*Article*

# Between shaming corporations and promoting alternatives: The politics of an "ethical shopping map"

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## Abstract

Ethical consumption can take different forms, some more contentious like boycotts or public campaigns, some aiming at the establishment or promotion of alternative consumption practices (buycotts). This study looks at how these tactics are articulated by analyzing the development of an "ethical shopping map," an action situated in the latter category of "supportive" actions. In 2007, a Swiss nongovernmental organization published this map as part of its ongoing campaign fighting for the respect of social standards in the global garment industry. A project pursued by a regional group of volunteers of the organization, the map listed stores where ethical clothes can be purchased in a big Swiss city. This article consists of an ethnographic analysis of the process of elaboration of the map and discusses its inclusion into the tactical repertoire of the anti-sweatshop campaign. Based on participant observation and interviews with volunteers and campaign staff, it examines what drives the activists' concern with alternative forms of consumption. It looks at the rationales and meanings the volunteers put behind the map and the different uses of the map that are suggested, and examines the ultimate "failure" of making it a lasting part of the campaign's tactical action repertoire. Doing so, the article reveals the inherent tension of "ethical consumption," between supportive action forms based on buycotts and denunciatory actions of public shaming of firms whose practices are criticized.

## Keywords

Ethical consumption, collective action, ethnography, social movement, buycott, tactical action repertoire

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## Introduction

In spring 2007, a group of volunteers from a Swiss Third World advocacy organization had finished working on a map listing all the shops where one can find "ethical fashion" in a Swiss city. The map was published by the organization as part of its ongoing campaign against sweatshops in the global garment industry, the Swiss branch of the international "Clean Clothes Campaign." This campaign targets clothing retailers and fights for the adoption of codes of conduct on social standards in all supply chains and their independent monitoring. The "ethical fashion map" constituted a complement to the established repertoire of the Swiss campaign, consisting of public campaigning, petitions, and rankings of brands. Rather than blaming and shaming fashion brands and retailers, it showed up alternatives where people could shop "with a conscience." But as such, it also constituted a challenge to the campaign: it provoked a debate on what ethical consumer campaigns should do, and on the place of the promotion of buycotts (deliberately buying products for ethical, political, environmental reasons) therein. The debate took place within the group of volunteers who had developed the map, and also between the volunteers and campaign staff. It was the latter who had the last word on the map's concrete outlook and who ultimately decided not to renew the experience for other cities. In this article, I offer an in-depth analysis of this process of tactical innovation and the interplay of different tactics in ethical consumption, highlighting the tensions between the promotion of buycotts and the use of denunciatory tactics to make firms change specific practices, and shedding light on the reasons that led to the decision not to durably integrate this tactic into the campaign's repertoire.

Ethical consumption has mostly been studied from an individual perspective as individual consumers' practices of boycott and buycott. Many scholars have pointed at the recent rise of ethical consumption (Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Micheletti, 2003; Stolle et al., 2005), and some have highlighted the role of social movements in its promotion (Balsiger, 2010; Sassatelli, 2006). It is this collective aspect of ethical consumption that is at the center of this article: organizations and campaigns pursuing the goal of making consumption and production more ethical by attaching political concerns such as environmental protection or social justice to consumption and production (Clarke et al., 2007; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013a; Malpass et al., 2007). Different tactics can be used to put forward such goals. Just as individual consumers can boycott or buycott products (Micheletti, 2003), ethical consumerist organizations can use tactical repertoires that promote those two forms of participation. The tactics of ethical consumption are always situated somewhere on this axis delimited by a pole of denunciatory and supportive tactics.

Consumerist actions, in general, and the promotion of buycotts, in particular, are often identified with a de-politicized, individualist action form that may jeopardize political mobilization. Critical academic and political commentators have often equaled buycotts with nonpolitical actions and pointed to its pitfalls: a retreat into the private realm of consumption to the detriment of public action. Taking the

opposite stance, the literature on ethical consumption or political consumerism has often celebrated the rise of the "citizen-consumers" as an expansion of politics into hitherto private domains of lifestyle (Bennett, 2004; Micheletti, 2003) or even the future of democracy (Beck, 1996). This article addresses this question from a more empirical perspective. It looks at the use of buycotts in a specific ethical consumption campaign and analyzes the inner dynamics of how the political meaning of buycott tactics is negotiated and how its consequences for collective mobilization are assessed. Within this campaign, buycotts were not associated to nonpolitical actions at all. They were seen as a vital part of promoting ethical consumption, but their limits were nonetheless a crucial issue. The potential pitfalls of a tactic that risks drawing the campaign too much towards individual and consumerist participation were a permanent concern that shaped the development, outlook, and use of the "ethical shopping map." It also drove the debate around the map's possible integration into the tactical repertoire of the campaign. In addition, because global clothing brands had started developing environmental and "ethical" labels, the alternative consumer culture, which the map promoted, was increasingly populated by the companies that were widely associated with the grievances in the global garment industry. In this new context, the use of buycotts became particularly disputed.

Theoretically, the article draws on the literature on tactical action repertoires (TARs; Fillieule, 2009; Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004; Tilly, 2008), which explains social movements' tactical innovations and choices with social, cultural, and strategic factors. This theoretical framework can help shed light on the politics of the ethical shopping map and on the dynamics in political consumerist campaigns more generally. In order to gain insight into this process, I participated to the meetings and public actions of the volunteer group that developed the ethical shopping map. The analysis thus mainly relies on ethnographic methods, which are particularly apt to capture the dynamics of the adoption of new tactics, their use and evolution (Auyero and Joseph, 2007).

## The tactics of ethical consumption

Although using different terminologies, studies on ethical consumption (Harrison et al., 2005), critical consumption (Sassatelli, 2006), political consumerism (Micheletti, 2003), or citizen-consumers (Scammell, 2000) have in common that they all address how consumers take into account the "politics behind products" (Micheletti, 2003) when they make their everyday purchase decisions. Using survey data, this varied literature has argued that the use of boycotts and buycotts by individual consumers has experienced a dramatic increase in the past 20 years, albeit with important country differences (Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Stolle et al., 2005). Qualitative studies have looked at the rationales and motivations of individual consumers to consume critically (Johnston et al., 2011; Johnston and Baumann, 2009; Miller, 2001; Shaw et al., 2006; Shaw and Newholm, 2002). While much of the work on ethical consumers has focused on such individual-level

analysis, studies often point to the role of collective actors inciting consumers to become ethical consumers (Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Shaw and Newholm, 2002). In this perspective, consumption is seen as a practice that is socially shaped in multiple ways (Balsiger, 2010; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013a; Sassatelli, 2006; Sassatelli and Davolio, 2010). Such studies thus tend to expand on Zelizer's (2011) view that markets cannot be reduced to rational effectiveness but take up moral values that can get integrated into new markets. Many collective actors and institutions attempt to shape consumer practices and give them moral meanings. Governments, for instance, use the guiding of consumption practices in the development of ecological and sustainability policies, such as when they impose taxes on garbage bags. Promoting ''responsible'' consumption practices has become a means of many public policies, and it is very likely that they account partly for the rise of ethical consumption that one observes.

Social movement organizations, too, have used markets, and in particular consumption, to achieve social change by giving new political meaning to consumption and production practices. The focus in this article is on the tactics they use to promote ethical consumption. According to Sassatelli (2006), critical consumption initiatives frame consumption as a political act. Through their actions and public discourses, social movement organizations have given political meaning to individual purchases. Often, movement actors fighting for ethical consumption and production contribute to the creation of new valuation devices such as labels or ethical rankings that allow consumers to take into account this dimension (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013b). Fair trade initiatives, for instance, promote a political vision of consumption and try to mobilize consumers to their cause through different means (Clarke et al., 2007; Malpass et al., 2007). Movement actors thus use different tactics to promote ethical consumption. Studying the articulation between individual and collective action forms, Dubuisson-Quellier (2013a) distinguishes between tactics that take place *on* markets (through boycotts and buycotts) and tactics that take place *outside of* markets (such as different forms of consumer mobilization or the development of alternative systems of exchange). Most of the time, the different modes are closely articulated: boycotts and buycotts are the result of mobilization taking place outside of markets; individual participation through boycotts or buycotts are made possible by collective actions of framing, evaluation, or the development of alternative niches. Ethical consumption therefore cannot be reduced to individual practices directly on the market place, but must be thought together with the tactics used by collective actors mobilizing consumers outside of markets.

I draw on and adapt Dubuisson-Quellier's classification to study the articulation of different tactics in a given social movement campaign on ethical consumption. Both individual boycott and buycott behavior on markets, I argue, are related to collective tactics used by movements. These collective tactics can be classified on a continuum between two poles: denunciatory and supportive action (see Figure 1). Denunciatory tactics target existing market actors to change their practices, damaging their reputation and possibly inciting consumers to refrain from purchasing. Supportive actions promote alternative, more ethical consumer choices. While the
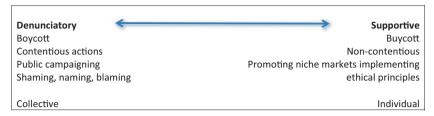
| Denunciatory | Supportive |
|---|---|
| Boycott | Buycott |
| Contentious actions | Non-contentious |
| Public campaigning | Promoting niche markets implementing |
| Shaming, naming, blaming | ethical principles |
| Collective | Individual |

**Figure 1.** Denunciatory and supportive action forms in ethical consumption.

focus of the former is on using contentious tactics to denounce firms' practices, the latter builds on noncontentious action forms and aims at the reverse: promoting or establishing market niches where ethical principles are implemented. Such alternative niches can rise outside of existing retail channels, as in the case of alternative fair trade shops, or within them, as with fair trade labels. Contentious action tends to build more on collective participation (through public campaigning and sometimes boycotts), while supportive action can be characterized as more individualist and is mostly associated with buycotts.

Ethical consumption campaigns can focus on one or the other of these aspects, but most of the time, they do a mix of both. Often, the same tactic can be used in either a supportive or a denunciatory way. For instance, ranking firms according to their social records is used to put pressure on companies by damaging their reputation, but can, at the same time, be an orientation tool for consumers who can direct their purchasing power towards those firms that get the best rating (Balsiger, 2014). This is why I speak of two poles rather than two types of tactics; actions are situated between the poles and tend towards one form or the other, depending on their interpretation and use. There exists a tension between the two approaches, and ethical consumption movements struggle to find a balance. In particular, some authors have noticed a perceived trade-off between collective mobilization (mostly through denunciatory tactics) and individual adaption of consumer behavior favored by supportive tactics (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013a). This article addresses this tension by studying the rise of a tactical innovation within a campaign targeting clothing retailers. The campaign used mostly denunciatory action forms, but the innovation in question – a map indicating ethical fashion outlets – was firmly situated on the pole of supportive actions.

## Tactical action repertoires

To understand the issues at stake in the articulation of different action forms by ethical consumption movements, it is useful to consider them under the theoretical lens of the concept of "tactical action repertoires (TARs)" taken from the study of social movements. The notion of "action repertoire" designates the array of "performances" (Tilly, 2008) available for collective action at a given historical time and geographical location. From a historically available repertoire, social

movement entrepreneurs draw specific TARs (Fillieule, 2009), that is, performances that they carry out in their struggle for social change.

Scholars of action repertoires have analyzed what explains tactical innovation, the adoption of specific performances, and the transformation of TARs. We can identify two broad factors that explain the adoption of tactics. On the one hand, the TARs of social movement organizations and campaigns are relational; that is, they can only be explained in the context of the other actors with which a given group is in interaction. Movement actors choose tactics they believe will be efficient in achieving their goals, and will thus adapt them to their opponents (Walker et al., 2008), but also to other important actors such as the media (Neveu, 2010). Strategic aspects are thus important (Jasper, 2011). Furthermore, because movements are always composed of a multiplicity of groups and organizations pursuing similar goals but using different approaches (Curtis and Zurcher, 1973; McCarthy and Zald, 1977), tactical choices may thus reflect strategies of distinction or, in some instances, implicit or explicit forms of coordination between different movement actors (Mathieu, 2012).

Studies also show that tactics correspond to activists' social and cultural characteristics (Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004). On the one hand, depending on financial and human resources at its disposal, a group will use different tactics. On the other hand, tactics are used for their symbolic meaning. Action repertoires are not just a range of means to express discontent; they are also a series of significations that emerge within contentious episodes (Ayuero and Joseph, 2007). Tactics reflect protestors' personal tastes (Jasper, 1997) and say something about how a movement actor wants to be perceived.

## Case and methods

The analysis builds on participant observation of an activist group that is part of an NGO carrying out an anti-sweatshop campaign in Switzerland. The campaign was the Swiss branch of the European-wide Clean Clothes Campaign. It primarily targeted clothing retailers demanding that they adopt codes of conducts and have them independently monitored. Its ultimate goal is thus that companies respect minimal social standards in the production of all the clothes they sell. Its main action repertoire consists of postcard petitions (inciting campaign sympathizers to send protest postcards to clothing retailers) and the publication of ratings of the targeted clothing brands according to their "social records." The NGO conducting the campaign has been active in advocacy campaigns on behalf of populations from the developing world for the past 40 years and is part of the broader solidarity movement (Passy and Giugni, 2001). Importantly, it has related development issues to consumption in many campaigns since the 1970s. Today, it is a professional NGO where approximately 20 staff members work. In its beginnings, the organization counted a large number of regional groups uniting activists who mobilized in its campaigns, but only very few of them persisted at the time of this inquiry. They are composed of local volunteers[1] who punctually support the

NGO's actions or autonomously develop activities linked to the organization's topics. One of these regional groups was particularly interested in issues related to the ethical production and consumption of clothes. I started participating in this group in the end of 2006 by contacting the group's coordinator and attended its meetings and activities until mid-2008. It turned out that during this time, the group undertook the project of creating an ethical shopping map for clothes, and I analyzed its development and the process of its integration into the TAR of the campaign.

Ethnography is an iterative–inductive research methodology and draws on direct and sustained contact with human agents usually through participant observation (O'Reilly, 2009: 3). It is a particularly apt entry point to study how tactical repertoires are formed and transformed because it allows researchers to observe actions as they are happening (Lambelet, 2011). It gives the observer an insider look at actors and their practices – in my case, NGO staff members and volunteers of the regional group. Through immersion in the field, the analyst gets to perceive through activists' eyes the dynamics at play and the constraints and uncertainties with which activists have to cope. Participant observation can grasp the processes of tactical innovation and transformation of TARs (Ayuero and Joseph, 2007).

In addition to the many informal conversations and interviews with group members that were part of my participant observation of the group and the process of map elaboration, the study was complemented with in-depth interviews with four of the volunteers (the ones implied in the elaboration of the ethical shopping map) and with the NGO official responsible for the campaign; it also builds on documentary research on the campaign dynamic more generally. Indeed, doing "just" participant observation posed a number of problems, which point at the peculiarities of the action form I was studying. Most studies on tactics that use ethnographic methods have focused on movement groups with activists whose intensity of participation is high. This is the case, for example, for ethnographic studies on protest events going on over several days such as the world social forums (Della Porta, 2009). In my fieldwork, I did not find this kind of intensity. Although I focused on campaigns targeting the clothing sector, one of the areas within ethical consumption where social movement activity is the most visible, it turned out that the kind of activity that is prevalent is of a very different kind: at first glance, it resembled more what scholars of civil society associations have characterized as "advocates without members" (Skocpol, 1999), that is, professionally conducted advocacy campaigns where classic activism did not play a central role. Importantly, this led me to revise general preconceptions of what constitutes social movement repertoires and to stress the importance of individual and noncontentious actions in movement campaigns on markets.

However, the involvement of the regional group meant that more active forms of activism were present nonetheless, and gave me an access point and opportunity to study the campaign ethnographically. But participant observation in this group proved at times to be difficult. This was due to the small size of the group, the relative rarity of its actions, and their nature. Even important parts of the work

done for the development of the ethical shopping map were hard to observe. On the one hand, at the time of my entry on the field, the decision to create such a map had already been taken. I was therefore not there when the subgroup responsible for the map formed and I could not take part in the discussions that led to the establishment of the criteria that would be used. The information I gathered on this process was collected through conversations and in-depth interviews with the volunteers. Second, even if I had participated in this group, much of the work consisted of research and information gathering, which was done individually. The volunteers would look up information on brands on the Internet and call shop managers and owners to ask them about the clothes they sell. For all these reasons, the case study was complemented by interviews and other data, such as e-mail correspondence between the campaign responsible from the NGO and volunteers, which the latter forwarded to me. While many of the insights of the study thus build on the participant observation, the study also heavily draws on this other material.

The difficulties of access means that the truly "participant observation" part of the analysis is mostly based on the volunteers' perspective. The viewpoint of the professional campaign makers is only partly based on this kind of ethnographic fieldwork and relies more on interviews with campaign staff. Furthermore, my analysis is importantly informed by a broader study of the campaign's dynamic and outcomes over time (see Balsiger, 2014).

## Why promoting alternative consumption practices? The conditions of a tactical innovation

All the members of the group I met told me that they had been attracted to the NGO because of its complex, global, and somehow "intellectual" approach to development issues. The volunteers contrasted its approach to those of other organizations doing more spectacular actions, such as Greenpeace, which they saw as too simplistic and sensational. The volunteers were very close to one another in terms of some social characteristics: they were young (between 20 and 35 years) and highly educated, many of them students, mostly in the social sciences and humanities. They all strongly valued knowledge and individual autonomy. These individual characteristics and tastes placed the role of intellectual engagement with development politics at the core of the volunteers' relation to politics and activism and characterized the group's "style" (Eliasoph and Lichterman, 2003). What they sought out through their activism was a deepening of their intellectual examination of these issues and a way to concretely participate in political campaigns.

The members were thus looking for "meaningful" actions they could contribute. It was this conception of activism that favored the development of the ethical shopping map. The project was formulated very quickly after the founding of the group, and one easily sees how it corresponded to the group members' expectations and skills. It implied autonomous intellectual work of participants, who would discuss the criteria to be adopted, do research to find the shops and gather all the information to produce the map. Doing so, they would be able to

value their intellectual skills and invest this capital into this action. At the same time, the map allowed them to link intellectual work and mobilization: it was a concrete result of an autonomous effort that constituted concrete result of an autonomous effort that constituted a contribution to the campaign.

But this correspondence to the group members' expectations of political activism was not the only reason why the map was so appealing an action form. Listing shops where ethical clothes can be bought also responded to a need for orientation that the volunteers identified in themselves and in their environment. They longed for having information on where to buy clothes in conformity with their values and political convictions. The volunteer who was at the origin of the idea named this as her prime motivation:[2]

> It often happens to me that people tell me "I think fair trade is good and I think it is good to care about the clothes one buys, but where can I buy it?" And I always had the feeling that a city map could work, that it could be something … Many people would like to act more ethically but have the impression that they don't know how. So I had the feeling that one simply had to create such an instrument. (Interview, Brenda, volunteer, October 2007)

The "instrument" that was to be created would thus help consumers concerned about adapting their purchase decisions to political and ethical considerations. The volunteers observed such a need in their environment, but also – and possibly often in the first place – in their own everyday lives. In conversations and interviews, they all told me that they paid attention to such aspects when they shopped. The map, they hoped, would help them identify places where one can buy clothes "with a conscience." Adapting one's consumption practices was naturally part and parcel of their political action. In the volunteers' view of politics, it was not enough to fight for one's political ideas through public actions: one also needed to follow political principles in everyday live, such as when going to the supermarket. Political action thus required individual responsibility. Theirs was a *personal politics* (Lichterman, 1996) where private actions count as much as public ones. This close entwinement of the personal and the political does not allow one to consume without thinking and thus act as if private action did not matter. One of the volunteers put this careless attitude to consumption at the same level as political abstention: politics concerns us, she said, and people who have a certain level of education have an obligation to care. Just like they have no excuse for not going to the ballot, they also have to question the consequences of their consumption practices (interview, Brenda, volunteer, October 2007).

## Negotiating criteria

The first thing the volunteers and campaign staff had to agree upon was the criteria to be used. What would qualify as ethical clothes? Initially, the group had thought about creating a map not limited to fashion, but including all

kinds of ethical products. The first decision was thus to focus on clothing, a realm where the NGO had a very strong expertise thanks to its campaign for the adoption and monitoring of codes of conduct that had been ongoing for the past decade. In coordination with the person responsible for the campaign at the NGO, the volunteers decided on the criteria that would be used to identify ethical fashion. On the published map, one finds four broad categories: social (fair trade and/or participating in an independent monitoring scheme on production conditions), organic, recycling (which applied mostly to second-hand shops), and Swiss-made. The first two are well-established categories with a broad array of labels and programs that attest for their respect, such as fair trade or organic certification or multi-stakeholder institutions on the control of labor rights. The latter two categories build less on previous experiences but broaden the range of ethical fashion. Buying second-hand clothing means fighting against the wasting of resources and thus taking up an anti-consumerist stance. Swiss-made was included because clothes produced in Switzerland are a guarantee of respecting labor and environmental standards. It can be seen as a variant of the claim that consuming local products constitutes a more sustainable lifestyle. Together, the four criteria thus represented a broad definition of ethical fashion. Importantly, they did not exclude big brands and retailer chains: as long as at least part of their clothes respected one or more of these criteria, they would figure on the map.

While the initial discussion of basic criteria was coordinated between staffers and volunteers, volunteers then began doing their research by themselves, identifying fashion outlets in the city and investigating whether they respected any of these criteria. Concretely, this meant reading websites and making phone calls to shop managers or sometimes going directly to the shops. Because of the proliferation of labels – especially in the realm of the environment but also concerning social issues – volunteers were often not certain whether a given label could qualify as ethical. During the elaboration already, such questions were sometimes discussed with the campaign coordinator from the NGO – but generally, the NGO officials let volunteers do their work on their own. However, once the producers and retailers were identified, NGO officials, and in particular the staff member responsible of the Clean Clothes Campaign, came back into play. It was the campaign coordinator who ultimately decided which shops would figure on the map, and what explanations would be given.

There was a gap between the volunteers' knowledge of the field of ethical fashion and the signification of the different existing labels and the NGO's expertise in this matter. The NGO had come to play the role of watchdog in evaluating the different ethical initiatives (labels, certification schemes, and so on) and had strong opinions on many of them. Together with its European partners, the NGO evaluated these initiatives and was especially very critical with regard to "window-dressing" initiatives by brands that were far behind the standards set by demanding civil society initiatives. Of course, the map would need to reflect these positions, and the last stage of map elaboration consisted of putting the

information on the map in accordance with the past political stances of the campaign.

This explains, for instance, the strong insistence on the map on the strict application of criteria (saying, for example, that 107 initially listed stores had been finally dismissed because they did not correspond to the strict criteria of the NGO). Furthermore, the inclusion or exclusion of certain labels and shops also raised important political issues. Matters that had been discussed and resolved in the beginning were again put up for discussion shortly before the map's publication. One example is the network of fair trade shops from the 1970s' fair trade movement. One member of the volunteers' group had advocated strongly for their inclusion on the map, but eventually, it was agreed that they would not figure on it for the simple reason that they do not sell clothes. In sight of publication, the debate rose again. Was it possible for the NGO to publish an ethical shopping map on which the traditional fair trade shops did not appear, while global brands such as H&M or national retailers would be on it? Wouldn't this alienate long-term activists of the fair trade and development movement, of which the NGO considered itself a part? Eventually, fair trade shops were not listed, but at the same time, there were lengthy explanations on the criteria and the reasons for inclusion/exclusion of them and certain other shops on the backside of the map. The backside also featured information on the Clean Clothes Campaign and on certain labels and monitoring initiatives.

Giving out buycott recommendations thus required careful negotiation of criteria and extensive justification of the choices made. By not limiting itself to locate shops that applied ethical criteria, but instead providing a lot of information on labels, certification schemes, and the general issues of ethical fashion, the map was supposed to be not just a buycott tool but also raise consumer awareness and thus promote the goals of the Clean Clothes Campaign more generally. But despite strict guidelines and lengthy printed explanations and references to the core issues of the Clean Clothes Campaign, there remained difficult questions. Wasn't it a contradiction for an advocacy campaign against sweatshops to ''recommend'' its sympathizers to shop at H&M? Wouldn't this dilute the message and be against the ultimate campaign goals, that is, the respect of minimal social standards on all supply chains? Was it ultimately helpful for the campaign to encourage people to shop for ethical clothes? The important debates on such questions are revealing of the ambiguities of the action form within the TAR of the campaign.

## On contentious and noncontentious uses of the map

The volunteers themselves got caught in this questioning. They had developed the map to respond to the practical problems they encountered when trying to buy clothes in accordance with their political beliefs, thus reflecting their personal politics approach. But the more they dealt with the issue, the less they knew what the right thing to do would be. From the outset, ethical consumption was a deeply political question for them. In an interview, one of the volunteers said, ''with the

issue of fashion, I feel that even people who usually do not talk about politics can get access to such things and get the feeling that they can bring about change" (interview, Ruth, volunteer, July 2007). They had in mind a very political use and effect of the map: it should make people think about issues of consumption and production, make them discuss with one another, go to shops and ask questions, and discover new places. In addition, the map should not only have an impact on consumers, but also on producers. Calling them and asking questions while investigating for the map, for instance, is a way of raising awareness and directly targeting producers. The volunteers even envisioned a collective and activist way of promoting the map: as a group, they would bring the map and go to shops that were not listed, engaging in a conversation with store managers to make them think about the issue.[3] Imagined uses of the map were thus political and sometimes even contentious. But at the same time, the volunteers perceived the limits and even dangers of their approach. Working on the map's conception and elaboration had made them doubt strongly its efficiency as a tool for social change. The more they plunged into the different criteria, the more the internal contradictions between telling people where to shop and a more general critique of consumption became apparent for them. Is it enough to call for a different consumption, or shouldn't the goal be to consume less? These questions were there at the beginning, but were then evacuated to focus on research once the criteria were decided upon. But at the end of the process, the debate resurged. In an interview, one of the volunteers reflected on the contradictions of consumption. How could one reconcile, for instance, development and ecological goals? Was it ok to buy fair trade imported from far away, when the same product could be made locally? If development should be sustainable, she says, the solution should ultimately be not just to consume ethically, but to consume less. The process of elaboration of the map had thus had a strong effect on the volunteers. They came to see ethical consumption more and more critically. At the moment of the map's launch, these debates were very present. The volunteers wondered if they had not made a mistake, if they were not about to promote an approach that would not have the consequences they hoped for.

While this critical and political reading of the map was prevalent among the volunteers, such a reading could of course not be imposed on the broader audience of the map. Even with its important effort of explanation, the map makers could not control how people actually "read" the map, that is, whether it would become a tool that raises awareness for the ethics of consumption and thus potentially plays a political role, or whether it would simply be an orientation tool to discover new brands and have few consequences that go beyond. The map incited people to consume "better," but doing so also incited them to keep consuming. In its very form, the map recalled other "special interest" city maps, such as gay maps or maps listing hip shops in a neighborhood, which work in the same way: they give people orientation in finding commercial places that correspond to their interests. The mobilizing and politicizing effect of the tool is thus very uncertain.

## Between exit and voice: The dilemma of the ethical consumerist TAR

Not only the volunteers voiced certain doubts about the ultimate effectiveness of the ethical shopping map, so did the campaign coordinator, whose opinion ultimately counted when it came to deciding on the integration of this tactical innovation into the campaign's repertoire. The thoughts and opinions of the volunteers had no real consequences for this, but the same tensions and lines of conflict that the volunteers had experienced were also at stake in the NGO *staff's* relationship to the ethical shopping map. They can shed light on the strategic reasons that made the campaign coordinator refuse the proposal of the volunteers to produce similar maps for other cities. This refusal does not primarily have to do with lacking resources, as volunteers would have happily done most of the work. Instead, it is revelatory of the inherent tensions between supportive and denunciatory forms of ethical consumption.

In a comment at an internal meeting, the campaign official had said to the volunteers that his role was to "put pressure on brands, not to promote organic cotton" (field notes, December 2007). This statement could be interpreted as a warning of the "danger" of possible "apolitical" uses of the map, which could be the reason why it was not continued. By saying that the map is about the promotion of organic cotton, the tactical innovation of the shopping map is relegated to its sphere of origin, the arena of marketing, and would therefore not correspond to the NGO's collective identity as an advocacy group. But the broader TAR of the NGO speaks against this interpretation. Marketing language and tools are an integral part of the organization's tactical and discursive repertoire. Most importantly, this can be seen by the way the map was launched. For this occasion, the campaign staff decided to organize an event at an expensive, made-in-Switzerland designer shop in the heart of the city's hippest neighborhood and not, as would also be possible, at a third-world shop. The launch resembled more a trendy opening than an activist action, and the choice of this shop was clearly justified by the goal of attracting a broader audience than just the organization's committed members. Indeed, the ambiguity in the meaning of the map, in particular that it borrows a form that is not usually associated with political content, was certainly one of the reasons for its media success.[4] The NGO's position on this was ambiguous; while the political aspects were highlighted in many ways (especially in the accompanying texts), the organization also mastered the use of marketing language to promote its goals. In other campaigns, the same NGO sometimes used personalities known from show business to promote some of its events. By playing this game, the organization hoped to attract new audiences, especially young and not politicized people. From this point of view, the ethical shopping map was actually a very good fit.

Another explanation is thus needed. When the coordinator says that he has to put pressure on brands and not promote organic cotton, he explicitly opposes the two action poles characterizing the ethical consumption repertoire: supportive and

denunciatory actions. The map stands for supportive buycott actions; it orients consumers' purchases and shows where one can find ethical products. The campaign's main repertoire, meanwhile, is denunciatory: public shaming and blaming in order to bring retailers to change their practices. This is a contentious action form and requires the potential mobilization of campaign sympathizers for its goals. The ethical shopping map, which encourages and facilitates buycott practices with the idea of advancing social change through specific consumption practices, poses a problem to the campaign makers. The problem is not the fact that buycott as such is promoted. Certainly, the campaign makers did not generally dismiss such action forms. Supportive action forms were already an important part of the campaign's repertoire, for instance, in the rankings the campaign had published over the previous years, where certain companies with a positive ''social record'' were implicitly endorsed.

What was different about the map was that it stood one-sidedly on the buycott side, contrary to the other instances where supportive actions were always combined with contentious actions of shaming. It thus rendered explicit a dimension that is always present in consumer campaigns: the possibility of a retreat to a niche market that offers a solution to grievances voiced against producers. To use Hirschman's (2004) terminology, despite the uses promoted by the map makers, it does explicitly promote an exit strategy as opposed to the voice expressed in the public campaigning actions. But the exit and the voice are potentially in conflict. For campaign makers, there is a concern that by giving alternatives for ethical consumption, one may give the impression that change has already been achieved and no more mobilization work needs to be done. Perhaps even worse for the campaign's goals, this favors the label strategies employed by firms who, rather than adopting encompassing change on the supply chains for all their products, single out and designate specific ethical clothing lines. Indeed, most of the options listed on the map are not alternatives in the sense of producers and retailers emanating from the movement sector such as, for instance, fair trade shops, but companies that have adopted ethical clothing lines. Doing this, targeted retailers succeeded in sidestepping the campaign's core demands (Balsiger, 2012). Despite the efforts on the map to raise awareness for the campaign, it may in fact contribute to the development of partial solutions and signal that the campaign approves of the proliferation of labels. Eventually, this might jeopardize the campaign's ultimate goal, which is making companies adopt minimal social standards on all of their supply chains.

If, in the following years, the campaign makers integrated the idea of the map – such as in a Smartphone app that was released in 2010 – it was directly related to its evaluation of brands, which brought together both supportive and denunciatory action forms. In addition, pure orientation tools could be promoted by other movement actors more oriented towards supportive action forms. Here, we observe a form of coordination or division of tasks between different social movement actors. This is what happened with the creation of a website launched by a development aid NGO that runs a big organic cotton project. This site, which is much

less constraining than the map developed by the volunteers I followed, allows owners of stores selling organic or fair trade clothing to get listed on an interactive map.

## Conclusion

Using ethnographic methods, this article addresses the question of the articulation of what I have called denunciatory and supportive action forms within ethical consumption, respectively contesting existing market practices or promoting alternative ones. It has been shown in previous studies that the choice between those two often constitutes a dilemma for ethical consumption campaigns, and some authors have voiced concern about the possible depoliticizing effect of the use of buycott-related tactics.

The analysis proposed here looks at this from an empirical point of view. The volunteers saw the map as extending political action into the private realm. They thought of political uses of the map and hoped it would lead people to reflect more on their consumer choices. Together with the staff from the NGO which published the map, they took great care in establishing very strict criteria for what could qualify as ''ethical fashion.'' However, despite this clearly political meaning given to the map, the map makers could not impose such an interpretation on all users. Even more so, the very development of the tool made the volunteers more critical with regard to the contribution of changing individual consumption practices to social change, sometimes questioning the ultimate contribution of the map. Nonetheless, they kept thinking that it was a useful and important tool and were willing to create maps for other cities as well.

When given this option, the campaign makers refused. The analysis points at strategic questions related to the inherent tensions between denunciatory and supportive action forms in ethical consumption, the same tensions that animated debates by the volunteers. While the promotion of buycotts had always been an integral part of the consumer campaigns launched by the NGO, they were always combined with more denunciatory actions, such as in the rankings the NGO published regularly. The ethical shopping map, however, focused on buycott alone and, in addition, could give the impression of giving credit to the recent proliferation of product labels by big clothing retailers and brands, which were detrimental to the campaign's goal of bringing about more encompassing change.

By addressing the articulation of different action forms within ethical consumption campaigns, this article sheds light on the politics of alternative consumer cultures. It argues that there is an underlying duality and tension that characterizes movements promoting alter-consumerism (see introduction by Forno and Graziano 2014). In the realm of consumption, contentious action is never isolated from the accompanying adaptation of consumer practices: the development of alternative forms of production and consumption is always part of consumer campaigns. Between promoting alternatives and contesting firms, the choice is not between an apolitical and a political action form; the development of alternative consumer cultures or ''counter-cultures'' can be a very critical and political

project and can constitute the means through which activists hope to achieve social change. But these alternatives just as often come to be perceived as exit options that constitute an obstacle to political action that tries to challenge the mainstream market. What seems to be a constant is thus the perceived danger of demobilization once an alternative offer emerges. This dilemma around the merits and dangers of building up alternative cultures of consumption and production are a defining feature of ethical consumption. But it becomes especially acute in the contemporary context where alternative consumer cultures are also the targets of marketing efforts by global companies. Those big brands partially take up movement demands, but only offer a few product lines that respond to "ethical" criteria. The rise of ethical markets populated by a combination of capitalist firms, "social entrepreneurs," and alternative suppliers with close links to social movements poses a new challenge to movements in markets.

## Funding

## Notes

1. It is not easy to find a term that properly characterizes the members of the group. "Activists" seems sometimes too strong as a word, and the members define themselves more as volunteers, but they also distinguish themselves from another kind of volunteers who exist within the nongovernmental organization (NGO), a pool of members of the organization who occasionally give a hand for administrative work such as mailings.
2. Although the volunteers do not refer to it explicitly, such orientation tools have been used by social movement organizations promoting buycotts for a long time. An early example is the Whole Earth Catalog (Turner, 2006) where people could find information on where to find counter-cultural tools and products. Similar listings also existed in Switzerland and other European countries. Green Consumer Guides build on the same idea. Thus, there is a history of consumer orientation tools on which the map makers implicitly, and as it seems rather unconsciously, draw.
3. The idea never realized.
4. A slot in the second most important news show on Swiss TV, which is extremely rare for an action by the NGO.

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