtrade Towns came to be (http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_towns/about_fairtrade_towns.aspx [20 Jul 2009]).
[100] http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/default.aspx [20 Jul 2009].

It was probably when I was at university ... I think that it was just a thing that started to happen. A lot of the ... coffee houses that I used to visit had it, and I just saw it as a really good thing and have been trying to support it since then – a lot of my friends likewise. We're all trying to support the movement in any way that we can. (Sandra)

The prominence of educational spaces in mobilising citizens to the fair trade cause can sustain participation in the movement. All of the interviewees who were brought into coffee activism through such a space have been actively engaged in campaigning for fair trade, whether that was through their work in a development charity or an ethical local business. Groups and organisations involved in coffee activism through such spaces are accordingly described as 'campaigning traders' and 'trading campaigners' (Harrison, 2005; Jaffee, 2007) (Chapter 3). Therefore, there is a link between civic structures for involvement and offline engagement in coffee activism.

The second most common space (8 out of 30) which has been crucial in the movement is the space of religion. Littler (2009) mentions the connection between Christianity, faith groups and fair trade, but there is very little research on this correlation (Barnett *et al*, 2006). There is an established relationship between the Fairtrade Foundation and the networks of churches in the UK which is worthy of attention. These intense connections between the movement and religious narratives and spaces are not surprising; it was mainly charities and religious organisations which initially promoted campaign coffee (Chapter 6) and the idea of fairly traded products. It is those very organisations which founded the Foundation in 1992 and their presence remains strong in the movement[101]. The Fairtrade Foundation claims that "more than 30% of activities during Fairtrade Fortnight are organised by faith groups"[102]. The role of the permanent campaign on Places of Worship is also underlined by citizens:

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[101] The Fairtrade Foundation was initially established by CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam, Traidcraft and the World Development Movement.

[102]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/press_office/press_releases_and_statements/archive_2005/march_2/check_out_fairtrade_faith_release.aspx [24 Jul 2009].

I don't know quite how much this is recognised within the fair trade movement generally, but the churches I think are quite instrumental. It would be nice to spread it out to different faith groups as well, but it has tended to be the various denominations of the Anglican Church at the moment. (Dorothy)

While the very term 'places of worship', as used by the Foundation, is more all-encompassing, discourses of Christianity have been more prominent in the fair trade cause. During fieldwork, I found myself sitting in Angie's living room when she brought over the Holy Bible and read from the Old Testament:

And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Chapter 6, Verse 8)

Angie explains that, from a Baptist perspective, one of the moral obligations proposed by the Scriptures is the nature of justice in human action. Various denominations of Christianity tend to reach a consensus on the ethics of consumption. Wilber (1998) discusses the relationship between the Catholic Social Thought (CST) and its moral principles regarding consumption. The ethics of consumption in CST deem excessive consumption as morally unacceptable because it exacerbates global social inequalities and environmental resources, while it "is seen as detrimental to human dignity" (Wilber, 1998: 405) for both consumers and producers of commodities. The idea of providing support to farmers through fair trade under the metaphor of offering help to one's 'neighbour' in the global South is also prominent in the interviews.

I think I come at it from a kind of a Christian perspective, the idea of the neighbour. That the people who work for us, the people who produce our cotton our cocoa our coffee our craft goods, they are suppliers to us they stand in the relationship of neighbours and we're commanded to love our neighbour and that means not condemning them to a life where the choice is selling a child or letting their wife die of not being able to buy medicine. Ok, very colourful, but those are the real facing choices that are faced by people in developing countries. (Patrick)

The framework for ethical consumption follows a religious ethical disposition. There is therefore a permeation of a doxological approach in the ethics of consumption. Beyond this ideological involvement in the consumer side of coffee activism, there is also a civic attention to the movement.

Several interviewees had some affiliation with fair trade through their church (12 out of 30). Some of them were even instrumental in setting up campaigning groups and widening their involvement in the local community:

> Where I go to church we have a peace justice and now environment group and that group has been heavily involved in promoting fair trade within our church and then it's widened out. (Dorothy)

Others were involved with a youth group in their church or had found out about fair trade through the Traidcraft stall in their church:

> I've been aware of Traidcraft which were one of the early companies to get involved in the concept of fair trade. They predate the Fairtrade Foundation. [I've] been aware of them for a good ten or fifteen years through church organisations because they had a lot of ties with churches. I used to be in the girl guides, so the church I went to they used to have a Traidcraft stall after their services, so they were selling fair trade stuff even though the term fair trade hadn't really been coined in a way that it's so familiar now. (Wendy)

Therefore, the engagement of citizens in coffee activism through the church has been likely to sustain their active involvement. This argument is similar to research on the effects of religious values and involvement through the faith-based organisations for active citizenship (cf. Couldry *et al*, 2010). The historical involvement of religious organisations in the foundation of the fair trade movement has therefore succeeded in engaging, mobilising and sustaining civic engagement in the case of coffee activism.

Finally, the most common space of introduction to the fair trade movement appears to be through face-to-face socialisation. Numerous interviewees (9 out of 30) claimed that it was either family or friends who introduced them to fair trade. It was usually reported that the person who drew these interviewees to fair trade was actively involved in supporting the movement either through their work or faith space:

I think I first heard about it probably around six or seven years ago. I didn't really know what it was all about, but I was kind of drawn in by the term 'fair' and started to find out a little more about it. And, actually, one of my friends was heavily involved in fair trade and she was working in the Fairtrade Foundation, so, through her, I found out a lot more about it and it's just gone from there really. (Claire)

I remember the first time I came across it knowingly was through a friend who was active with her church and they were selling fair trade products at their church, so her family had all these fair trade products getting ready to sell and it was so obvious... Well of course you should pay a fair price! (Emily)

The family also appears to be critical in providing an entry point in coffee activism:

My family have always drunk PG tips and ... my aunt lived in Turkey and we used to send her PG tips, because she couldn't get that kind of tea out there. I remember going home from uni[versity] once and my mom had bought this fair trade [tea]... It must have been Clipper. I think it's Clipper, because she gets that now and ever since then it was really strange, because my family always got PG tips and you get used to it, and then I started to buy it. (Susan)

It seems to have been around for a long time now. I really couldn't be able to pinpoint the first time [I found out about it]. I've just been aware of it for a long time. I think probably my first personal involvement with it was when my parents took up selling at our Parish church ... probably around six or eight years ago. They decided then they would start selling fair trade products after mass once a month at their local church. (Rachel)

It is important to also trace the initial involvement of the person who introduces another to the cause. The case with family mobilisation was that they either became aware of fair trade through the mainstream market or more often through the church. The correlation of fair trade and the church appears to be uncontested and crucial in terms of mobilising citizens in the cause.

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In conclusion, the entry points which present themselves to unengaged citizens are more regularly in their social circles, than through their faith communities and lastly through education and local campaigns. These are indications of strong civic structures which exist parallel to the erosion of a 'solid' and institutionalised politics. The existence of apparently strong offline civic connections in coffee activism provides two contradictory conclusions. On the one hand, coffee activism has been identified as a form of liquid politics which transcends traditional manifestations of politics, and suggests a looser form of civic engagement which is non-sustained and fleeting. On the other hand, the evidence of appealing civic structures such as the church offers insights on the sustained presence of civil society arrangements which can facilitate the growth of coffee activism as a form of both liquid and solid politics. What is of additional interest in this paradoxical case here concerns the very formation of civic engagement as a form of political consumption which is dictated by the neoliberal marketplace and the force of economic agencies.

Despite the fact that the marketplace is not a direct entry point for engagement, although the mainstreaming of the fair trade movement has been facilitated by the mobilisation of large economic actors. According to the latest Ethical Consumerism Report (2009), during the period when corporations entered the picture (1999-2008), the increase of fair trade sales by value has grown from £22m to £635m[103]. The rare case of a person being introduced to coffee activism through the avenue of another political interest demonstrates that a pro-active, progressive and politically explicit narrative has been absent from the initial space of contact with the cause. The narrative of fair trade has been increasingly interwoven with the narrative of the church. According to the latter, the politicisation of consumption occurs predominantly through acts of consumption and acts of faith. In particular, the principles of moral ethics brought to political consumerism by Catholic Social Thought include "a special concern for the poor and powerless" leading to "a criticism of political and economic structures that oppress them", as well as "a concern for certain human rights against both the collectivist tendencies of the state and the neglect of the free market" (Wilber, 1998: 403). The mobilisation of citizens into coffee activism occurs on this moral basis. Finally, there are both 'solid' and 'liquid' associations following the entry points of interviewees. The most common

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[103] See http://www.goodwithmoney.co.uk/ethical-consumerism-report-09/ [02 Feb 2010].

entry points (social space, space of working and education space) have assisted the further involvement of interviewees in coffee activism, while there are numerous 'liquid' entry points such as the local space, the work space, the political space and the market space which mobilise an interest in the cause, but are not always operating to sustain it. The following section analyses the use of media for the sustenance of this interest.

9.3 Sustaining Contact: Ports of Call and Liquid Information Diffusion

In this section, I analyse the modes of continuing an interest in fair trade through a variety of media sources by exploring the communication means which people employ to become informed and updated on coffee activism. The internet appears to be useful as a virtual leaflet, but there is little evidence to be enthusiastic about its capacities for mobilisation in coffee activism (Chapter 8). However, the importance of information-spreading should be examined from the point of view of citizens. The UK enjoys high internet penetration rates (79.8% of the population[104]) and citizens are potentially able to retrieve any bit and byte of information available online. Contrary to the fragmented online structures which frame coffee activism and the responses of the majority of attendees of fair trade events, the majority of the interviewees (22 out of 30) were quick to celebrate the internet over other media as the first port of call for fair trade information. For Patrick, "probably the internet carries the balance".

> The internet for me is probably the most important way … to find out about what's going on. I don't get it really from newspapers. They're alright; they give you a rough view of what's happening, but not really in depth. (Betty)

> I think there's a huge amount of awareness-raising that is possible online. (Karen)

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[104] United Kingdom Internet Usage Stats and Market Report [online]. Available: http://www.internetworldstats.com/eu/uk.htm [10 Feb 2010].

Quotes such as this suggest that, while civic engagement online is virtually non-existent among fair trade websites, the accessibility and ease of the internet prioritises it over other media:

> Because I'm a mom, my evenings are at home with the children, if I'm not out
> at meetings. So the internet is just easily accessible. It's just there, it's instant.
> If it's eleven o'clock at night and I want to find out about something, that's
> really the only way that I can! (Nancy)

Due to limitation of time and other resources, citizens resort to more readily available information. The shifting nature of information flows enables citizens to customise their consumption of political information. In the quote below, Katherine describes how she has established several online ports of call when she had more time in her hands:

> I've got several of the companies or websites bookmarked, so I go to them from
> time to time to see what there is to know about them every now and again. I
> found a lot of them by going to BAFTS, the British Association of Fair Trade
> Shops. ... [I] went to their website and followed all their links through to have a
> look at them. That was when I didn't have a lot of work!

The selection of a time slot and pattern of engagement with information pertaining to coffee activism suggests that the open and amenable nature of the internet is suited to the liquid nature of coffee activism.

As mentioned before, the success of the fair trade movement has been attributed to grassroots campaigning. The majority of interviewees have been active in local campaigns (18 out of 30), where they also use the internet to communicate, organise and mobilise locally:

> I think it [the website] helps coordinate and it helps us to show how much
> support there is in the borough, because we're able to just put everyone on
> there, you know, MPs, councillors, general public, supporting restaurants and
> cafes, churches. So we treat it more like a community kind of thing, rather than
> six people sitting in a room ... and it's good for the group, we can coordinate

what's happening and news, we can recruit new members through it. It's a good way of getting people to join. (Betty)

Undoubtedly, the internet is regarded as a crucial medium for information gathering among interviewees. It is regarded as a provider of a space for organisation of action and it raises hopes for additional online engagement.

The most popular ports of call which were mentioned include the Fairtrade Foundation's website and the search engine Google. According to numerous interviewees (12 out of 30), the Fairtrade Foundation website is the most popular in terms of information search.

Always my first source is the Fairtrade Foundation website. I think it's really good for a source of information. I think it's excellent. (Melissa)

Every week I look on the Fairtrade Foundation website. (Abigail)

Joanna stressed that the Fairtrade Foundation's website is the first one that comes up in a Google search:

When you look up fair trade on the internet, because if you're in the UK, you'll come directly to the [Fairtrade Foundation's] website and that's what lots of people do.

The domination of Google among the search engine landscape has been noted (cf. Hargittai, 2004; Rainie, 2005; Shaker, 2006). Approximately one in four interviewees explicitly mentioned the search engine as an important first stop for any type of information imaginable.

I'm always on Google, Googling things, Googling organisations, Googling nice things, Googling nights out, Googling new products. Google, Google, Google! Googley-goo! (Sandra)

If you want information, I think Google is the best invention since sliced bread. (Karen)

The politics of search engines play a significant role in the geography of cyberspace (Introna and Nissenbaum, 2000). Moreover, they appear to impact the geopolitical variances of information search; Stross argues that "when Google receives a search request, its search does not at that moment check the world's Web sites, but rather checks the copies of those sites that were collected earlier and stored on Google's servers" (2008: 27). Google is successful, because it proudly delivers information at the fastest rate available online. It is able to do so, because the software it uses to perform a search (crawling 'spider') fleetingly searches the most recent outcomes of previous searches and recreates them at a fraction of a second. In other words, Google recreates dominant results and is therefore more likely to reproduce a 'development through lifestyle' narrative rather than a 'trade justice through solidarity' narrative. The success of Google has been aligned with the Web 2.0 web-as-platform principle and suggests that a technology-focused approach to information search is revolutionised by the internet.

There are various dynamics in the relationship between the internet, the internet user and online information. Computer-mediated communication is not exhausted in the user seeking out information, but information is also seeking out the user. The existence of mailing lists supports arguments for the proliferation of information and the viral distribution of narratives (cf. Buchstein, 1997; Clarke, 2000). As Edward points out, the case is simply that "once you've signed up for that you just get lots of emails". Half of the interviewees stated that they were subscribed in at least one fair trade related mailing list. However, subscription to a mailing list does not guarantee consumption of its daily, weekly, or monthly material. Over half of the interviewees who were receiving e-newsletters declared that, while they were subscribed to a mailing list, they were actually disconnected from the material they received:

It's funny, because I'm signed, for example, to the newsletter the Fairtrade Towns and I never read it and that comes into my inbox. ... I keep thinking that I should and I never do. (Melissa)

> If I want a bit of information, I know where to find it. I haven't unsubscribed
> myself from any of those mailing lists, because I still want... I mean I wish I had
> the time to read them, but at the moment I don't. (Maya)

There are also some cases where a couple of interviewees were confused as to whether they actually receive a mailing list or as to how they got subscribed in the first place. Finally, there seemed to be some level of discomfort linked to the overflow of information through mailing lists among a couple of interviewees. Patricia pronounced that "your email box is flooded sometimes!" Similarly, there is a burden accompanying the weightless bulk of online information.

> I always prefer to seek stuff out myself, that's my personal preference. I don't
> like being on lots of mailing lists. Especially [be]cause for my work I'm on
> loads of mailing lists, and you can just get swamped and you start to just pile...
> You're reading this week's newsletter or whatever, but you don't take it in, so I
> prefer to seek out information. If I really wanted to, then I could set up some
> feeds and it would be very easy to get that information delivered. I just haven't
> done it for whatever reason. The thought of a hundred emails and newsletters
> coming into my mailbox does not really fill me with joy! (Anna)

Therefore, the online polyphony of information towards users is constant and prolific, but the intended reception is not guaranteed. The scarcity of time resources necessary to connect to the amounts of information piling up on inboxes obstructs the consumption of mailing list content. Mailing lists are features indicative of the 'cyberbalkanization' of online communities (cf. Buchstein, 1997; Sunstein, 2002; Kahn and Kellner, 2005). While interviewees can be regarded as belonging in the same cyberbalkan peninsula, the homogenous consumption of their information should not be assumed. The move of liquid politics online can further cause precarity of civic engagement.

Another dimension of online interaction concerns social networking. A mode of engaging citizens online has been the Facebook group of the Fairtrade Foundation, where you can become a fan of the Foundation, as well as post pictures and comments pertaining to fair trade. Only two interviewees were involved in this group and claimed to have found it useful in terms of information and even mobilisation.

On Facebook ... there's a fair trade social networking group, so I kind of have been on that and they have different articles on that sometimes or discuss the issues. That's when I found out about how you can get your organisation involved properly and there is some information on that. (Susan)

However, a couple of interviewees stated that they regarded this involvement as superficial.

I don't think I've joined any relevant Facebook groups, because I'm a bit cynical about some Facebook sort of campaigning groups. Because ok, if you joined something that actively promotes a message, fine. But all these online petitions it trivialises things, because people think 'oh yeah, I'm making a difference [be]cause I've joined a Facebook group'. They don't actually understand how the process of say democracy works. People think 'oh, yes, I'm championing a cause, I've joined a Facebook group'. (Wendy)

While Facebook might appear to be appealing to a number of citizens using the internet for coffee activism[105], it does not necessarily present a key space for information gathering or involvement, as mailing lists do for instance. There is little evidence to suggest that the instantaneous nature of information distribution online impacts directly on civic engagement, whether that is online or offline. Undoubtedly, online spaces provide a plethora of information, but a crucial subsequent question concerns the impact of this information.

The use of online information outlets signals a liquid consumption of online information. The majority of interviewees openly celebrated their use of the internet in terms of coffee activism and the ease and accessibility of the medium. This accessibility was celebrated, as one interviewee claimed, because of the possibility of looking for information online and watching television at the same time. This flexibility and the ability to use the internet in a leisurely manner provide a comforting and perhaps even distracting perspective. While half of the interviewees were subscribed on a mailing list, over half of them were not reading it on a regular

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[105] The Fairtrade Foundation's (UK) Facebook group had 1,751 followers on May 4th 2008 and 3,123 followers on February 14th 2010.

basis, while a few were not even sure how they got to be subscribed to it and some felt burdened by the influx of emails. Also, only a small fraction of interviewees were involved in relevant groups through social networking sites, while others were cynical about the use of such sites for campaigning purposes. There is evidently considerable fragmentation in the way that interviewees engage with online information. The only stable variants included the insistence on two usual suspects for the provision of information. The Fairtrade Foundation's website was the most often quoted port of call, while Google followed. The Fairtrade Foundation projects a 'development through lifestyle' narrative, while Google augments the popularity of the Foundation's website through the configuration of its crawling software, despite claims of it being 'the neutral reference librarian" (Stross, 2008: 127).

Sunstein's (2002) suggestion that there needs to be an assessment of the media in relation to how they affect us both as citizens and consumers should be taken into consideration. There are different gears in adapting to a liquid online environment, as is evident through the fragmented structures and uses of the internet. Perhaps the market has jumped on the electronic bandwagon faster than politics. While the circumstances for the democratic renewal of politics are under construction, the full potential of liquid consumerism online is realised faster (Barber, 2007). There is a proliferation of sources for ethical consumerism online, but the practice of online ethical consumption has not been as widespread among the interviewees. However, the grassroots campaigning of online coffee activism generally suggests 'support to fair trade', but this support concerns the commercial enactment of civic engagement (Chapter 8). This has resulted in the mobilisation of numerous ethical consumers. The next part of this chapter explores the views of interviewees regarding online and offline ethical consumerism and their political attributes.

9.4 A Politics Present? Ethical Consumerism as Political Expression

I think it's a really interesting movement, fair trade, because it's a mix of politics and consumerism. (Joanna)

This section further explores the relationship between civic and consumer duty, while underlining the empowering perception of ethical consumerism as a form of political expression. Fair trade is an amalgam of civic engagement and selective (ethical) consumption (Chapter 3). The perspectives of interviewees regarding their ethical consumption practices are explored here in terms of their conscious acknowledgement of the interplay between political articulation and consumer enactment. This section considers the civic side of consumption in coffee activism in an attempt to search for the citizens' lost political soul (Sassi, 2001) at spaces beyond the suspected. Demonstrating reflexivity towards the spirit of contemporary times, citizens appear to be making political claims elsewhere; the marketplace is becoming a place of pilgrimage for the voicing of political claims where citizens demonstrate their preference for branded as ethically produced commodities over others (cf. Nava, 1991; Micheletti *et al*, 2004). The strength of ethical consumerism lies in factors such as convenience, availability and degrees of integration into everyday life. Hitherto, ethical consumerism presents a form of liquid politics which is adapted to citizens' unofficial and unstructured political practices.

The interviewees articulated two types of responses to the enquiry into their ethical purchasing habits. On the whole, citizens (20 out of 30) claimed to be making an effort to choose fair trade over other types of products in an active attempt to support the movement, while some citizens (10 out of 30) were eager to buy fair trade products when they were readily available and easily accessible. The latter type of answer corresponds with research suggesting the fragmentation of ethical consumerism as an ethic of everyday self-conduct (Barnett *et al*, 2005a). In the first case, interviewees defined themselves as active ethical consumers:

> I'd say I was a very active consumer... If I had two identical products in front of me and one was fair trade and one wasn't, I'd buy the fair trade one. Probably some people have come over to thinking about fair trade by picking up fair trade tea from the shelf instead of the normal tea and that's them doing their bit and that's great, but it sort of doesn't require them to change any other habits or go out of their way to do anything. It's just in the supermarket, which is great and in a way is how it should be. (Wendy)

I'd say I'm more kind of active as a consumer, that's how I show, demonstrate, my commitment to fair trade.... Since ten to fifteen years or something I've always bought fair trade when it was available and always tried to buy sugar, coffee, tea all that kind of stuff. And, also, I always wondered why it was for such a long time such a narrow area and why should it only be coffee and tea that's fair trade? Bananas should be [fair trade], every vegetable, every fruit, every flower. (Emily)

Almost all of the citizens who made an active choice to support the fair trade movement and were willing to go out of their way to support it were involved in a local campaigning group, either through their borough or through their church or even through both. These types of ethical consumption practices did not just rest in consuming what was there on the shelves of the supermarkets, but was also connected to the need for further action. This type of consumer corresponds to Newholm's (1999) typology of the ethical consumer as *integrator*. Newholm (1999) distinguishes between three types of ethical consumers (for an extended discussion, see Chapter 3). In brief, distancers resort to boycotting, integrators resort to ethical consumerism and rationalisers consume ethically without becoming integrators. In the case of the citizens interviewed, integrators were also involved in structures which promoted civic engagement beyond political consumerism.

The other type of ethical consumers, then, includes the rationalisers. This type of ethical consumer uses already available spaces for consumption, such as the supermarket or the church stall to practice ethical consumption.

I don't always get as much as I would like. [At] the church we have a stall every month and so I get it from Traidcraft and, if I got time on a Saturday, the Fair Enough shop has got quite a few things as well and I'll probably go there, but at the moment I don't have time and I try to do rush shopping on a Friday night coming home from work and I go to Sainsbury's. So, again, if I can get something that I need like sometimes tea, but it depends what they've got- I used to have another shop [where] I would buy tea from, but that's closed, so I have to look around. I think sometimes I've just got to buy something and I don't have time to look for it, which is a bit disappointing really. (Cynthia)

I hate to say it, but mainly [I consume ethically in] the supermarket. We try to do as much shopping we can do locally, but we still haven't got to the stage, my partner and I, where we do everything locally. That's what we're aiming for. So, it's the supermarket and to be honest we shop in Sainsbury's and they do have quite a good range of fair trade products. So, we always go towards the fair trade products when we shop there. The other thing is, you know, there were some eco-shops scattered around London as well. There's one near where I live and I like to go there. (Anna)

Consumer citizenship is convenient for a number of reasons. The mainstreaming of fair trade through the placements of such products in supermarket shelves has facilitated convenience for this group of ethical consumers. However, there seems to be a strong dedication to practicing ethical consumption, which makes the majority of interviewees go out of their way to enact it. Whether these practices belong to the 'development through lifestyle' narrative or the 'solidarity through trade justice' narrative is a different story. As I have argued in Chapter 8, the two narratives are typically found in variations of organisations, but there is a strong tendency for the promotion of the first type, which is less polemic and more politically vague in its message.

Regardless of the degree of integration of ethical consumerism into their consumer lifestyle, the majority of interviewees (22 out of 30) perceived ethical consumption as an act of political connotations or 'politics with a small p'.

[Ethical consumption is] political with a small p, because you're making a choice to do something; to buy fair trade goods. (Harriet)

[Involvement in ethical consumption is] not political with a capital P, but I'm making a decision to try and do what I can at that point to ensure that someone else gets a fair deal and I think that is political. (Anna)

This is particularly indicative of the perspective of ethical consumption as a form of 'sub-politics' (cf. Beck, 1997; Hier, 2008). The association between rallying or lobbying MPs and fair trade campaigning was explicitly made:

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I could go and do lots of rallies in parliament and constantly write to my MP and stuff, but it's not something I choose to do really. Other people prefer to do that and I prefer to bang the fair trade drum to people all the time and run a stall and keep telling people and being the figurehead in church that people know, if they've got fair trade questions, they can come and ask me. (Katherine)

As a 'powerful site for politics' (Micheletti *et al*, 2004: ix), the marketplace is regarded as empowering by interviewees. The sophistication of consumption into types of ethical consumption affirms that civic engagement has diffused in private and market arenas. Scammell argues that "a model of citizenship, with some of the classical republican dimensions of civic duty, public-spiritedness, and self-education, is an increasingly apt description of consumer behavior" (2000: 352). Consumer citizenship in the case of coffee activism occurs predominantly through acts of ethical consumption, as well as participation in a grassroots movement which works independently from the patronage of the Fairtrade Foundation, but within the narrative boundaries dictated by it and with promotional material provided by it. Citizens' critique of conventional trade is expressed through acts of ethical consumption, but seldom enacted through acts such as campaigning or other types of protesting. Their activism is often filtered through the signing of petitions or lobbying the local store manager to stock more fair trade products (so that fair trade becomes more *competitive* with free trade). There is, therefore, reluctance around fair trade vis-à-vis free trade – citizens are not economic experts capable of meaningfully assessing the two models, but they understand a simple narrative or 'normative conclusion' (Polletta, 2006) which suggests, for instance, that the more fair trade coffee you buy, the more coffee farmers benefit.

Less observable was the lack of sharing this view; some (8 out of 30) interviewees did not believe that their involvement in coffee activism is inherently political.

It feels like it is less political, it's more just about... fundamental beliefs that you have ... I don't see them as being overtly political. It's just that's what I believe in and it's not to do with politics... I don't know. (Joanna)

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My experience is [that] people are sometimes interested in politics, but they never want to be active. So, I guess it's a bit like armchair activism. ... You don't have to go canvassing door to door. You just buy some bananas or some tea, and in quotations "make a difference" if you like. (Edward)

I think it's one of those things that it's not a particularly contentious issue, so you're not going to annoy people in the same way that you might, if you were to open a case on some other things that people do not agree with so much. And it's more a case of raising awareness and getting people to think [be]cause a lot of people don't think when they engage in consumerism, they just go and buy stuff. (Wendy)

This is a direct declaration of the denial of the enveloping political aspect of coffee activism. Although this remains a faint signal of the depoliticisation on the movement, in combination with the gradual fading away of the agonistic narrative of coffee activism (Chapter 6), it presents a hint of the perplexities of liquid politics. While some citizens are critical of the permeation of consumerism in fair trade, one interviewee suggested that fair trade consumption should not be regarded as a political outlet.

I would agree more to it actually to have its own spirit, its own motor, if it works by itself, not if it's a tool of politics. I think that's why fair trade organisations have grown very much. Because it hasn't been a tool of politics, it's actually a tool of people to express themselves. (Gabriella)

The idea that the market is a mechanism which provides citizens with choices and outlets for expression through consumption is directly linked to the political repertoires of neoliberalism (Schmookler, 1993). Beyond the nature of political empowerment through the marketplace and the uneasy relationship with neoliberalism which it demonstrates, other conditions for the politicisation of consumption include sustainability and intentionality of action, as well as collective enactment (Chapter 3). Sustainability and intentionality appear to be fulfilled as citizens realise the civic nature of ethical consumption and primarily choose to be involved beyond their comfort levels. Collective individualism also appears typical based on the fact that

most interviewees were involved in some type of civic engagement beyond the marketplace.

Ethical consumption allows citizens to believe that they are engaging in a political act through which they voice their preference towards a fair model of trade, but not necessarily their opposition to the current model of free trade. A question regarding the relationship between fair trade and free trade was confusing to some interviewees (5 out of 30).

> I'm not an economic expert for one and ... I don't know, ... if we leap from a capitalist market to a completely fair trade market, I don't know if that'll work. ... I do understand why capitalism exists ... I also know that we're never going to have 100% fair trade market and, as far as I see it, however much I can increase what we do have is a good thing [be]cause I know we're never ever going to abolish free trade. It's not going to happen. But I also think, on a political level, I'm sure there are lessons to be learnt from fair trade and there's no reason why free trade and world capitalism could be not modified or at least have some kind of regulation put in place based on the success of fair trade which helps regulate it slightly. I mean completely free trade is not fair basically, it's not fair. It's a biased market, but what we're talking about it's not only politics, it's multinational companies, that's what we're talking about changing and they are the force that drives everything. So I don't know. I mean it's just such a massive thing. (Melissa)

Therefore, it can be argued that the fair trade movement does not present citizens with a clearly defined political goal. Ethical consumerism is more frequently than not viewed as a legitimate and politically charged arena, where their 'economic votes' can be cast. Fridell argues that fair trade can operate as a "symbolic tool to critique conventional trade" (2007: 270), but is disapproving of uncritical enthusiasm over its potential to politically empower citizens. The celebration of ethical consumerism as a politically valid act should not be swiftly related to economic voting. When it does, it belongs to the repertoires of economism and 'banal cosmopolitanism' (Beck, 2002) (Chapter 2). As discussed below, there is an increasing interest in international politics, which suggests an awareness of global belonging and interdependence. This relates coffee activism to debates around cosmopolitan citizenship (cf. Stevenson,

2003; Beck, 2006; Kivisto and Faist, 2007). The adjusting of citizens' political lenses to a more global focus is explored in the next section.

9.5 A Politics Past? The 'Double Imagination' of Consumer Citizenship

Although the debates around contemporary citizenship are contested, there is a dominant argument on the decline of public space (Chapter 2). In coffee activism, this has been evident through the projection of consumer power as a politically empowering variable. A politics more relevant to the configurations of society has been growing despite – and perhaps at the expense of – the general dissatisfaction with the political parliamentary modus operandi. While there seems to be a significant gaining of distance from civic habits of the past (such as voting in General or Borough or European elections, participating in local governmental groups, or protesting), civic engagement is taking place elsewhere. The 'civic dynamics of consumption' (Trentmann, 2007: 28) have been brought to play in order to conceptualise the broadening of the political beyond national imagination through the 'double imagination' (Beck, 2002) of cosmopolitanism, as well as the political claims of the marketplace (cf. Micheletti *et al*, 2004). Such forms of civic engagement have been fully embraced by coffee activism where people do not follow conventional avenues for political expression, but engage within the marketplace to make transnational political claims. This section aims to address the relationship between enactments of 'acts of citizenship' (Isin and Nielsen, 2008) such as ethical consumption and traditional forms of political participation such as involvement in political parties, groups or organisations and the electoral process.

None of the interviewees currently belong to a political party and four out of thirty stated that they used to be, but now are not. Three out of four interviewees who declared having been members of a political party used to belong to the Labour Party, while one of them used to belong to the Liberal Democratic Party. The disassociation of interviewees from a 'solid' political activation is indicative of the prevalence of a liquid politics. Their disengagement with their previous political party membership was generally attributed to disappointment, which is typical of those engaging in political consumerism (cf. Micheletti *et al*, 2004).

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I've been involved with the Labour Party ... in the past, but not anymore. I got cross with them and went off! About fifteen years ago, perhaps a bit more than that, I was involved with the Labour Party and I was actually chair of this particular ward in which I lived, but I must have left probably about two or three years after that. (Dorothy)

The disassociation with public political life is evident from the fact that the majority of interviewees (26 out of 30) have never been members of a political party. Distrust of the parliamentary structures of politics was often quoted as the reason for this political abstinence.

I've got to be honest; I'm not a massively political person. I don't really agree with the politics a lot of the political parties have got. I tend to kind of have my own kind of politics and my own philosophy. I might take something from say like a labour mandate or even a conservative mandate or a liberal mandate or a green mandate. ... You know, I don't really trust a lot of the politics of the main players at the moment. (Sandra)

In this sense, the politics of fair trade offer a space where citizens feel more confident to be trustful.

I think there are so many negative things to politics as well and to being involved in it, and the reasons people get involved in it and the people who are involved in it. It's not an institution I would like to be associated with; it's not an institution I would like to be embedded within, which is why I like fair trade. Because that's an area I don't see any negatives to it. (Melissa)

Perhaps a reason for the trust interviewees placed in fair trade was their feeling of empowerment through individual choice.

I suppose I would say I'm part of the modern trend of kind of personal politics, rather than party politics. So, kind of various issues I would buy into on a personal level, but I don't necessarily feel are offered as a sweep by any one

party, and I think that for a lot of people has been one of the reasons that fair trade and these sort of organisations are so successful [is] because they offer you as an individual the opportunity to do something rather than signing up to an organisation and delegating your power, sort of to speak, to them. (Amanda)

It was also rare for interviewees to be affiliated with a political group or organisation. One interviewee mentioned having been involved with the trade unions movement.

However, regardless of the existence or absence of affiliation with a political organisation, almost all interviewees (28 out of 30) pronounced participation in the electoral process.

I'm not a particularly political person. I always vote, because I think that you should and you can't complain if you don't. Not that I necessarily vote for the people that are actually successful. So, yeah, I wouldn't say I'm particularly political. (Katherine)

I definitely vote and I think that's really important. I am not involved in any groups, but I am not really an active campaigner on the things that I believe in. I believe in them in the choices I make ... but I don't actively belong in a group in the rest of my time. (Joanna)

I do [vote]. I don't just kind of ignore everything that's going on. I will vote absolutely. And locally I'll also vote, but I don't really get involved, I don't go to any meetings, I don't know who my chancellors are. (Anna)

Citizens involved in coffee activism and ethical consumerism seem to be casting their vote in both the public space and the market space. Therefore, in parallel to the registered attachment to a political party is a dedication to some of the classical ways of engaging in traditional political life. In relation to a solidified political engagement, liquid political engagement thus contains both the expression of respect towards specific forms of political participation, such as voting, as well as the unrestrained expression of political opinion in specific forms of civic engagement, such as ethical consumption.

The decline of sustained participation in national politics in the form of political membership is then met by an argued global awareness, which relates to arguments on cosmopolitan citizenship (cf. Hill, 2000; Held, 2003; Beck, 2006). Littler (2009) makes the point that this is characteristic of ethical consumers. When asked if they were more interested in national or international issues most of the interviewees (16 out of 30) expressed higher interest in the international political scene.

> I keep up with what's going on, but I'm not at all involved. I don't belong to any political party. To be honest, because of my job and my interests anyway, I do consider myself as more of a global personal with a global focus rather than a national focus. So, obviously what's happening in the UK directly affects me my family my friends and I do take an interest in it, but I'm not focused on what the Tories are doing or the Labour Party are doing. ... I do try to keep up with international news just so I know what's going on and I can be more informed about what's going on in the world. So, I see myself more of a world citizen, rather than a UK citizen and I think along with that comes an interest more in global issues, rather than just issues that affect the UK. (Anna)

> I'm obviously interested in national issues, but I tend to, actually, when I'm reading the newspaper, turn to – unless there's something that grabs my attention – ... the international section of the newspaper, before reading the national section. (Abigail)

Several citizens (6 out of 30) also expressed an immediate interest in national politics. Attention to international politics does not translate in to a complete disassociation of one's geographic politics:

> [I'm interested in] local and international [politics], but not national. I think locally I guess because I feel I have more chance making a difference in my votes and internationally, because it's so important. Nationally, I feel very ambivalent about, because I think honestly it's not going to make much difference how I vote and also that the difference that it makes isn't going to be that. (Melissa)

There is, subsequently, reason to believe that local politics are not irrelevant in the fair trade cause, particularly when considering that eighteen out of thirty interviewees were active in their local campaigns. In conclusion, in terms of traditional political participation, interviewees are rarely actively engaged in a political party, group or organisation, despite their strong confidence in the electoral democratic process. The politics of fair trade present one of several alternative ways in which citizens are turning to, due to a number of factors such as the disappointment or disengagement with formal national political landscapes.

The disconnection from national politics has been met by the acceleration of a cosmopolitan outlook, but does not amount to a disconnection from political participation, such as in the voting process, or disengagement from the local levels, such as organising locally to tackle local issues. Ethical consumers are becoming politically sensitive to global events and developments; this indicates a growing sense of cosmopolitan sensitivity, 'cosmopolitan empathy' (Beck, 2006) or 'cosmopolitan caring' (Littler, 2009), which is grounded and enacted locally within various physical spaces. The mechanism which facilitates this cosmopolitan interaction is the marketplace. In the case of fair trade, the notion of banal cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2002) suggests that political cosmopolitan consciousness is restricted to the enactment of a consumer right to support the impoverished farmers of the global South through ethical purchases; this is cosmopolitan sympathy, but cannot be translated to cosmopolitan empathy. Cosmopolitan sympathy, in other words, is the expression of kindness through support of the fair trade market, while cosmopolitan empathy is a more engaged expression of solidarity through support to the market, as well as the movement.

Heilbroner claims that "the ethos of 'every man for himself' reflects the market mentality" (1992: 89). A neoliberal mentality isolates the individual from the collective. Political consumerism is different to market mentality in the sense that 'consumer politics is about every*one* [italics in original text]' (Fine, 2006: 305). The dynamics of individualisation (Mouffe, 2005) versus collectivity are therefore meshed. The citizen consumer treads alone in the streets (and markets) of the mediapolis while they are re-constructed and regarded as "self-interested disparate individuals" (Root, 2007: 36). Here lies the fundamental paradox of consumer action: while it is individually enacted, it is collectively effective. This conceptualisation of

collective individualism is also evident among interviewees (16 out of 30) who were asked their opinion on ethical consumerism as a potentially political variable.

I think me as an individual no [I can not make a change as a consumer], but I think us, collectively, yes. ... Now you can walk in a supermarket and you can do all your shopping by putting up the fair trade logo. Whether that has that made a change I don't necessarily know, but it's definitely made citizens more aware of the issues. So, I mean I'm hoping that even if it's only awareness, even if it's only an increased awareness, that it has definitely induced some change. (Maya)

I do think consumer power is enormous. I'm a big believer in that. I'm a big believer that you make a statement with what you buy, and where you buy and who you buy it from, massively, which is why, as far as I'm concerned, by encouraging people to buy fair trade that's helping. That will also help push other political agendas, because the more people do it, the more successful it becomes as a money-making enterprise, the more it will become noticed. (Melissa)

I do [think ethical consumption is political], I mean I hope so. I hope that the more people buy ethical products and fair trade products, the more the supermarkets are taking note. Even I have noticed, for example, in a lot of supermarkets there are a lot more fair trade products and I mean I hope that that's partly to do with the fact that they see people buying them, so they think we have to buy more of these products. (Sophie)

This enthusiasm is based on the assumption that, if individuals support the fair trade market, they are contributing to the amelioration of the fair trade cause. Despite the faith placed in collectivity, however, interviewees did not contest the notion that consumers and businesses are the social agents of justice (cf. O'Neill, 2001; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008). The normative narratives of fair trade in particular, contradict the uncertainty of the political domain (Bauman, 1999) through a form of direct politics; there is seeming immediacy in the exercise of ethical consumption where each purchase can be translated to a further contribution to the benefit of coffee

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farmers in the country of origin of the product. In this manner, it is possible to argue that the realm for voicing political concerns is increasingly shifted towards the market.

9.6 Conclusion: Liquid Politics in the Mediapolis

In this chapter, the exploration of the politics of space concerns the connections which impact civic engagement as well as the arenas where it is enacted. While the online efforts for mobilisation have not been prominent (Chapter 8), offline mobilisation is more purposeful. Social spaces, spaces of worship and spaces of education are more likely to mobilise and to further engage citizens in coffee activism. The relationship between faith groups and the fair trade movement has been particularly significant, as it attaches its strong moral position to the ethics of consumption which complies with the dominant fair trade narrative. Therefore, the grassroots mobilisation of the fair trade movement has also impacted on its mainstreaming. The contradictions arising between the forces of online and offline political participation signify the slow development of various forms of coffee activism in terms of internet politics. The growth of structures which can facilitate online information, organisation and action does not guarantee the attraction of citizens in these online spaces. Offline spaces such as the church or the local borough, agents of traditional political gathering, remain more powerful in the mobilisation of citizens. Liquid politics thus does not equal online politics, but rather the interplay between solid and liquid manifestations of civic engagement, as well as between online organisational practices and offline civic actions.

I also examined how interest in fair trade is sustained. The majority of the interviewees celebrated the internet as the first space where they turn to in order to become informed. In liquid life, this communication is mostly fleeting and ephemeral. For interviewees, online civic engagement was fragmented and reduced to fleeting interaction with already familiar websites such as the Fairtrade Foundation's website and Google. The Fairtrade Foundation promotes a 'development through lifestyle' narrative and Google reproduces that narrative due to its technologically deterministic searching mechanism. These preferences comprised

the most solid ties which interviewees have with information resources. As for mailing lists, while most interviewees were subscribed, they admitted to not being able to consume the magnitude of information reaching their inboxes on a frequent basis. Therefore not only is information fragmented, but its consumption is precarious. Once more, the internet does not prove to be a medium which can promote and sustain political engagement, but rather a collection of spaces where information can be sought for, organisation can be built and action can be pursued. However, the use of the medium by engaged citizens is not in accordance to the abundance of these spaces. Additionally, there is not much evidence suggesting the engaging potential of social networking sites.

The question of the space of politics concerned the understanding of a politics past, in the sense of traditional political engagement, and a politics present, in the sense of ethical consumerism and fair trade campaigning. One of my respondents underlined that "politics is everywhere". In liquid life, the political is to be found in the shadows of every street and even in the price tags of every product in the everyday choices we make. A form of political expression is diffused into private actions and settings. In this sense, political expression can be regarded as an individualised/privatised or a marketised/privatised form of politics. In the first case, civic engagement is regarded as a form of political expression which is customisable to the conveniences of daily life and adapted to the beliefs of each political individual. In the second case, what would traditionally be considered a civic duty is regarded as a moral duty and, rather than being expressed in the public space, it is enacted in the market space. The entry of private businesses into the fair trade market has facilitated its widespread reception and enactment. The degree to which a politics of consumption remains symbolic or actualised, physical or virtual, temporary or permanent, frames different types of questions around that statement. For citizens, ethical consumerism constitutes a quick, easy and satisfactory way of being moral in their everyday lives. While it does not require more effort than the mere purchase of ethically produced and sourced goods, the majority of citizens who take time off their lives to go to fair trade events are also usually active in a local context, whether that is a stirring/campaigning group or a church. Politics can therefore be found in spaces as diverse as supermarkets shelves and charity shops, in churches and in boroughs, in websites and now more prominently in the media.

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Ethical consumerism is regarded as an empowering tool for political expression, through the marketplace, reproducing the legitimacy of the free trade market as one that is able to be socially conscious. The relationship between free and fair trade was not clear for all of the interviewees. Traditional avenues for political expression were only active in the case of voting, which was deemed important for the majority of interviewees. However, none of them were engaged in a political party, group or organisation. The decline of interest in national politics has been met by a rise of interest in international issues. The enactment of civic duty with regards to these issues was predominantly ethical consumption. Also, cosmopolitan sensitivities are evident, but their enactment is more often than not reduced to market-mediated forms of expression. I underline the role of mediation in the creation and sustenance of a political interest and present a both 'solid' and 'liquid' picture of politics in the conditions of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000). Individualisation is constituted in the mediapolis; from the reception of information to the ethical consumption, citizen consumers are almost always alone. But they are not alone when they form locally-based groups, when they organise or participate in coffee mornings, fair trade breakfasts, church or school events, bazaars and sales events, fashion or art shows, talks or campaigns. They are not alone when they consider that their actions have a collective impact. They are not alone when they are told that they are a powerful category in determining global justice. There is a strange consciousness of collectivity which, though invisible, is very rooted in this individuality and which I have identified as collective individualism. Moreover, there is a lurking link between individualisation and cosmopolitanism, which traditionally was an isolating category (Silverstone, 2007).

In the high streets of the mediapolis, a dominant (though politically latent) narrative is emerging. The attraction of political consumerism is based on factors such as the normative narrative of fair trade, its accessibility in the supermarket shelves and the familiar spaces of cafés, the immediacy of an individual decision and the emotional grasp of cosmopolitan sensitivity. The practice of politics is characterised by diverse parameters which can stabilise or disorient participation online and offline, in the political space and in the market space. The following chapter threads together the core themes of this thesis and discusses questions of articulating, framing and mediating civic engagement in a politics as liquid as coffee.

Chapter 10

Conclusion:

Consuming Coffee, Being Political?

10.1 Prologue: The Theoretical Frameworks of this Project

In this thesis, I have problematised the notion of civic engagement in contemporary advanced capitalist societies within the concurrent wider debates on the decline and the online mediation of political life. After having reviewed fundamental claims about what it means to be political nowadays, I turned my attention to alternative forms of political participation and the current debates on extra-parliamentary politics in relation to internet politics. Essentially the story narrated attempts to explore where people place their politics and what is the significance of those actions and spaces. By examining coffee activism as a case where civic engagement is often equated to mere participation in the ethical marketplace or ethical consumption, I have explored the implications of acts of political consumerism as it has been called in terms of the employment of the internet. The exploration of the online mediation of coffee activism is deemed important, since as Bennett (2000) has argued, types of civic engagement are better understood by the analysis of communication patterns around which they are facilitated. Moreover, I have interrogated political consumerism in terms of the wider framework of market-driven politics in the United Kingdom and I have scrutinised what I perceive as a troubled relationship between the politics of consumption and the marketisation of politics. This thesis examines coffee activism online and offline, in the spaces of politics and the spaces of markets, in the actions and opinions of individuals, groups and organisations.

My enquiry, therefore, concerns the mediation of contemporary political life through the prism of coffee activism. Coffee activism proved to be a suitable case for examining forms of participation through their online and offline availability and enactment. I have used this term to describe a diverse pool of actors involved in trade

justice, spanning from anarchist and solidarity groups to campaigning and grassroots organisations. This thesis has explored empirical evidence to increase an understanding of certain variances of internet politics for political communication and mobilisation. By selecting such a popular form of civic engagement as the driver of my analysis, I have tackled some of the promises and fallacies of internet politics. The research questions address the structures and narratives of the facilitation and manifestation of coffee activism online. Moreover, I discovered that the offline context of coffee activism is much stronger and more effective in terms of political organisation and mobilisation. It took no less than three theoretical chapters to draw a picture of the contexts of coffee activism. In this manner, I approached the complexities of a contemporary form of participation from three different angles: from a wider political context (Chapter 2), from the prism of a new phenomenon pertaining to the politics of consumption (Chapter 3) and from the point of view of the mediation of extra-parliamentary political life (Chapter 4).

I have argued that there is a liquidity permeating contemporary politics, a politics very much rooted in the mediapolis (Silverstone, 2007) and prone to practices of consumption. While Bauman (2000, 2005) views liquid modernity as detrimental to political life, I argue for a constructive understanding of liquid politics. While traditional forms of political participation appear to be waning, different forms of engagement are popularly emerging (Chapter 2). In this spirit, the concept of citizenship is being thoroughly revised to adapt to the transformations in the social world. A number of constructive studies have been dedicated to the understanding of cultural citizenship in this light (Stevenson, 2003; Miller, 2007; Couldry *et al*, 2010), thus signifying a theoretical shift in conceptualising the operation of individuals within both the space of politics and the space of consumption. The most significant adaptation is the recognition of – or resistance to – the concept and reality of neoliberal globalisation. An operationalisation of coffee activism in this research enables the discussion of the fluidity and paradoxes which characterise contemporary forms of activism, empowerment, engagement and participation.

10.2 A Synopsis of the Findings and Reflections

The first question which guided this research solicited answers directly regarding the mediation of contemporary politics. With the internet being employed by a variety of socio-political and economic actors and with a variety of speeds of adaptation to the online world, the promises of Web 2.0 appear to be realised only for those actors who enjoy or who can employ pertinent expertise. Citizens enjoy the fruits of the platform-like characteristics of the internet, such as the now dominant Google, social networking platforms, and the seemingly all-encompassing YouTube. However, cyberactivists' websites do not appear crucial for purposes of recruitment, organisation or deliberation. The use of the internet in the case of coffee activism is extremely linear and basic, which suggests that it only presents a 'virtual leaflet', an additional source of (electronic) information. In the cases examined, the internet does not appear to be realising the hopes and dreams for the revolutionising of political or dialectic communication, or mobilisation. In coffee activism, mobilisation is fluid, spread by word of mouth, as well as email. Narratives spread online in much faster, cost-effective and creative ways and can sustain a grassroots movement despite the absence of frequent face-to-face communication. Internet politics and new media were meant to be a match made in heaven (cf. Rheingold, 1993). The reality of it, however, is that the potential of this relationship is not always realised. In so far as this research has proven, while the majority of case studies have a public online façade in the form of a website, they do not often update it. Also, while the majority of citizens claimed to be subscribed to a number of mailing lists, they also admitted to not having time to read all the materials sent to them. In terms of political participation, there is a quiet withdrawal from national politics and a turn to global issues facilitated by acts of ethical consumption. Moreover, there is an augmentation of consumer-driven calls for action available online, where even offline participation is framed in consumer lingo. Different activists frame the rhetoric of participation in the case of coffee activism differently. There is a gradation of stories narrated online in the websites of the examined cases. The fallacy of the internet in revolutionising political life might be evident in the fact that it has also facilitated the spreading of a very powerful consumer narrative, which creates tensions in more alternative expressions of politics that functions in opposition to a neoliberal framework.

The second question posed concerned the tensions involved in a politics of consumption. Consumer citizenship appears to be empowering in many ways, as it enables the proliferation of civic life both online and offline and in both political and market spaces. There is a strong belief in the power of an economic vote (in the form of an ethical purchase), and a confidence gained by the immediacy of consumer politics. But, while political consumerism is empowering, its full potential has not yet been realised. Ethical consumption is regarded as politically empowering, but there is quite a lot of vagueness in terms of the political goal of the movement. It has not succeeded in provoking probing questions and initiating direct actions, rather than providing individuals with the satisfaction in their belief that they have taken a small step towards social change through their shopping basket. Opportunities for political expression grow with the rise of consumer citizenship, and citizens feel politically empowered to act as economic voters through their positive or negative political consumerism acts. However, the case is more often than not that their actions remain restricted in the marketplace, the foundation of which suggests the neoliberal grounding of citizenship. I have suggested that through the contextualisation of coffee activism within the framework of neoliberalism a certain type of fetishisation of its politics has been taking place (Chapter 7). The ostensible power of political consumerism can also be seen as dictated by the capitalist system, where the mainstreaming of coffee activism has resulted in certain symbolic compromises (Chapter 6). The idea of the marketopoly, a concept which I introduce in this thesis, is related to the reign of the market over the politics of coffee activism through a persistent emphasis on consumption that pervades and overwhelms political context. This is directly relevant to the dominance of neoliberalism.

Additionally, I have argued that the debility of political life as we knew it has been influenced by a variety of changes in the social, political and economic landscape, coloured by a medley of alternative political practices and facilitated by the fluid, one-click-nature of online spaces (Chapters 2 and 4). I have noted that there is a shift away from a national scope of political participation and towards an international outlook of political affairs. There is a variety of alternative forms of civic engagement in the case of coffee activism. While such types of engagement are concerned with public life, the differentiation with previous typical forms of civic engagement means that citizens engaged in coffee activism are concerned with global rather than national political life. Moreover, the dynamics of the individual vis-à-vis

the collective have also transformed. There is the sense of empowerment in voicing concerns over social issues beyond the sphere of the nation, which qualifies for the growth of global citizenship. However, the dynamics of this manifestation in terms of the individual/collective binary are paradoxical. While there appears to be a collective disposition towards an issue such as coffee activism, the individualisation which characterises acts of civic engagement is strong, as well as elusive. These structural questions are posed to coffee activism in order to conceptualise a manifestation of contemporary politics. In the following sections, I outline the key findings of this research. The findings of this project can be broadly mapped out in terms of the liquification and mediation of politics, and the diffusion between public and private spaces, as well as the dominance of the marketopoly.

10.3 A Politics Liquid like Coffee

Throughout this work, I have utilised Bauman's (2000, 2005, 2007) take on liquid modernity, life, and times in order to argue for the notion of a liquid politics in the case of coffee activism. Bauman has argued for the waning of political life under the unstable, unsustained and uncertain directions of individuals in the global terrain. I have illustrated through the analysis of my data that liquid politics is possible. This concept in this case contains a series of contradictions ranging from the spaces of to the forms of participation in political life. What distinguishes the pictures of liquid politics which this thesis has painted from other types of arguments on the contemporary disposition of political life concerns the definition and modality of politics, as well as the relationship between the concept of politics and that of democracy. Liquid politics is the sum of civic types of action which are included or not included in institutionalised practices. It is a politics which includes practices which are argued to wither under the conditions of liquid life. For instance, liquid politics envelops the process of partaking in the electoral process, as the majority of citizens who were interviewed declared their devoted attention to voting. It is also a politics which includes practices which go beyond the terrain of parliamentary politics. Most importantly, it is a politics which is adopted and adapted at variant rhythms. Liquid politics is customisable and prone to the individualised experience.

In this sense, the concept of the political, the overarching base which concerns agencies participating in some form of organised action to bring upon social change, is characterised by degrees of fragmentation which concern the parameters of time and devotion. Liquid politics is a politics dictated by unruly, yet to variant extents, devoted participation in a variety of arenas in order to reformulate the rules of the political game.

Liquid politics also highly signifies an ephemeral and fragmented politics. Liquid citizenship can be evident in many non-exclusive or non-excluding avatars; for instance, in Isin and Nielsen's (2008) terms the consumer citizen, the ecological citizen, and the cosmopolitan citizen can be different facades of the same political individual. Moreover, liquid citizenship is manifest in a variety of spaces, both public and private. Liquid politics can be overtaken by the private, both in the sense of the citizen as an entity of powerful agency, but also in terms of private interests going public. Another fundamental element of the conceptualisation of liquid politics is, therefore, characterised by the changing relationship between the public and the private. The primary settings of politics are blurred between political and market spaces, where participation is predominantly individual, but seeking collective enactment. Purchasing is an individual act; ethical purchasing is also individually conducted, but ethical consumers are more aware of the importance of more ethical consumers purchasing the same products which they are also purchasing. In that manner, ethical consumption is often equated to economic voting. This, in its turn, concerns the conceptualisation of democracy under liquid politics. The concept of democracy is included in liquid politics, as one of the fundamental aspects of political activity and touches upon numerous variations of civic engagement. Coffee activism belongs to a wider network of political activism which aim to promote democratic values on a global context. However, the increasing identification of civic engagement to ethical consumption, an inherently economic activity, creates disturbance in the classic Marxist perception of the economic and the political base as separate. In this light, while the politicisation of consumption might be indicative of the variant directions of liquid politics, the democratisation of consumption must remain under question. In any case, the politicisation of consumption and the dynamics of individualisation are demonstrative of the shifts which have impacted civic life.

Political consumerism exists amongst the grey areas of public engagement. My contention remains that only through the examination of specific instances of civic culture is the articulation of meaningful conclusions possible. Coffee activism presents an interesting case to examine the various distributions of civic and consumer attention online and offline. Offline, there is a long history of contention spanning from the middle of the twentieth century, while online there is a wealth of information and ports of call for action regarding this issue-based type of activism. However, the space for contesting the generalisation of these findings is open. Fair trade is only one of the many types of ethical consumerism, which include organic and vegetarian markets, as well as other socially and environmentally conscious initiatives (Chapter 3). The case of fair trade remains particularly interesting, as its claims – be they for political expression rather than further action – appear stronger in relation to any of the other types of ethical consumption narratives. Moreover, the persistence in the fair trade market appeared to have endured the lash of the credit crunch more than other types of ethical consumption (Chapter 7). Thereby, the choice for the exploration of coffee activism has been distinctive, but the conclusions which are drawn from it can reflect the wider dynamics of the interactions between politics and markets.

The politicisation of consumption has been gaining wide recognition through a variety of strategies and avenues. The politics of ethical consumption are making their presence felt either through rising annual growth rates or by the unequivocal support of ethical consumers. The rationality of political involvement through selective consumption practices is being assumed on the level of individuals, while activists appear sceptical of the consumer narcissism which is inescapably some part of any consumption practice, as well as the 'alternative hedonism' (Soper, 2004) which can be related to ethical consumption practices. Most crucially, these changes have impacted our understanding of the political as a diffusing notion, prone to transformation and creativity, but also appropriation. An argument can be voiced about the rationalisation of the political by the economic online and offline. In the virtual and the material world, coffee activism is being promoted as a good cause, which is accessible and open to all through a variety of political and private spaces and outlets. What the internet appears to be offering is merely an additional channel for information distribution (Chapter 8). I have presented evidence which suggests that, historically, coffee activism has been altered significantly in terms of its

relationship to neoliberalism and neoliberal politics (Chapter 7). Moreover, the political is being replaced by its economic counterpart in the case of coffee activism; evidence for this is to be found in the mobilisation calls of the movement, which are leaning heavily towards positive consumer choice rather than agonistic political choice (Chapter 8). Finally, the politicisation of consumption is consensually regarded as a meaningful, but sufficient, form of political expression (Chapter 9). In the following sections, I proceed to a more detailed outlining of the contradictions of liquid politics and the implications for civic engagement online and offline.

10.4 The Wild Lands: The Public and Private Spaces of Coffee Activism

Traditional articulations of political life have focused on the separation of the political space from other social, cultural or economic spaces. I have provided evidence for the deconstruction of this distinction because of the high levels of interest and activity in dispersed areas, such as coffee activism. I began the discussion by suggesting that arguments on the waning of the 'public' (Sennett, 1974; Arendt, 1982; Marquand, 2004; Bauman, 2005) should not be applied to re-conceptualisations of contemporary politics (Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, I scrutinised a manifestation of consumer citizenship which has been theorised as the phenomenon of political consumerism, and has been paralleled to political engagement. Then Chapter 4 examined the role of the internet in mediating public and private spaces of politics and consumption. The main point of the link in these chapters was the necessity of renewing contemporary political grammar, in order to illuminate and examine where people place their politics, as this has been internalised in personal experiences. The blooming of different forms of participation in political life has shifted the focus of attention from what I discuss as a politics past (based on party membership, voting and a national political agenda) to a politics present (based on choices of action from a pallet of possibilities and a cosmopolitan vista). In this context, the notion of citizenship has been extended to include the dominion of consumption.

This thesis belongs to an enlarging field of research on alternative politics, especially those facilitated by media or commodity consumption (cf. Micheletti and

Stolle, 2004; Litter, 2009; Couldry *et al*, 2010). A basic differentiation between traditional and alternative forms of parliamentary or extra-parliamentary political engagement concerns the space of their enactment. Coffee activism has been a significant case for the discussion of the politicisation of consumption. For activists, ethical consumption is either a tool for mobilising people or as a loudspeaker for companies to revise their ethical policies (Chapter 8). For citizens, however, coffee activism has become intrinsically linked to a form of participation in the marketplace through the enactment of ethical or political consumerism (Chapter 9). Political consumerism is also paralleled with political engagement in the relevant literature (cf. Micheletti and Stolle, 2004). As I point out, this equation should not be assumed, but should account for the conditions of liquid modernity. Firstly, after a discussion of the literature, I outlined the sustenance of participation in ethical consumerism as a prerequisite for its political meaningfulness (Chapter 3). Secondly, Goldhaber's (1997) argument for an economic model based on attention in the case of the internet raises issues around the significance of fleeting forms of participation in the chaotic online space. Through the data gathered at different sites of coffee activism, I also exposed the limited structures for participation in activists' websites and the transitory, one-click nature of the online experience (Chapter 8). The internet has proven an underutilised medium in the case of coffee activism. The mediation of politics online is susceptible to the unruly experience of the internet (Chapter 4). The most significant conclusion here is that the internet does not foster sustenance of attention. Characteristic of that is the evidence suggesting that many interviewees were not consuming the content of mailing lists that were sent to them (Chapter 9). This liquid nature of attention online hinders the success of the multi-dimensional information flows. Fostering attention is the utmost prerequisite for participation.

Consumer citizenship in the case of coffee activism is linked to cosmopolitan citizenship. It is not only the consumer narrative that comes into play in new forms of politics. The disconnection from national politics has been met by the acceleration of a cosmopolitan outlook, but does not equate with a disconnection from political participation, such as in the voting process, or disengagement from the local levels, such as organising locally to tackle local issues. Ethical consumers are becoming politically sensitive to global events and developments; this indicates a growing sense of cosmopolitan sensitivity, 'cosmopolitan empathy' (Beck, 2006) or 'cosmopolitan caring' (Littler, 2009), which is grounded and enacted locally at various physical

spaces. The cosmopolitan narrative of fair trade spurs a budding feeling of cosmopolitan sensitivity and signifies the responsibility of (consumer) action. In contrast to the 'double imagination' (Beck, 2002) of cosmopolitan citizenship, where individuals understand themselves as both citizens of a nation and citizens of the world, the evidence suggests an immediate preference for more accessible and direct forms of engagement which bypass the national level (Chapter 9). None of the citizens which were interviewed belonged to a political party. However, over half of them were active in their local fair trade campaigning groups. This disengagement with national politics is concurrent with the 'death of citizenship' (Falk, 2000) thesis, when this is paraphrased to 'death of national citizenship'. Conversely, an attempt to ground citizenship in the national terrain is dated (Chapter 2). Civic engagement operates within these contexts.

There are strong indications in the data that civic life online has not yet met its full potential in the case of coffee activism. The internet has not been so accommodating in terms of organisation and mobilisation. As far as organisation goes, the provision of a space for expression is possible online, but building and maintaining a website require more time and financial resources than most small groups can spare. Obstacles in equal access to the employment of the medium might therefore not be apparent at first sight, but are latent in the cases examined. The internet has also not fulfilled its prophecies in terms of mobilisation; online information has not been as instrumental in mustering civic engagement offline in comparison to information spread by word of mouth. Despite this fully unrealised interactive hiccup the internet has a firm grasp over discussions on contemporary politics, particularly pertaining to younger generations and their use of the medium for social change (cf. Loader, 2007; Bennett, 2008). The latter has not been explored in this thesis, but could provide fruitful grounds for further research. Despite the lack of a multi-linear online environment, bilateral interactivity has been hopeful in the democratisation of information flows. The use of mailing lists as a standardised practice exemplifies this; each and every one of us with access to a computer and basic understanding of email can become the receiver of selected information. Silverstone's (2007) concept of the mediapolis as the mediated space of appearance is a powerful metaphor in conceptualising a political (or not necessarily political, but ever so powerful) media environment.

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The internet has provided a plethora of both political and market spaces, but there is an evident explosion of calls for ethical consumption online (Chapter 8). Therefore, while coffee activism can be enacted in a variety of spaces, it firmly remains based in market-type spaces. I have argued that there is a series of processes from the considerable awareness of the issue of coffee activism to the attachment of big economic players which has impacted on its mainstreaming (Chapter 6). These processes have signalled the gaining of distance of this type of politics from an alternative to a mainstream presence. This mainstreaming in its turn reworks the narrative frameworks of coffee activism (Chapter 8). This is further explored in a section below. Thus, while ethical consumerism is an alternative form of civic engagement, it is popular among such forms of participation. Civic engagement in this context is the articulation of an alternative form of participation in an alternative space.

What I have discussed as a 'quiet withdrawal' from traditional forms and spaces of politics does not appeal to ethical consumers as much as a loud involvement in non-traditional forms of politics does. Ironically, alternative forms of politics can offer a less excluding, as well as a non-exclusive sense of participation. In order to become involved in party politics, you need to become a member of a party, and quite possibly to attend meetings. In order to become actively engaged in coffee activism, the most basic thing you can do is switch your big corporate tea to fair trade (perhaps still corporate) tea, and only if you are feeling a further need to engage you can join a local campaigning group. Besides a sense of providing the right to consume without requesting the responsibility to engage in further action, ethical consumerism can also offer the sense of positive immediacy. Buying fair trade coffee on a weekly basis translates to weekly contributions to the betterment of the lives of coffee farmers, while voting on a four-year basis translates to a chance every four years to make one choice out of a predetermined few parties. Of course, 'economic voting' does not recant political voting, one of the most important rights of citizens; what it does is that it attracts trust and participation in a more consolidated manner. The politics of the pocket are becoming increasingly significant. However, they are still bound to some of the parameters of traditional politics, such as the importance of sustained support and engagement.

10.5 Liquid Civic Engagement: Striving for Collective Individualism and Continuous Connection

Civic engagement in the case of coffee activism is bound to a series of contradictions. There are significant tensions around the notion of ethical consumption as civic engagement, as this sways from the private to the public realm. An increasingly relevant personalisation of politics has occurred, either as institutionalised (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) or a market-directed (Brown, 2005) individualisation. I have been predominantly concerned with the latter form of individualisation and its relationship to the private form of political expression through consumption. Arguments on the rising adaptation of the 'new consumer' (Lewis and Bridger, 2001) to the spirit of their times suggest that the consumer is able to deal with a number of questions and issues when facing a supermarket shelf. Civic engagement has been reinvented through the hailing of life or lifestyle politics (Giddens, 1991; Bennett, 1998). There seems to be a gaining of distance from civic habits of the past such as forms of campaigning or protesting. However, the pessimism regarding the entropy of traditional civic engagement and citizenship is simply reductive. There is evidence of an extensive interest and engagement in the fair trade cause (Chapter 9), as well as a mounting growth in fair trade sales (Chapter 6). Political life has evidently been diffusing into intimate settings where the technologically apt and consumer-wise citizen feels more at home. The consequences for internet politics, however, still are subject to a series of restrictions.

In order to assess the political meaningfulness of the politics of ethical consumption, I have regarded a determination of the relationship between individual and collective participation as crucial. I have discussed the term 'collective individualism' as the paradoxical necessity particularly evident in the politics of consumption. The term suggests that while individual acts are empowering and personally meaningful to the ethical consumer, they are regarded by both activists and consumers as politically meaningful only when enacted on a collective scale. As a consequence of the blurring between the public and the private spheres of civic engagement, 'homo economicus' (Brown, 2005) has been placed at the forefront of civic life. Political responsibility has been internalised and there is a growing belief in the politics of the pocket, or the change that consumer power can bring along

(Chapter 9). The transformations of consumer citizenship are often leading to contradictory paths, when while there is trust in economic voting, there is also a confession as to the general scale in which this should be enacted. Moreover, forms of further engagement beyond the marketplace are viewed as essential, but not always possible, particularly due to time constraints (Chapter 9). The marketplace facilitates an easy, accessible space for the individual to cast their economic vote. However, even in such a case there is not enough evidence to suggest that it is positively impacting on ethical sales.

The failure of the internet to provide a platform for mobilisation for either political interaction and action or ethical consumption (Chapter 8) further suggests the unbearable lightness of digital debates. This thesis has discussed the democratic potential of the internet in terms of information (awareness-raising), organisation (online facilitation) and mobilisation (online recruitment). I have demonstrated how information flows are varied but fragmented and can be grasped or ignored in the information-gluttonous environment which is presented online. Similarly, the internet is celebrated as a space which breaks typical organisation patterns and encourages interactivity, but in reality the agencies behind the structures have not accelerated into multilateral platforms, either due to practical reasons (lack of resources) or due to their account of their specific membership base and the specific ways which are best to communicate with their members. Moreover, in terms of mobilisation, there is still high reliance in offline civic structures which can engage citizens in a much more sustained manner. In conclusion, there are noteworthy differences in the speed of the adaptation of the medium with regards to different uses and different users. The liquid nature of politics and the internet opens up debates on a widening notion of civic life. On the one hand, the new politics which we are faced with is highly adaptable to the online world. On the other hand, there seems to be a faster speed online, which is not so easily caught up by political initiatives, or by market innovators. However, while the structures for political or market-based action are not successful online, the spreading of the narratives of the marketopoly is.

10.6 A Marketopolis or Marketopoly? Political Life in Neoliberal Times

Daniel Bell once wrote that "the seduction of the consumer has become total" (1975: 70). This is a reductive notion, one which echoes Bauman's (2005) notion of a 'consumerist syndrome'. However, evidence shows increasing awareness, trust and belief in consumer power as a parameter of accessible global social change (Chapter 9). There remains a significant relationship of tension between consumption and citizenship. Political participation has been explored in this thesis through the notion of liquid politics, consumer citizenship and civic engagement. At the spine of this thesis lies a critique of the contemporary spirit of capitalism which extends beyond the case study of coffee activism, but through this case addresses a combination of types of critique on capitalism. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) discuss four types of relevant critique. The first one concerns the disenchantment or inauthenticity of objects, persons and the kind of existence associated with it, which is relevant to Schmookler's (1993) perception of the gradual reformation which the market imposes on such. In this regard, this is where the central tenant of my thesis rests; the observation of manifestations of political disenchantment characterising practices of civic engagement appear to be stronger than the reconfiguration of polemic practices aiming at social change at the level of citizens. The second type of critique regards capitalism as a source of oppression. This is indirectly interrogated in this thesis in terms of the changing anti-capitalistic to capitalist-friendly nature of coffee activism. The third type of critique concerns capitalism as a source of poverty among workers and inequalities on a global mass scale, which is the basis of coffee activism. This is not an immediate part of this empirical composition, as I have been exploring the consequences of the realisation of the unequal rules of free trade on the level of civic action. The fourth type of critique is related to the scrutiny of capitalism as a source of opportunity and egoism, where private interests prove to be destructive to collective solidarity. While my critique is heavily based on disenchantment, it peripherally concerns an amalgam of all these critiques. I discuss how the ethical marketplace is likened to a platform for economic democracy, thus concealing the practical goals of the trade justice movement.

My exploration of the case of coffee activism with regards to neoliberalism can summarised in terms of two critical elements. The first one concerns the notion

of democracy in the marketplace and the second the commodification of practices of citizenship. In the first case, the shifting awareness of the marketplace as a democratic place through the notion of economic voting creates a disenchantment of political action as placed in the realms and hands of economic actors. The increasing privatisation in both the sense of individualisation and marketisation of acts of civic engagement collectively captures the political imaginary of citizens and dictates individual action in the form of liquid participation. The commodification of practices of citizenship then relates to symbolic and economic questions of power. For instance, branding and promotional culture solidify coffee activism in the supermarket shelves and the economic rationality of the conscious – but comfortable – consumer. In fact, activists themselves regard the practice of ethical consumption as a practice of engaged consumer hedonism (Chapter 7). Their concerns centre around the idea that ethical consumption is an area which allows citizens to 'buy into' a form of politics without further interrogation or engagement. Branding is also perceived as a powerful capitalist tool which while allowing for validity of outlets or actors, promotes a superficial engagement with fair trade commodities. Moreover, the arena which envelops the practices of power in coffee activism is the market, and the attention which is paid to activists concerns their ability to utilise new communication technologies to the maximum. This dimension has also been discussed in this thesis in terms of activists' perceptions of coffee activism, as well as the socio-economic contexts in which they operate.

Behind these parameters is the overarching framework of economic, but also social, cultural and political operations which has been widely theorised as neoliberalism (cf. Harvey, 2005; Brown, 2005). This thesis has raised the issue of how neoliberal narratives are enclosing discourses of coffee activism. I have suggested the notion of 'marketopoly' as one which describes the reign of the market over all forms of life. The concept of 'marketopolis' might also appear promising in delineating the penetration of markets in civic life. The marketopolis refers to the inescapable structures of life in advanced capitalism and is a milder term than marketopoly in the sense that it does not accept the absolutisation of markets. However, consumer action in the terrain of a marketopoly is inescapably subject to the rationality of neoliberalism and has proven a more suitable term for discussing the absolute grasp of economism. The neoliberal market presumes an abundance of options to gratify any type of consumer appetite. From the original denial of the very

term 'fair trade', which economic actors related to an opposition to the term 'free trade', both terms are now used and understood by both companies and consumers alike as comparable (Chapters 6 and 7). In the case of ethical consumerism there has been an increasing promotion of the consumer as economic voter (cf. Dickinson and Carsky, 2005; Cherrier, 2006). Ethical consumerism has proven to be a significant parameter in terms of what it means to be political today. Such arguments are inextricably linked to the wider arguments of economism (Chapter 2). Notions such as economism and globalism, which have attempted to describe the social world, belong in the grammar of the marketopoly where everything is reduced to its economic basis. Coffee activism is at play between public and private spaces, between individual actions and collective structures, between the local and the global. Cosmopolitanism has also impacted on citizenship expanding civic attention beyond national issues and borders. Global issues such as fair trade have been brought to the forefront. Cosmopolitan citizenship consists of widened empathy in the global village, but is often reduced to consumer-based practices which do not extend beyond the marketplace. The very mechanism which facilitates this affective form of cosmopolitanism is the marketplace. This manifests as a problem of banal cosmopolitanism. The repertoires of coffee activism are entrenched in the celebration of consumer lifestyles, making a critique of the commodification of the movement (Low and Davenport, 2005a, 2005b; Fridell, 2007) valid.

The mainstreaming of coffee activism has been evident from the rising degrees of awareness and amounts of sales. I have argued that a series of symbolic compromises have been evident throughout the processes of mainstreaming in terms of the changing – towards a more politically blurred – rhetoric of the movement, the lack of mass political events and the concurrent rise of smaller market events, the historical tensions between corporations and trading campaigners, the avoidance of direct confrontation between fair and free trade which softens the agonistic nature of a type of activism of key elements which oppositional to capitalism, as well as the fetishisation of civic engagement. The notion of commodification and fetishisation are interlinked in the case of coffee activism. There is an understanding of the term commodification which emerges as different to the classical understanding of the term. In this sense, a controversial argument which surfaces in the case of consumer politics concerns the ever more restrictive notion of participation as contained in the arena of the market. However, rather than dismissing the political potential of

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political consumerism in advance, I have explored this from a variety of angles. The fetishisation of commodities also gains new significance in terms of political consumerism. Within a wider neoliberal framework, several coffee activists appear to be disconcerted about the seeming immediacy of liquid participation in the marketplace. Thus, the peripheral commodification of civic engagement in the case of coffee activism presents a concern about the direction of the politics of consumption and political life in general.

Hence, while the literature on fair trade insists that the movement is resulting in the decommodification of ethically produced commodities (cf. Elson, 2003; Luttinger and Dicum, 2006; Lyon, 2006), the data shows that the mainstreaming of coffee activism has actually caused a form of commodification of civic engagement (Chapter 7). In this sense, while the fair trade model discloses the actual processes which surround the relationship between the production and consumption of commodities, thus decommodifying the process of consumption, it commodifies the practice of citizenship. This happens because in the same sense that a product is commodified through the dissimulation of the conditions which enclose it, civic engagement in the form of political consumption can be commodified through the avoidance of the political parameters which enfold it. The influence of neoliberalism on cultural citizenship has not been extensively discussed in the literature. The appeal of political consumerism can be democratically productive in so far as it revitalises the political imaginary, and provokes more global or national questions, but not in so far as it is shaped, shifted, packaged and distributed explicitly by the tools of the markets, such as brands and their resourceful co-optation practices. For instance, the link between fair trade and an environmental cause, such as climate change mobilises citizen consumers into different types of participation, from petitioning and lobbying or marching. The separation of issues was never dictated by coffee activists, but the mainstreaming of fair trade has caused the absence of more traditional types of civic engagement (Chapter 8). The consumerist syndrome and the latent processes of co-optation should always be considered when dealing with the interaction of public and private spaces.

The dominance of consumer culture upheld by the 'new spirit of capitalism' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005) influence consumer citizenship, as this operates in a marketplace where neoliberal values rule, commodities are symbolically powerful (Wernick, 1991) and the danger of commodification lurks. For instance, commodities

such as t-shirts, badges, fridge magnets and other paraphernalia are infused with politically powerful symbolisms but are reduced to certain types of production, distribution, marketing and accumulation, as they remain for many the only types of political expression. With so many directions in fair trade politics, information and action-wise, the future of political participation seems undetermined. However, I would argue it is important to remain vigilant and gradually reclaim our values and individualities from the control of the market (Schmookler, 1993). Making an alternative cause popular through mainstreaming processes can have simultaneously positive and negative impacts. Making fair trade popular might have taken something away from its previously more politically vocal nature, but it has increased both its campaigning and consuming followers. The consumer narrative behind the cause might be reduced to acts of participation in the marketplace, but it might also make it accessible to more people. Fair trade remains a type of activism where we are addressed as 'cool citizens' (Scammell, 2000), but we must also act as 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999).

The politicisation of political engagement in coffee activism is possible, but citizens need to engage in a consolidated manner in structures in and beyond the marketplace in order to participate in a political marketopolis. The nature, parlance and action of coffee activism has transformed through a series of processes which have impacted the movement over the last three decades; widening access, branding fair trade and accommodating big economic players in the landscape of coffee activism has led to a neoliberal framing of the movement as the market is already entrenched in the wider economic structures (Chapters 6 and 7). Online, these transformation are reproduced; both political and market online structures currently appear weak in augmenting offline structures, but an increase of calls for market mobilisation (ethical consumption) is noted (Chapter 8). The grey areas of coffee activism are evident in the continuum of 'trade justice through solidarity' to 'development through lifestyle' narratives, where ethical consumerism remains the basic form of civic action in coffee activism (Chapter 8). Moreover, while the majority of ethical consumers appear more active in their ethical consumption habits and their belief in the strength of this type of consumerism, they are engaged without a clearly defined political goal (Chapter 9). This is perhaps one of the most significant reasons as to why ethical consumerism can be political, but cannot be considered democratic.

10.7 Reflections on Methodology, Empirical Design and Future Research Directions

This research project has enabled a discussion on the main issues surrounding the politics of coffee activism and consumption in terms of repertoires and technologies employed, as well as the activists and citizens who employ them. A research design was built to determine different aspects of the associations between online and offline information, interaction, organisation and action, as well as civic and consumer structures and narratives. The goal of the methodological choices was the synchronous examination of these in their online and offline contexts. Therefore, the exploration of mediation aimed to explore both the processes (i.e. citizens' interactions with the medium) and the products (i.e. websites of the case studies) of the internet in terms of coffee activism. This combination of methods has, for instance, facilitated the prismatic analysis of the mediation of political communication through interviews with activists, citizens, as well as analysis of the structures and narratives of such communication. The discussion on the mediation of political mobilisation also pulled together data from different stages of the analysis in terms of the opportunities and messages surrounding online calls for action. The latter discussion, in particular, appeared to be more deeply engaged in an analysis based on a combination of methods. Therefore, the attempt to triangulate online and offline data was achieved.

Most importantly, this thesis has engaged in a pooled analysis of coffee activism from various outlooks. From a macroscopic point of view, I have discussed the politicisation of consumption, the notion of liquid politics, as well as the transient notion of attention and connection. From a meso-exploration, I have outlined the strategic organisational practices, as well as the personal activities of coffee activists in the United Kingdom. From a micro-level, I have engaged in a discussion of everyday political and commercial practices of ethically consuming individuals. The analysis chapters of this thesis combine these different levels. Each has unlocked areas of investigation, which have not been the purview of this thesis, but would benefit from more detailed consideration. Further research could elaborate usefully

upon the historical relationship between the market as a growth-driven mechanism and coffee activism as a socially driven cause. For instance, the more recent narratives of campaigns by the Fairtrade Foundation ("Fairtrade is one way we can support disadvantaged producers as the climate begins to change"[106]) or the Trade Justice Movement ("Change Trade, Not Our Climate"[107]) are becoming linked with the politics of climate change. These constant changes therefore impact in the structural and ideological focus of the movement and such historical transformations should be regarded when analysing the politics of consumption. I discuss the transformations to coffee activism since its beginning and until approximately the end of 2009. But, as I have established, coffee activism is liquid politics, under constant transformation, and the attempt to build alliances with the politics of climate change could have interesting ramifications worthy of further exploration.

Furthermore, the relationship between fair trade, commodification and decommodification would benefit greatly from extended investigation in relation to issues pertaining to the marketopoly. In this thesis, I have been using the terms 'ethical' and 'political' consumption almost interchangeably, while at times drawing on slight qualitative differences between them. I have, nevertheless, suggested that the distinction is increasingly important. Future research on the politics of consumption should examine the distinction between ethical and political consumerism in more detail. The first could begin from a more moral approach to consumption, relevant to notions of religious standpoints, while the second might suggest a more polemic treatment of contemporary issues. This approach could undertake an expanded analysis of narratives in terms of the actors involved. Moreover, there is a growing strand of business studies literature on the importance of corporate citizenship that would also be worthy of investigation and analysis (cf. Andriof and McIntosh, 2001; Zadek, 2001; Das Gupta, 2008). As businesses are becoming more ethically articulated, there must be further interrogation of their articulations. The role of the media in carrying corporate rhetoric similarly deserves further investigation. Also, as businesses make more political claims as agents of justice (cf. O'Neill, 2001; Micheletti and Stolle, 2008), their political communications need closer investigation. Further research could also shed light on the implications

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[106]

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/news_events_and_urgent_actions/why_the_climate_revolution_must_be_a_fair_revolution.aspx [20 Mar 2010].
[107] http://tjm.org.uk/events.shtml [20 Mar 2010].

of the politicisation of corporations and the impacts of their mobilisation for social change. While this project does not delve into an exploration of the role of businesses in promoting trade justice, it provides certain findings relevant to the impact of political consumerism on civic engagement and provides leverage for further research in this area.

This thesis has offered a critique of the blurry intersections between public and private domains, citizen and consumer action, individual and collective engagement, as well as cosmopolitan and national citizenship. I have dissected the different entangled understandings of the political potential of political consumerism as civic engagement from the points of view of activists and citizens. I have unpacked the mediation of forms of participation in coffee activism through the analysis of the means and modes of internet activities, as well as their consequences for online and offline mobilisation. Most importantly, I have outlined the processes and consequences of the interactions of alternative forms of participation and the mainstream modus operandi. The significance of this thesis lies primarily in its inquiry of the penetration of neoliberalism into different areas of political action, but also everyday life. This discussion can be applied to a series of phenomena and areas of symbolic or material contestation of the rules of neoliberal capitalism. In the exploration of the spaces for expression, participation and action, the tow of an all-surrounding systemic power should always be scrutinised. While coffee activism remains embedded in the wild lands of neoliberalism, possibilities for political contestation might be undergoing similar transformations in relation to the fervent flow of the economic rationale which drives contemporary societies and politics. A critical outlook should also be applied to the media which convey the messages of opposition and provide the structures for civic engagement. As re-producers of dominant voices, electronic media such as the internet can be swirled into the coaxed course of political life. Understandings of the situation of political life should develop with regards to their relation with economic life and the tenants of communication between the mobilisers and the mobilised.

10.8 Epilogue: The Power of a Politics of the Pocket

In the introduction of this thesis, I cited an excerpt from a blog where the 'Green Man' wrote that activism "has to do with your coffee.... Activism is not all or nothing. Any action, no matter how small, counts for something". This is by all means true. In coffee activism, the dispersion and fragmentation of forms of participation can range from very small engagement such as making one purchase which contributes to the fair trade movement's development work to tactical and sustained participation in the politics of trade justice through a variety of civic actions. This thesis does not problematise or question the validity of the fair trade movement. As a matter of fact, the work conducted by the Fairtrade Foundation in the United Kingdom and relevant organisations around the world has resulted in the widened awareness of an important global issue, which concerns the bleak consequences of unruly free trade. In Luttinger and Dicum's words, they have provided "a bright spot in the overall grim picture of global trade" (2006: 210). Rather, this thesis presents a critique of the ideology of neoliberalism or the new spirit of capitalism, which in order "to be capable of mobilizing people... must incorporate a moral dimension" (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 487). The moral dimension of capitalism has met the ethical dimension of consumption and the battleground of the politicisation of consumption has been left with dominant neoliberal narratives.

The need of the capitalist system to reinvent itself has been typical across its history (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). It seems as though when the system is in some sort of crisis, it turns to legitimate claims – sometimes even those against it – and draws legitimacy from them in order to stabilise and secure its status. In the case of coffee activism, this has been particularly the case. The aftermath of the coffee crises strengthened the claims of activists and threatened the claims of the free trade rule. As part of coffee activism's positive expansion, the neutralisation of its agonistic politics has enabled it to blow into the mainstream, while allowing the politics of neoliberalism to negatively enclose the politics of trade justice. Coffee activism went from being associated with words such as 'alternative' or 'campaign' to being recognised as 'fair', a claim which isn't explicitly – or even implicitly – challenging free trade. It grew from a 'social justice through solidarity' narrative to a 'development through lifestyle' narrative. There are double-edged conclusions to be

drawn from these transformations. On the one hand, coffee activism belongs to a more altruistic wave of consumer action, where consumers behave as citizens in the marketplace to voice political claims that concern the well-being of others. On the other hand, this form of engagement remains rooted in the neoliberal marketplace, the same place that enabled the social devastation across the producing global South. The marketplace has been rearranging the initial opposition towards it, and projecting political claims into the labyrinth of consumer choice. It defetishises fair trade commodities, but fetishises the environments in which they are situated and the politics which can be advocated.

In this thesis, I have explored the constant interplay between the 'political' and the 'economic', the 'mainstream' and the 'alternative', as well as the 'individual' and 'collective'. Citizens involved in coffee activism come to it from diverse contexts and bring in different understandings of it, as suited to these contexts (social, educational, faith) (Chapter 9). However, these understandings are based on the interweaving of the narratives of political participation and economic voting. There is a strong belief in the politics of the pocket and what people can do with a few extra pence. This belief has resulted in the mainstreaming of consumer-based forms of action, as these are easily facilitated by the market both online and offline. There is more evidence to suggest that the growth of sales has been aided by the entry of corporations in the fair trade landscape, rather than by the utilisation of the internet. There is also more evidence to suggest that the recruitment of citizens into the cause occurs in offline social contexts, rather that through the medium. The internet is a potentially powerful tool for awareness-raising and questions-answering (Chapter 9), but not for online deliberation or offline mobilisation (Chapter 8). In the interplay between the internet, politics and markets, the latter seem to have more drive in the course of the others.

The politics of the pocket is an engaging politics; it can be politically affirmative and entertainingly attractive. It can sustain the campaigning work of activists. It can engage citizens which are not drawn to parliamentary forms of politics. It can provide awareness of global issues and the sense of global interdependence. It can offer alternatives to socially and environmentally harmful consumption. It can help revive the flame of citizenship by enabling further participation. It can facilitate consumers in assuming the role of active global citizens. It can educate, empower and politicise the civic body. It can also numb the nature of political engagement by restricting action in the marketplace. It can

disengage forms of collective behaviour. It can veil some of the unethical practices of corporations through their tokenistic involvement in the fair trade market. Finally, it can legitimise the political project of neoliberalism and the claim that the marketplace can facilitate a more direct democratic platform. As I argue throughout this thesis, the contradictions characterising the politics of the pocket are many, but the most significant one is possibly the reconfiguration of our understanding of civic and consumer engagement in such a tangled manner that a clear political goal is never clearly defined. The drive of the egocentric marketplace softens the agonistic politics of coffee activism, and is able to direct political life in almost any direction, but an oppositional one.

List of Abbreviations

AND	Active Distribution Network
ATOs	Alternative Trade Organizations
BAFTS	British Association For Fair Trade Shops
CAFOD	Catholic Agency For Overseas Development
cDc	Cult of the Dead Cow
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DFID	Department for International Development
DoS	Denial of Service
EC	Ecocoffee
EFTA	European Fair Trade Association
FLO	Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International
FTAs	Free Trade Agreements
FTF	Fairtrade Foundation
ICA	International Coffee Agreement
ICO	International Coffee Organization
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IFAT	International Fair Trade Association
IMCs	Independent Media Centres
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NSC	Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
RISC	Reading International Solidarity Centre
SMOs	Social Movement Organisations
TJM	Trade Justice Movement
WDM	World Development Movement
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

CODING CATEGORIES FOR WEBSITE ANALYSIS

a) STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

    a. Technological Sophistication

        i. Interactivity

            1. Bilateral (email, electronic form)

            2. Multilateral (mailing list, forum, chat service, blog)

        ii. User friendliness/Accessibility

            1. Search Engine (internal or external)

            2. Site map/Menu

    b. Information Provision

        i. About Group/Organisation ('about us', history, type of action carried out, news, financial information)

        ii. About Coffee/Coffee Activism

            1. Official information (e.g. reports)

            2. Unofficial information (testimonies)

        iii. About Ethical Consumerism (explicit of implicit use of term)

    c. Membership/Internal Organisation

        i. Staff/Volunteers/Meetings

        ii. Becoming a members

            1. Accessibility (online and offline)

            2. Benefits/Obligations

    d. Mobilisation/Call for online and offline action

        i. 'Take Action'

        ii. Volunteer

        iii. Donate

        iv. Consume ethically

    e. Ethical Consumption

        i. Provision of Commercial Services

B) NARRATIVES

a. analysis of storytelling about organisation
b. analysis of storytelling about fair trade
c. analysis of types of cyberactivism
d. analysis of types of ethical consumerism

APPENDIX B:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH COFFEE ACTIVISTS

1) Table of Interviewees:

Pseudonym	Gender	Group/ Organisation	Role	Date of Interview
Beatrice	F	RISC	Events Coordinator	04/02/2008
Bianca	F	RISC	Shop Volunteer	02/02/2008
Carol	F	NSC	Information Officer	08/04/2008
Jennifer	F	NSC	Campaigner	29/12/2007
John	M	RISC	Education Outreach Worker	04/02/2008
Josh	M	RISC	Shop Coordinator	02/02/2008
Lidia	F	ADN	Co-Responsible for Distribution	12/03/2008
Linda	F	NSC	Sales and Events Officer	06/03/2008
Mary	F	NSC	Acting Chair	14/02/2008
Olivia	F	Fairtrade Foundation	Head of Communications	01/11/2008
Rob	M	ADN	Founder, Website Manager	08/11/2007
Sean	M	ADN	Website designer	21/02/2008
Tom	M	RISC	Volunteer DJ	02/02/2008

2) Sample questions:

A. INTRODUCTION

    a. Initial Involvement in Coffee Activism

        i. How did you first become involved in coffee activism?

        ii. How and why did you become involved in this particular group/organisation?

    b. Current Involvement in Coffee Activism

        i. What is your current role in coffee activism?

    c. Perception of Coffee Activism

        i. How is your group/organisation placed in the broad field of coffee activism in the U.K.?

B. INVOLVEMENT IN GROUP/ORGANISATION

    a. History of Group/Organisation's Action

       i. When was the group/organisation founded and what were its initial operations?

  b. General Information for Group/Organisation

       i. What does your group/organisation do?

       ii. What is your role in the group?

C. INFORMATION ABOUT GROUP/ORGANISATION

  a. Operation in Wider Field of Coffee Activism

       i. How does your group/organisation operate in the wider field of coffee activism?

  b. Organisation

       i. How many people are involved in the group/organisation?

       ii. How is your group/organisation structured and how are responsibilities distributed?

  c. Membership

       i. How can citizens or companies become involved in the group/organisation's actions?

  d. Finances

       i. How is the group/organisation financed?

  e. Media Use

       i. What type of media does your group/organisation employ to communicate its goals and strategies with regards to coffee activism?

  f. Internet Use

       i. How is the internet employed in your group/organisation in relation to other media?

       ii. How is the internet different in communicating the group/organisation's goals and strategies with regards to coffee activism?

       iii. How is the internet used for mobilising citizens?

  g. Internet Use in Relation to General Media Use

       i. Is the internet prioritised over other media and what are the opportunities and drawbacks that you have experienced with relation to its use?

  h. Generation and Management of Internet Content

       i. *Who is responsible for generating and updating internet content?*

      ii. *How often it your website updated?*

D. GROUP/ORGANISATION AND ETHICAL CONSUMPTION

    a. Definition of Ethical Consumption

       i. *How do you understand ethical consumption?*

    b. Involvement in Ethical Consumption

       i. *How is your group/organisation involved in ethical consumption practices?*

    c. Type of Change Posed to the Market

       i. *How does your group/organisation challenge mainstream trade?*

      ii. *What kind of change in the marketplace do you campaign for?*

    d. Ethical Consumerism and Political Activity/Change

       i. *Do you believe ethical consumerism resembles political activity and how?*

    e. Ethical Consumer and Political Power

       i. *Do you believe ethical consumers have political power?*

APPENDIX C:

STRUCTURED INTERVIEW/ SAMPLE MINI-QUESTIONNAIRE WITH EVENTS PARTICIPANTS

How did you find out about this event?

Word of mouth ☐

Website/Mailing list/Email ☐

Leaflet/Poster/Printed Info ☐

Other ☐ Please specify ……………………………………………….

How often do you use the internet to find out about such events?

Frequently ☐

Often ☐

Sometimes ☐

Seldom ☐

Never ☐

Do you ever go to the any of the fair trade websites?

Frequently ☐

Often ☐

Sometimes ☐

Seldom ☐

Never ☐

How many hours per week do you use the internet?

Under 5 hours ☐

5-10 hours ☐

10 - 15 hours ☐

Over 15 hours ☐

Please rank the following types of internet activities depending on how often you do them. 1 for most often, 8 for least often:

..... E-mail/Instant Messaging/Social Networking

..... Shopping/ Consumer Information

..... News

..... Politics (information, action)

..... Educational Resources/ Career Prospects

..... Entertainment/ Culture/ Games

..... Religion/ Spiritual Information

..... Other. Please specify:..

Which age group do you belong in?

13-17 ☐

18-21 ☐

22-25 ☐

26-30 ☐

31-40 ☐

41-50 ☐

51-60 ☐

60 or over ☐

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

CSE/GCSE/O Levels ☐

A/AS levels ☐

Diploma/BTEC/HNC ☐

Bachelor's degree ☐

Postgraduate certificate ☐

Master's degree ☐

Doctorate degree ☐

Professional Qualification ☐

Other ☐

Are you male or female?

Male ☐

Female ☐

Would you be interested in being interviewed on your internet use and involvement in coffee activism?

No ☐

Yes ☐

If your answer is yes, please provide a full name and an email or postal address.

Full name: ....

Email or postal address: ....

APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE WITH ETHICALLY

CONSUMING CITIZENS

1) Table of Interviewees:

Pseudonym	Recruitment[108]	Gender	Campaigner or Consumer	Date of interview
Abigail	Invited by Sophie	F	Consumer	19/01/2009
Amanda	Directly Approached @ FF2009	F	Consumer	03/06/2009
Anna	Invited by Sophie	F	Consumer	22/12/2008
Anthony	Directly Approached @ FF2008	M	Consumer	21/02/2009
Betty	Invited by Melissa	F	Campaigner	20/01/2009
Brian	Invited by Karen	M	Campaigner	07/02/2009
Claire	Directly Approached @ IOEE	F	Consumer	04/11/2008
Cynthia	Invited by Susan	F	Campaigner	10/01/2009
Dorothy	Directly Approached @ FF2008	F	Campaigner	03/11/2008
Edward	Directly Approached @ NSCE	M	Consumer	31/10/2008
Emily	Invited by Rachel	F	Campaigner	09/03/2009
Gabriella	Directly Approached @ ICE	F	Consumer	15/01/2009
Harriet	Directly Approached @ ICE	F	Consumer	05/11/2008
Heather	Directly Approached @ FF2009	F	Consumer	25/02/2009
Jessica	Directly Approached @ SBCE	F	Campaigner	11/03/2008
Joanna	Invited by Sophie	F	Campaigner	17/12/2008
Karen	Invited by Dorothy	F	Campaigner	10/12/2008
Katherine	Directly Approached @ FF2009	F	Campaigner	26/02/2009
Lisa	Invited by Melissa	F	Campaigner	24/01/2009
Maya	Directly Approached @ FF2009	F	Campaigner	29/05/2009
Melissa	Directly Approached @ FF2008	F	Campaigner	21/01/2009
Nancy	Invited by Rachel	F	Campaigner	11/02/2009
Nathan	Directly Approached @ FTCM	M	Consumer	07/01/2009
Patricia	Invited by Karen	F	Campaigner	07/02/2009

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[108] FF2008 stands for Fairtrade Foundation 2008; SBCE for Streatham Baptist Church Event; ICE for Islington Council Event; FF2009 for Fairtrade Fairground 2009; NSCE for Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Event; LTSM for Love That Stuff Market; IOEE for Institute of Education Event; FTCM for Fairtrade Christmas Market.

Patrick	Invited by Karen	M	Campaigner	10/01/2009
Rachel	Invited by Sophie	F	Campaigner	22/01/2009
Sandra	Directly Approached	F	Consumer	22/12/2008
Sophie	Directly Approached @ FF2008	F	Consumer	06/11/2008
Susan	Directly Approached @ NSCE	F	Campaigner	10/03/2009
Wendy	Directly Approached @ LTSM	F	Campaigner	01/11/2008

2) Sample Email Inviting Citizens to Interviews:

```
-----Original Message-----
From: cop02el@gold.ac.uk [mailto:cop02el@gold.ac.uk]
Sent: 08 October 2008 14:42
To:
Subject: Involvement in Fair Trade Activism - Fairtrade Fairground event


Dear              ,

I am writing to you because a few months ago you completed a survey for my
PhD project on Coffee Activism, Ethical Consumerism and the Internet during
the Fairtrade Fairground (24/02/2008), and opted for participation in a
focus group with regards to such issues.

Since then, the structure of my research has changed a bit and I have now
decided to conduct personal interviews with everyone, rather than focus
groups. Therefore, I would like to invite you to suggest a time and place
that suits your schedule for a short interview.
My schedule is quite flexible, however I cannot meet you on Thursday
mornings because I am teaching at Goldsmiths College, where I study.

If you have any questions about my project or the interview please let me
know and I will respond to you asap.

Thank you for your time,

Eleftheria Lekakis
PhD Candidate
Department of Media and Communications
Goldsmiths College, University of London
New Cross, London, SE14 6NW

http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/media-communications/research/current-phd-studen
ts.php
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3) Sample Questions:

A. INTRODUCTION: INVOLVEMENT IN COFFEE ACTIVISM

a. *Where did you find information about the specific event you attended when we first met?*

b. *What kind of relevant events do you usually attend?*

c. *How are you currently involved in fair or solidarity trade?*

d. *How did you become involved? What drew you to participate in coffee activism?*

B. INFORMATION, INTERNET AND ACTION

a. *Where do you usually find information about events to attend?*

b. *How do you use the internet with regards to coffee activism?*

c. *How do you search online for information related to coffee activism?*

d. *How do you act offline with regards to coffee activism?*

e. *How do you act online with regards to coffee activism? How is that different to your offline action?*

C. POLITICAL BACKGROUND

a. *Were you ever involved in a political party, group, or organisation?*

b. *If not, why not?*

c. *Do you vote? How important do you think voting is?*

d. *Do you regard your involvement in fair or solidarity trade as political?*

e. *Are you more interested in local, national or international issues?*

f. *Do you consider your involvement in coffee activism to be political?*

D. ETHICAL CONSUMPTION AND POLITICS

a. *Do you consider ethical consumption as a political act?*

b. *How important is branding in your ethical consumption?*

c. *Do you consume ethically online, offline, or both?*

d. *Has the economic crisis influenced the way you consume ethically?*