

IS FAIR TRADE 'FAIR' FOR ALL?

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Abstract

The shift to “trade not aid” in the latter part of the 20th century is representative of larger ideological changes in development studies, under which notions of ‘fair trade’ and gender equality were formalized. It is now a commonly held belief that gender parity is a useful marker of development. Therefore, the role of women and gender in development is an important basis for addressing gender equity in modern Fair Trade organizations.

Starting point - **1) What role does gender play in Fair Trade? & 2) How do Fair Trade institutions effect/affect gender?**

This essay critically analyzes Fair Trade International (FLO) – an overarching and critical certification institution – comparing it to the role of the small-scale, Peruvian coffee cooperative Café Femenino, aiming to determine which of the two is more influential and important for improving gender equality, using the ‘women, culture and development’ model as a critical lens.

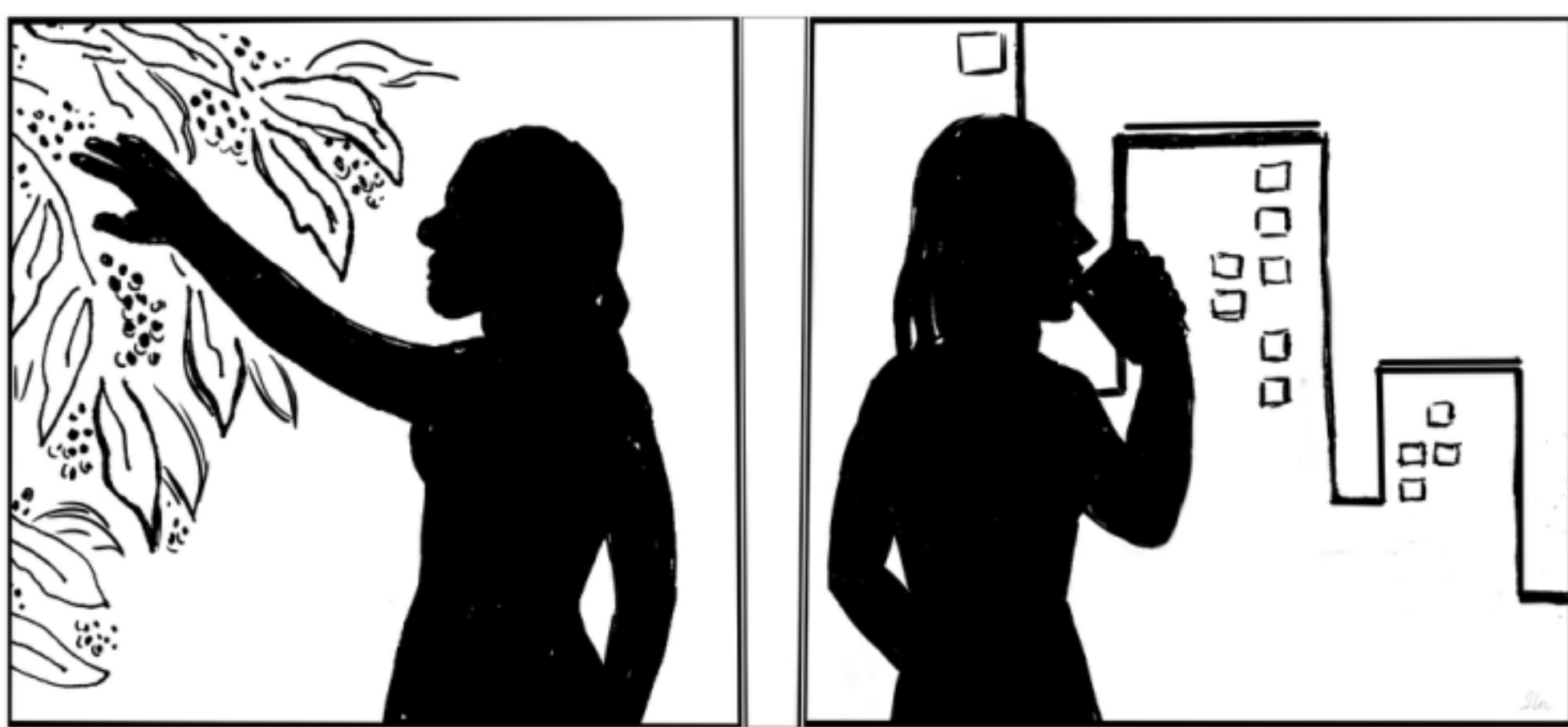
Methodology: 4-pronged

Positive analysis (how the world is): studying FLO publications, FLO’s list of certification standards, case studies, and empirical data

Normative analysis (outlook on how the world ought to be): using the ‘Women, Culture, Development’ approach and the concept of ‘social economy’ value chains

Reflective analysis: thinking about what it means to be ethical and how Fair Trade’s message is being diluted by corporate mainstreaming

Strategic analysis: providing policy proposals and potential solutions



FLO



What it does do:

- Promotes shared Fair Trade standards via labeling
- Focuses on economic inclusion
- Reduces women to public producers
- Mentions gender in relation to discriminations and for the sake of statistics
- Proposes small projects and micro-finance
- Views women as a “vulnerable” group

What it doesn't do:

- Account for context, culture and power
- Mention gender in a meaningful way
- Use the word ‘woman’ more than twice in its key certifying standards
- Extend women’s needs to the private sphere

Café Femenino

Women in the Andean region of Agua Azul in northern Peru are currently at a 40-70% risk of sexual assault despite the fact that they are usually married between the ages of 12 and 16 (McMurtry).

The Café Femenino Foundation initially assisted poor Peruvian communities, and now “works in some ten countries in Latin America, with development also under way in Africa” (Scholer). By focusing on women’s issues, the devaluation of men’s issues does not occur – rather, a more egalitarian community is developed (McMurtry).



Factors:

- isolation
- lack of education
- abuse
- shared hardship

Impact:

- social re-investment
- maximizing value added
- political involvement
- extra price premium: 2 cents/pound

Fair Trade

Fair Trade serves to put more power in the hands of small-scale producers through price premiums, long-term support, shorter value chains, and social re-investment, with intermediaries committed to a shared set of values. Ananya Mukherjee Reed and Darryl Reed identify 4 types of Fair Trade partnerships:

1) Conventional business

- Starbucks,
- Niche market opportunity
- Meet minimum standards
- Short-term contracts
- Concerned with quality & cost
- ‘Fair Washing’

3) Corporate accountability

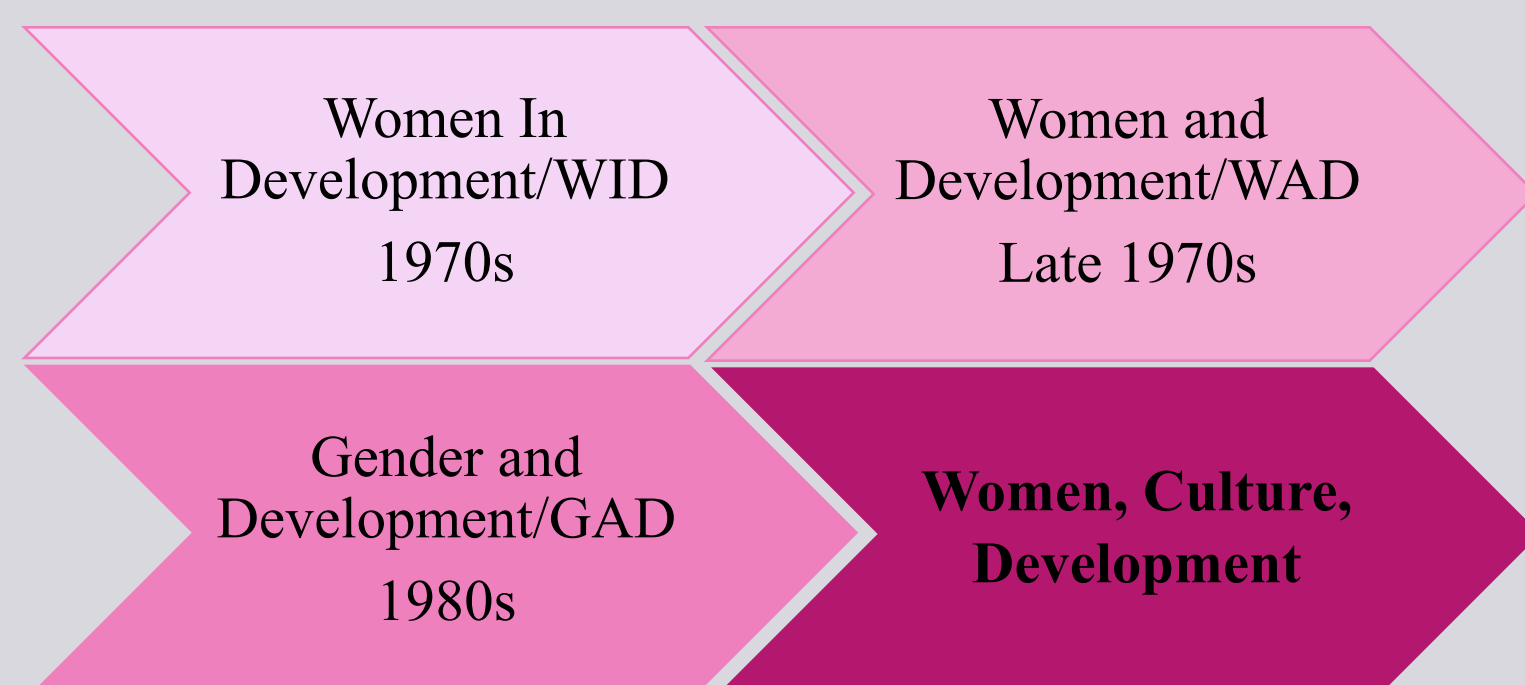
- More socially-leaning

4) Social economy

- Absence of corporations
- Benefits producers
- Values-based
- Collective entrepreneurship
- Maximizing value-added

2) Corporate social responsibility

- More corporate-leaning



Why women?

The inclusion of women in development has been a process fraught with contention and fragmented by ideological shifts. The first 3 approaches above have all been criticized for homogenizing women in developing contexts, while not accounting for intersectionality. The “Woman, Culture, Development” approach reasserts the role of culture and context, prioritizes lived experience, and de-romanticizes an imagined tribal past of developing states. shift towards more equitable relations.

“That is, we are in tune with those cultural analysts who point to the fluid aspect of culture and its ability to allow disempowered groups to negotiate power differences and to make sense of their world as they struggle in their everyday life” (Chua et al. 825).

Policy Recommendations

- Cannot rely on the ‘trickle-down effect’ of male earnings
- Necessitation of certification reform
- Participatory and inclusionary reform – promoting and prioritizing indigenous and women’s knowledges
- FLO has a responsibility to producers to shorten the distance between producers and certifiers
- Top-down outreach and bottom-up participation

Conclusions

Combining a top-down remodelling of FLO – setting stricter certification standards geared towards women, while empowering cooperatives such as Café Femenino and creating direct networks between certifiers and producers is therefore a viable and recommended solution.



Why should we care?

As consumers coming of age in the time of food/public health scares and growing concern over how things are produced, we are at the epicenter of this shifting landscape. The purchasing choices we consciously make – from brand of coffee to cotton t-shirt – are performative, ethical expressions. Each purchase guides demand, thus guiding larger production patterns. Closing the gap between consumers and producers means providing producers with more value-added, providing consumers with traceability, and (I’d argue) a sense of fulfillment on both ends. The more we invest – collectively – in the social economy, the more we divest from the current, corporate-driven model.