Making Political Consumers: The Tactical Action Repertoire of a Campaign for Clean Clothes

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ABSTRACT *Several recent studies have shown an increase in political consumerism (boycott and buycott) and a tendency towards a new 'politics in the supermarket'. These developments are usually seen as a transformation of forms of political action towards more individualized participation forms. Little attention has focused on the role of social movement activity in this transformation. In this contribution, which is based on a case study of political consumerism in the clothing sector in Switzerland, I fill this gap by analysing the ways in which political agency and mobilization shape political consumerism. I suggest taking into account the role of campaigning – that is, intentional and coordinated collective action and framing activities – as an incentive, if not a determinant, of individual political consumption. I show how different contentious performances mobilize citizens and consumers and make the consumption and production of clothing a public and political issue. I analyse the mobilizing strategies of a campaign regarding action repertoires and framing activities and ask how they contribute to provide political content to consumer products, creating a venue for political participation in the marketplace.*

KEY WORDS: Political consumerism, campaigning, participation, action repertoire, framing, consumption, social movement

Today, people have the opportunity to express their political preferences when they
purchase everyday goods like coffee, bananas, or clothing. Using buycotts – that is, explicitly buying a product for its political, social or environmental qualities – and boycotts, they act as political consumers. Michele Micheletti (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti *et al.*, 2004) has coined the term political consumerism to describe this rising phenomenon, defined as 'actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices' (Micheletti, 2003, p. 2). In Micheletti's view, political consumerism constitutes a new venue for political action which 'expands the policymaking process by introducing new issues and participants' (2003, p. 14; on political consumerism, see also Chessel & Cochoy, 2004; Tosi, 2006; Bartley & Child, 2007; Clarke *et al.*, 2007b; Malpass *et al.*, 2007; Micheletti & Stolle, 2007; Dubuisson-Quellier, 2009). The observed rise of political consumerism is said to

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reflect a variety of macro-sociological factors such as commodification, globalization, individualism and post-materialism (Inglehart, 1997; Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti *et al.*, 2004; Stolle *et al.*, 2005), which has led to a blurring of frontiers between public and private, collective and individual action (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti *et al.*, 2004; Tosi, 2006). Political action is integrated into everyday life and individual and private practices carry political implications (see Anthony Giddens's concept of *life politics*: Giddens, 1991). This form of political participation, it is argued, fits the needs of our increasingly individualized contemporary society better and it must be viewed as part of a general trend of the transformation of political participation towards more direct action forms (Norris, 1999). Descriptions of political consumerism thus tend to focus on its individual and almost spontaneous aspects (Peretti & Micheletti, 2004). Individual purchase decisions or individualized forms of protest, such as adbusting (Dubuisson-Quellier & Barrier, 2007), reflect political preferences and the collective is often only virtually existent, as the addition of isolated individual acts. To grasp this peculiarity, Michele Micheletti speaks of 'individualized collective action' (Micheletti, 2003, p. 25).

But these accounts of individualized action forms draw a picture that largely overlooks the role of political agency in creating new venues for political participation (Norris, 2007). Survey data, for example, shows very important cross-country differences for boycott and buycott participation (Ferrer-Fons, 2004; Forno & Ceccarini, 2006). This points to the importance of national contexts and specifically the activity of consumer campaigns and their success in mobilizing a broad public (Clarke *et al.*, 2007a, 2007b; Micheletti & Stolle, 2007). A study on 'politics in the supermarket' (Stolle *et al.*, 2005), for instance, shows that depending on the country, different products are bought for political reasons, which reflects activities by political consumerism campaigns and the presence of well-known consumer tools, such as fairtrade or organic labelling and certification systems.

The literature on political consumerism has understated the importance of campaigns (that is, intentional and coordinated collective action and framing activities) as an incentive, if not a determinant, of individual political consumption. It is through public actions and discourses that actions which were previously seen as private – for example, buying clothes – are reinterpreted in political ways and are thus transformed into actions with public and political meaning.[1] The specific ways in which consumption becomes a public issue and a venue for individual political action depends on the activities of political claimsmakers who load consumption with political content.

How do such campaigns make consumption a political issue and open up opportunities for consumers to behave as *political* consumers? I propose a case study of a political consumerist campaign targeting the clothing sector in Switzerland to shed light on this process. The campaign studied is the Swiss branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), an internationally coordinated campaign that focuses on the working conditions within the global garment industry and fights sweatshops.

Let us consider these two typical actions performed in the course of this campaign, described according to my observation and accounts in campaign documents:

(1) On a sunny Thursday afternoon, Barbara, Michael, Drew, and the other volunteers of the Clean Clothes Campaign are celebrating their just-released ethical shopping map of the city of Zurich in a boutique in the city's fifth district. Countless telephone calls with shop owners and managers and discussions about

organic and fairtrade labels have come to an end. Finally, a map shows consumers where to shop for clothes with a conscience, marking the spots where organic, fairtrade, second-hand, or Swiss-made fashions are available.

(2) On a public square in front of a fashion retailer on the city's main street, some of the Clean Clothes Campaign activists have installed a stand to protest against the company's refusal to assume responsibility for the working conditions in its production plants. A red line symbolizes the link between the shop and the exploited factory workers. The activists distribute pamphlets and booklets that provide ratings of the social performances of Swiss apparel shops.

These are only two examples of performances of the campaign's tactical action repertoire (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004) through which the purchase of clothes is given new meaning and clothing retailers are targeted. By focusing on Switzerland's branch of the European CCC, this article aims to analyse the ways in which this claims-making process occurs within the Swiss clothing sector. What performances constitute the action repertoire used by the campaigners? How does it mobilize and create new possibilities for political expression at the individual level? Before we turn to the empirical discussion, we present some theoretical reflections on tactical repertoires and the process of claims-making in the realm of consumption.

Tactical Repertoires in Political Consumerism

The divide between private and public spheres of action is a matter of social construction. For instance, issues like sexual harassment or domestic violence have only recently become public issues, significantly due to collective actors such as the feminist movement. Boundaries between public and private are shifted by political entrepreneurs of all sorts – social movement organizations, interest groups, politicians, public administrators, the media and researchers – which constantly define and redefine what is public, and what is to be confined to the private sphere.

The study of social problems has shown that, of the infinite, potentially injurious conditions, only a very small number will enter into the public sphere and become social problems. Social problems cannot be seen as pure reflections of objectively defined 'putative conditions', but as 'the process by which members of groups or societies define a putative condition as a problem' (Kitsuse & Spector, 1973, p. 415). In other words, it is 'the activities of groups making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative conditions' that define social problems (p. 415). The rise and fall of social problems has been described by Hilgartner & Bosk (1988) within their public arenas model. Public arenas have limited carrying capacities; different claims and claimsmakers are in competition with one another in order to gain access to them and to keep issues on the public agenda.

Activists in the realm of political consumption – fairtrade labels, organic shops, campaigns, and so on – can be conceptualized as claimsmakers who draw to public attention previously ignored aspects of products. For certain products, activist groups and other actors make claims about the putative conditions which are related to production processes, such as pollution, workers' rights, subcontracting, and so on. There are a great variety of products that have never been associated with such claims, just as there are many potentially putative conditions that do not receive any public attention. But for some

products – especially food – a significant amount of information about production conditions is available today. In many cases, this appears to be at least in part a result of social movement activity. There is a hidden history of package information that is very much ignored. For example, when buying eggs in Swiss supermarkets, consumers will have access to package information about the conditions of chicken husbandry. Obviously, this has not always been the case, but it is, to put it succinctly, a result of successful claimsmaking by animal rights and consumer activists and the translation of their assertions into corporate and government policies.[2] Thanks to this information, individual consumers can express their preference for eggs which are laid by free-range chickens.

Depending on structural power and resources, a claimsmaker has different means at his or her disposal in order to access public arenas. Among the most important and most studied – though not the sole – claims-making actors, one finds social movement organizations. A great amount of research on social movements has studied the ways in which they attempt to attract public attention despite their usual outsider position (McAdam *et al.*, 1996). They do this by using particular action repertoires. Action repertoires designate all action forms used by contentious politics at a given time and place, only incrementally evolving as a result of structural transformations (Tilly, 1978, 2008); nation states tend to be characterized by particular contentious repertoires (Tilly, 2006). Recently a number of scholars have broken down this category to speak of tactical repertoires, 'interactive episodes that link social movement actors to each other as well as to opponents and authorities for the intended purpose of challenging or resisting change in groups, organizations, or societies' (Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004, p. 266). Tactical repertoires thus characterize contentious interaction between a given social movement enterprise and its target(s). They vary depending on the characteristics of the movement actors, but also depending on the characteristics of the target(s). Tilly has shown how the shaping of the social movement repertoire is linked to the changing nature of the targets of protest, from local authorities to the centralized nation state (Tilly, 1995).

Drawing on Tilly's theoretical insights, Walker *et al.* (2008) studied the action repertoires adopted in protest events targeting the state, corporations, and educational institutions, and found that different protest tactics are used. According to their results, campaigns targeting corporations rely more frequently on confrontational tactics. The literature on political consumerism, on the other hand, stresses the interplay between individual and collective action that characterizes such action forms, but only very few studies address how this articulation works concretely (Clarke *et al.*, 2007a; Dubuisson-Quellier & Barrier, 2007; Malpass *et al.*, 2007). In my case study, I aim to show what protest tactics a given campaign uses when targeting corporations, thus discussing how tactical action repertoires are shaped in contentious interaction. Finally, it is important to stress that tactical action repertoires transport and are embedded in meaning. The same contentious performance can be used in very different ways according to the meaning that is attributed to it. For example, the squat has been used, at different moments of time and by different actors, in various ways: in order to claim, from the authorities, more and cheaper housing, or as a kind of counter-cultural appropriation of space (Péchu, 2006, chapter 5). Contentious performances are thus framed in particular ways, and the meanings given to them are likely to influence the course the mobilization dynamic takes. The articulation between different levels and forms of participation (individual and collective, participation by purchasing behaviour, petitioning, demonstrating, and so on) is shaped by the meaning attributed to the performed actions. In the realm of political

consumption, political and scholarly debates evolve around the question as to whether this phenomenon must be seen as a form of political participation or rather a trend towards depoliticization (Micheletti, 2003). I argue that we can only address this question when looking at the framings and meanings attributed to the action repertoires used in political consumerist campaigns.

In the social movement literature, movements that target other actors and arenas than the state – for instance, multinational corporations and the marketplace – have gained relatively little attention (but see Jasper, 1997; Bartley, 2003, 2005; Schurman, 2004; Bartley & Child, 2007; Soule, 2009). Consumption practices, however, have long been included on social movements' agendas (Cohen, 2003; Hilton, 2003). Historically, the labour movement relied heavily on consumerist action repertoires such as boycotts or buycotts. More recently, besides consumers' associations, it has especially been new social movements, such as the Third World solidarity movement and the ecology movement, which have framed their claims according to consumption practices. Just like political ideology, party, or movement membership, consumption practices characterize activists of the new social movements and of today's anti-globalization movement. Such practices consist of buying coffee in Third World shops, moving to a farmhouse in the countryside, sharing flats, growing vegetables in the garden, boycotting multinational corporations, and ordering clothes from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

In my case study of a campaign in the Swiss apparel sector, I seek to analyse how this process of claims-making occurs and how it leads to an emerging public arena for political consumption. I will briefly retrace the campaign's emergence and identify transformations in the clothing sector which have taken place as production conditions become a public issue. I then study the campaign's claims-making process in two ways. First, by analysing the action repertoire which is used by the campaign, I want to establish the ways through which consumers and citizens are mobilized in order to create pressure on companies and make clothing consumption a public issue. This, as will be seen, creates opportunities for both collective and individual as well as citizen and consumer participation. In the second part, I will discuss how, through these actions, the campaign creates a venue for political participation by giving political meanings to previously private practices.

In order to analyse the campaign's activities, I rely on two primary sources. First, I consider the entire production of documents by the campaign itself – leaflets, magazines, newsletters, and so on. This material serves as both internal and external communication for the campaigners and allows us to see how the campaign presents itself and its objectives, how it addresses its targets, and how it attempts to mobilize consumers. Second, we conducted in-depth interviews with both past and present key actors of the campaign, as well as interviews and participant observation with grassroots activists of the leading non-governmental organization (NGO) behind the CCC in Switzerland.

Making Clothing Consumption and Production a Public Issue

For some 15 years, the apparel industry has been a target of political campaigning. In the USA and Canada, students who support the anti-sweatshop movement blamed international corporations for workers' exploitation and demanded that they adopt codes of conduct and respect workers' rights in production countries (Featherstone & United Students Against Sweatshops, 2002). In Europe, the CCC, an internationally coordinated campaign which began in 1990 as a network of Dutch NGOs and labour

unions, has expanded into most European countries. There is a local organizational network in each country which directs the campaign. Although these country-specific affiliates are relatively autonomous, they are coordinated by an international secretariat. Basic claims and concerns are consistent throughout the countries, demanding corporations to adopt the CCC code of conduct. In Switzerland, the CCC is initially administered by a coalition of NGOs: The Bern Declaration (BD), a professional campaigning and advocacy group founded in 1968, which primarily focuses on topics of third world solidarity, and two development aid organizations: Lenten Fund (a Catholic organization) and Bread for All (a Protestant one). Since 2002, the BD has been solely responsible for the campaign.

The Swiss CCC officially launched in 1999 with the release of an information booklet and the distribution of postcards which consumers were asked to address to the country's biggest apparel retailers. As a first step, approximately 15 Swiss-based retailers were contacted by campaign officials, who informed them of the campaign's launch and asked how they guarantee the respect of social standards within their production chains. Based on this information, postcards were printed to ask companies to respect workers' rights in production countries. Consumers were asked to send the postcards to one or more companies of their choice.[3]

The first round of campaigning elicited retailers' responses, but since answers were incomplete and failed to satisfy the campaigners' demands, additional tactics were employed. Consumers were asked to continue the postcard campaign and, where they received personal answers from companies (many of which replied either to individual consumers or to the campaign organizers), to continue the effort by writing letters that included more specific questions. By the end of the year, approximately 40,000 postcards had been sent to companies, a number which was seen as a big success by the campaign organizers.[4]

When the campaign began, the questions that addressed corporate social responsibility were new to most of the targeted firms. Besides a limited number of environmental labels, there were literally no tools with which to deal with these questions. Few Swiss companies had adopted a code of conduct at that time, and there was great uncertainty as to what it actually meant.[5] Once the issue had been raised by the Swiss CCC, it initiated an action dynamic which was characterized by continuous interaction between the movement and its targets. However, the dynamic was not solely fed by the Swiss CCC campaign. Market forces and international developments, such as the rise of certain certification systems like SA 8000 or fairtrade labels, and eco labels, have also played an important role. A game of claim and counterclaim is set in motion in which companies react to demands, new actors emerge (social audit companies, certificators, joint business initiatives, fairtrade labels, and so on), and campaigners adjust their strategies and claims to the changing environment. The rise of a great variety of new actors and instruments can be illustrated if one compares the actors mentioned in campaign booklets of the Swiss CCC at its launch in 1999 and in 2004, after five years of campaigning. Table 1 portrays this striking transformation.

To be sure, some of these labels and initiatives already existed when the campaign started. A majority, however, emerged during the following five years. Claims for socially responsible business practices no longer come from the campaign alone; instead, a complex field has developed in which a company details its social records by using different instruments of legitimization. Many actors are now interested in keeping this social problem on the agenda, either to make claims about putative conditions, to advocate

Table 1. Actors mentioned in Swiss CCC campaigns, 1999 and 2004

Actors mentioned in the first booklet (1999)	Actors mentioned in the 2004 publication
Corporations	Corporations
CCC Code of conduct	CCC Code of conduct
SA 8000	ISCOM (monitoring program initiated by Swiss CCC)
	Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) (NL)
	Ethical Trading Initiative (UK)
	WRC (USA)
	FLA (USA)
	BSCI (European business-driven auditing initiative)
	WRAP (USA, business-driven)
	SAI, SA 8000 (USA)
	Labels
	Naturaline
	Engagement organic cotton
	WWF Bio Collection
	Max Havelaar (Fairtrade Label certifying cotton)
	Öko-Tex Standard 100
	Öko-Tex Standard 1000
	Migros Eco
	IVN
	STEP
	PCR

a label or certification scheme, or to talk about their own 'good practices'. Therefore, a 'community of operatives' (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) has emerged. In this transformed context, the campaign finds itself in the position of not only criticizing but also judging the different instruments which are used by corporations. Facing a situation that is more and more confusing, the CCC not only makes claims towards companies but also evaluates their efforts and the different labels, and initiatives that have emerged.

The Swiss CCC has thus become the major 'watchdog' of the issue of social conditions of clothing production in Switzerland. For example, whenever Swiss-German TV has a topic about scandalous working conditions in a Third World sewing factory, the Swiss CCC is contacted for comment about the situation. Thus, the CCC has achieved a position where it can speak *in the name of* political consumers nationwide. One could say that the Swiss CCC has gained ownership of this problem (Gusfield, 1981), which means that it has become the recognized expert (Best, 2008). How has it achieved this standing? Several factors can explain this. First, the CCC is the first and main claimsmaker in this area. While I have not found any other campaign from within the broad social movement sector raising more radical (or more moderate) claims than the CCC, and thus challenging its watchdog role, there are nonetheless other initiatives coming from social movement actors which constitute some sort of competitive claims. This is especially the case with fairtrade labelled cotton, which constitutes for some firms a sort of partial response to movement claims. The fairtrade labelling organization in Switzerland is run by development aid organizations. However, while fairtrade labelling does indeed constitute an alternative to the codes of conduct approach advocated by the CCC, the labelling organization does not campaign against corporations and does not make any political claims.

Second, the organization which carries out the Swiss CCC – The Bern Declaration – has a long-standing history in consumer campaigns (Kuhn, 2005). There is thus organizational legitimacy on which the campaign can draw; for example, the DB has a long history in targeting the Swiss retailers and is well known for these campaigns. This organizational embeddedness also provides the resources for the campaign, which allow it to maintain its campaigning efforts. Finally, while the financial and personal resources of the campaign are rather limited[6] – especially compared to the financial resources available to its adversaries – its 'knowledge resources' are very significant. Thanks to participation in internationally coordinated networks – the CCC network, but also networks previously established – and to research done within the organization and these networks, the campaign has accumulated great expertise on the subject, which is useful both to the media and in campaigning against its targets.

This position, however, can only be maintained through continuous claimsmaking and contentious interaction. Resources are only meaningful in particular situations and contexts and must be activated in order to be effective. Because there is no legal framework controlling corporations' corporate social responsibility claims, ending the campaign would remove critical observation of these practices. Thus, the continuing maintenance of pressure is of crucial importance to the maintenance of problem ownership. The campaign has to keep reminding its targets that it is 'still there' and observing what they do. Through what means is this pressure kept alive?

The Campaign's Action Repertoire: Rhythm and Performances

Ever since its first campaign, the Swiss CCC has been mobilizing citizens and pressurizing companies and other targets. Upholding public pressure over several years is a major challenge for campaigners, given public arenas' limited carrying capacities, the competition between different claimsmakers and claims that try to mobilize public opinion (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988), and the danger of attention fatigue due to the raising of the same claims over and over again. These difficulties are addressed by different strategies. If one looks at the 'action agenda' of the campaign, a certain regularity of public actions becomes immediately apparent. The campaign's activities are principally dictated, it appears, by the organization's resources and time management. It tries to set its own agenda. Action modes, such as the evaluation of companies' social performances, allow for regular 'check-ups' and the action mode in itself creates the necessity of its follow-up. But the campaign also reacts to external events. Its claims are adapted to a broader international agenda and attempt to benefit from highly publicized sports events like the Olympic Games or football World Cups (Micheletti & Stolle, 2007). In addition, it reacts to uncovered 'scandals', such as the Swiss company Triumph's production plants in Burma. Claims and targets are thus varied in the course of the campaign, in order to maintain mobilization and attract public attention, and this process draws both on external events that are incorporated into the campaign – revealed scandals, sports events, and so forth – and on an autonomous strategy. External events cannot always be incorporated into the resource and time management. For example, when the Euro football championship took place in Switzerland and Austria in 2008, the Swiss CCC did not stage a particular campaign despite a demand from a number of activists, because it had already planned a different campaign for the same time.

If one takes a closer look at the campaign's action repertoire, one sees that it employs a great variety of tactics. Some action forms are public and others are more discrete, like lobbying or institution-building. After the first round of the campaign, a pilot 'multi-stakeholder' project for the implementation of the code of conduct is carried out with three corporations. This experiment will lead to a division of labour between the campaign organizations. The two development aid organizations will continue the pilot project and its successor, and the BD will become solely responsible for the public campaign.

I will focus on the public actions that characterize the campaign. Citizens and consumers are called upon to participate in three different ways: using protest, conventional and consumerist tactics (see Table 2). These different forms involve various roles and commitments by individuals, who can either participate as activists or volunteers, as citizens in the marketplace, or through using their consumer power.

The *protest* category refers to actions conducted by activists or volunteers. They include street actions, such as information stands and the distribution of pamphlets, but also the organization of fashion shows, workshops, public discussions, and so on. These street actions foster mobilization by distributing campaign material, collecting signatures, raising awareness and providing public visibility to the campaign. They also allow the targeting of specific companies in a more or less direct manner; sometimes strategic positioning during signature collection can implicitly be interpreted as targeting a specific firm. In the case of the Swiss CCC campaign, these grassroots mobilizations are rather limited. They depend heavily on the activity of the campaigning NGO, which chooses the targets, shapes the claims, and tends to mobilize small numbers of activists. They often take place alongside bigger protest events, such as May Day rallies, festivals, and so forth. The orchestration by the 'official campaign' and its links with activists who are engaged in protest actions is sometimes direct and explicit. Campaign employees occasionally take to the streets and the BD's local volunteer groups carry out protest actions on behalf of the campaign.[7] But there are also groups with no organizational link to the BD that become involved. For example, in 2004 a local Association pour la Taxation des Transactions pour l'Aide an Citoyen (ATTAC) group campaigned for the CCC by participating in a 12-kilometre run while wearing CCC T-shirts. In another town, a group of volunteers formed an association and started conducting public actions in order to spread the CCC campaign in the early 2000s. This group, composed of approximately 15 activists, formed through

Table 2. Action forms used by the Swiss Clean Clothes Campaign

	Action forms	Actors	Goal	
Protest	Stands	Activists	Awareness-raising	Citizen; Collective
	Rallies		Signature collection	
	Street theatre		Public attention	
Conventional	Petition	CITIZEN-consumers	High figures of participation	
	Postcards		Pressure	
Consumerist	Evaluation 'shopping maps'	CONSUMER-citizens	Public attention on corporate behaviour	
			Awareness-raising	
			Influencing consumer behaviour	Consumer; Individual

church-based volunteering to organize a fashion show for 'fair' clothes at a local music festival in 2001. The group would then organize other actions – public discussions and workshops, letters written to shops, and so on. It also got involved in other protest events that were not linked to the CCC campaign, such as demonstrations against the war in Iraq and protests against the World Economic Forum in Davos, and it initiated the first social forum of eastern Switzerland.

In sum, the Swiss CCC relies on activists' participation on different occasions. This participation is sometimes explicitly orchestrated by the NGO that is organizing the campaign and it is certainly encouraged by its communication tools. The Swiss CCC's website provides action ideas, including information stands, street theatre and sports events. However, in order for these actions to take place, the campaign can only count on a very limited and specific network of activist groups. Therefore, much more than active mobilization, the campaign seems to provide specific content which activist groups belonging to the wider network of the social movement can adopt, apply and disseminate.

The category termed *conventional* refers to individualized forms of participation like signing petitions and sending postcards, letters, or emails to companies or sports associations. The campaign in particular relied heavily on postcard petitions, where people send postcards bearing the campaign's claims to corporations. This form of petition allows the creation of a direct link between a corporation and its supposed consumers, signalling to corporations that their costumers care about conditions of production. Participation in this kind of action obviously depends very heavily on the political offer: petitions are signed individually, but they build on a common text and are launched by the campaign. Similarly, protest emails or letters are written and prepared by the campaign organizers. These activities typically occur at the CCC headquarters,[8] but they can also be undertaken by grassroots groups, which adds an additional level of mediation. For instance, one of the local groups mentioned above organized a 'popular referendum' about ethical shopping, where citizen-consumers could proclaim their preference for clean clothes through their votes in ballot boxes which were placed in several shops.[9] These types of action directly target companies and try to mobilize the highest possible number of participants. Besides these 'pre-shaped' action forms, campaign booklets and the CCC website specifically invite consumers to participate in other activities, such as speaking with store managers, asking for information about working conditions, writing letters, and more – in sum, adopting individual practices of critique when acting as consumers.

Finally, the third category – *consumerist* action forms – refers to the participation of consumers as the purchasers of goods. The campaign publishes information about companies' negative or positive practices. This information contains implicit or explicit boycott threats or buycott recommendations. Although the campaign does not call for boycotts, its evaluations must be considered as implicit ways of using consumer power to target corporations. Consumerist forms of action which the campaign uses are its evaluations and ratings of corporate social performances, negative publicity for companies by specific campaigns and a map of ethical shopping sites. The first postcard campaign specifically contained various corporate information which is regularly updated. Different criteria are taken into account in order to reflect the changing environment and the reactions of the targets. The evaluations are at first published in the campaign's newsletter, but in 2004 and 2006, a joint publication with Switzerland's biggest consumer organizations was released, thus reaching a much larger public. In these publications, a genuine consumerist vocabulary was adopted, with companies classified in three categories

(precursors, followers and hedgers), and some certification systems were explicitly recommended. The campaign adapts the typical action repertoire of consumer organizations, consisting of comparative tests of different products or brands (Aldridge, 1994). In the case of the shopping map, political consumers are given a tool that shows them where to buy 'ethical' clothing.

Making Political Consumers

Far from being the result of spontaneous individual consumer mobilization, the Swiss CCC campaign's action modes prove to be quite dependent on various activities orchestrated by a centralized campaign organization. Because the campaign calls for consumers to act as activists, citizens and consumers, the mobilization tools are intertwined with consumer- and citizen-focused activities. These tools mobilize both citizens and consumers and include both traditional activist and grassroots actions as well as consumer-focused activities. The proposed classification (Table 2) also groups the activities on a continuum from individual to collective practices. The collective action of *protest* is an example of classic collective group mobilization. The conventional action type is somehow more individualized. In this respect, the postcard petition is an interesting case. Petitions always ally a collective claim with an individualized form of participation. The classic petition collects signatures on sheets that give a physical presence to the number of petitioners (Contamin, 2001, p. 425). But the use of individualized postcards particularly emphasizes the individual aspects. There is no physical aggregation of signatures. Instead, direct links are established between individual protestors and targeted corporations, as protestors send their postcard individually and independently from one another. The aggregation takes place in the mailbox of the receiver. The postcard petition is also an adaptation of the petition to a specific context. Postcards allow campaign participants to simultaneously target different corporations while differentiating among them. The individualization of the petition can thus be partly understood as a practical solution to the problem of multiplied targets. Other activities that campaigners are encouraged to adopt, such as writing letters to companies or asking question at shops, are still more individualized and typically do not leave public traces. Consumerist action forms, finally, appear twofold. Individual consumers' purchase behaviour expresses itself individually. However, those individual actions are guided by the campaign's activities. The consumerist actions which the campaign utilizes consist of providing consumers with information about producers and products. It is the result of research activities and investigations and the definition of criteria which serves as the basis for evaluations. Thus, consumerist actions within the campaign have an important public and collective component.

The three distinguished types of action are used throughout the campaign in a complementary manner. They tend to depend on and reinforce each other. Petitions are linked to consumerist tactics, and activist tactics help promoting petitions. Together, all these tactics are designed to put pressure on companies, establish the campaign as a legitimate collective actor in the continuous contentious interaction, and give consumers tools to become *political* consumers.

The uses of tactical repertoires can be summarized in two categories (Contamin, 2001; Taylor & Van Dyke, 2004): a substantive use – that is, a use which seeks to accomplish the specific claims raised by a movement campaign, by putting pressure, through different ways, on decision makers; and an internal or mobilization use, where action forms serve to

keep a group and its sympathizers mobilized, give opportunities to participate, thus contributing to the creation of collective identities. These different uses of tactical repertoires point to the different audiences a movement – or a campaign – targets (Jasper, 1997, chapter 12). One public is the campaign's primary target, corporations. But other, less important, audiences are the campaign organizers' adherents and, eventually, the broad public of consumers. Repertoires, then, are not only designed to place pressure on corporations, but also to raise awareness of the issue among the consumers. Substantive and internal uses are highly intertwined, as the same tactics serve to put pressure on companies and at the same time to guide consumers sympathetic to the movement in their purchase practices.

Through its tactical repertoire, the campaign not only targets corporations but also gives consumers the necessary tools to guide their purchasing behaviour, by providing information about firms' social records. This means that the tactical repertoire of political consumerism plays a performative role: it makes political consumers at the same time as it mobilizes them. The campaign pretends to speak in the name of political consumers who want corporations to change their practices. But it is through the campaign's actions and the information it provides that consumers can integrate political criteria into their purchasing behaviour. The tactical repertoire does not only have an instrumental role – putting pressure on companies by blaming them and signalling a demand for more ethical practices to them. It does at the same time create the possibilities for such political consumerist behaviours, by assembling the necessary information and equipping consumers with this knowledge.

Political Consumerism: A Venue for *Political* Participation?

If the campaign makes political consumers by giving them tools to guide their consumption behaviour, it also contributes to defining what kind of practices can be seen as political. Critics of political consumerism denounce the individualistic position of this action form. Rather than being perceived as a way to revitalize political participation, they see a process of depoliticization at work (Princen *et al.*, 2002). Other scholars see that same form of individualized political action precisely as an indicator for the renewal of civic engagement. In this case study, I have emphasized the role of the campaign organizers as a form of *agency* serving as a mediator for participation in creating venues (Norris, 2007). Political consumerism appears to depend much more on collective forms of mobilization than literature has suggested (for a similar point of view, see Clarke *et al.*, 2007a). Its public actions lead to the creation of new public arenas where debates occur, claims are made, initiatives are evaluated – arenas of 'appeal' in the judicial sense (Neveu, 2005, p. 17).

However, tracking down the collective shaping and political agency in the creation of tools for individual political consumerism is only part of the issue which surrounds the question of politicization. Collective actions can lack political meaning, just as individual actions can have great political significance (Scott, 1990). Hence, meanings need to be taken into account. How does the campaign address consumers, citizens and corporations? Do the discourses and claims that go with the action forms put forward a political approach of consumption? To what extent do these actors contribute to politicizing individual purchases? Frame theory distinguishes between diagnostic (that is, naming and blaming), prognostic (the proposal of solutions) and motivational (the reasons for action) framing

(Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow *et al.*, 1986), and it is in all three of these dimensions that processes of politicization and depoliticization can take place.

When discussing campaigns that target corporations, tracking down the political can obviously not be limited to a merely legitimist definition of politics where the political is defined as the game of representation within political institutions (Bourdieu, 1984, 1991). Doing so would condemn us to find an almost entirely non-political action form. Instead, one must admit that the political can be found outside of government actions; social movement actors, in particular, are specialized in the construction of new issues as having a political meaning. Some authors have suggested objective definitions of the political or processes of politicization around generalization (Boltanski, 1984), public-minded conversations (Eliasoph, 1998), or the attribution of responsibility (Gamson, 1992; François & Neveu, 1999); however, the problem with such objectivist definitions is that they overlook the fact that what is considered political is always a matter of struggle between political entrepreneurs. Only contextualized interpretations can overcome this problem.

The Framing of the Clean Clothes Campaign: Political Goals, Market Motivations

In the case of the CCC, the campaigners are clearly pursuing political goals. Transnational firms and retailers are blamed and held responsible for working conditions within their production plants. Codes of conduct are based on the core conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and are to be controlled by the independent institutions which represent all stakeholders. Finally, workers' rights and participation of trade unions are particularly emphasized. By analysing the official diagnostic and prognostic framing of the campaign, one can identify a clearly defined political stance.

However, when looking at the motivational framing, the picture becomes less clear. Market mechanisms are invoked. Corporations are pressured to respond to consumer claims and the use of economic arguments provides the encouragement to adopt codes of conduct. In the booklet launching the campaign, the Swiss CCC states: 'By demanding "clean" clothes, we tell the companies that the sense of justice is also a way of distinguishing oneself from one's competitors' (Clean Clothes Campaign, 1999, p. 1).[10] Consumers are addressed in many different ways through politicizing and depoliticizing arguments and strategies. Mobilization is said to be a way to empower consumers. As it is stated in campaign material: 'Let's use the power we have as consumers! Let's influence those who usually try to influence our purchase behaviour!' (Clean Clothes Campaign, 1999, p. 1) But on the other hand, the CCC's strategies are intended to appeal to a broad public and often use advertising language, celebrities, prize ceremonies[11] and so forth – tools that could be viewed as a dilution of the political message. But the use of 'commercial' tactics in political campaigning does not necessarily mean depoliticization. They can sometimes be interpreted as tactical innovation (for example, adbusting) and are building on repertoires experienced by humanitarian campaigns (such as celebrity endorsements; for an analysis of such 'protest simulacra', see Lahusen, 1996). Furthermore, they constitute instrumental strategic choices in order to appeal to broad audiences. Their use is not uncontested; conflicts arise among the campaign organizers where instrumental (that is, with regard to the choice of campaign strategies) decisions are often controversially discussed.[12] Raeburn (2004) highlighted a similar mechanism, studying lesbian and gay activists fighting for equal protection within firms. She speaks of frame blending, that is, a

'dualistic rhetorical strategy' (p. 218) when two or more kinds of frames are used. In the case of the lesbian and gay rights activists she observes that 'combining an ideology of ethics with an ideology of profits, they argue that doing the right thing *is* good for the bottom line' (p. 218, emphasis in original). The Clean Clothes Campaign also uses such dualistic rhetorical strategies.

In sum, the campaign's framing suggests that it is all right to rely on market mechanisms in order to achieve political goals. This mix of political goals and market motivations is held together by an ideological stance that is neither anti-consumerist nor anti-capitalist. It is only within this broader 'reformist' agenda that the claims of the campaign can take place. The general ideological framework is not one of rejection of consumer society. Although 'excesses' are condemned (throwaway society is criticized, as is the trend to ever cheaper clothing), '*the campaign doesn't want to diminish the pleasure of clothes*' (Clean Clothes Campaign, 1999, p. 8).

Naming the Political

The use of 'commercial' tactics to appeal to consumers also has to be seen in the context of the targets and the marketplace in which the campaign's actions take place. Its political messages which address consumers are consistent with the advertising messages that the corporations disseminate. Companies also make claims about their social and environmental concerns. Social entrepreneurs who offer goods especially designed for the 'ethical market' become successful, while established corporations communicate their corporate social responsibility policies, adopt labels, and so on. The emergence of such a market for 'ethical' goods is encouraged by the campaign's claims, although forms of 'recuperation' will be criticized as long as they are perceived as mere communication strategies or as being too limited in scope. The resulting field of political consumerism is characterized by claims-making about social and ethical performances. Most actors in this field, however, do not pursue any political goals.

Rating these initiatives and giving consumers the tools they require to adopt 'responsible' purchasing behaviours becomes, as we have seen, an important action form for the campaign. One example of this action type is the publication of a map that shows where 'fashion with a conscience' can be bought. The elaboration of the criteria to be included on the map constitutes a concrete example of the interpretation of acceptable practices – that is, which serious initiatives guarantee the respect of at least some of the CCC's goals – and others that do not. A DB volunteer group conducted the map research and encouraged its entire conceptualization, although it was published by the NGO and featured the official CCC logo.

One could say that the shops or product ranges which are included on the map represent retailers that the CCC supports as offering products for conscious consumers. With this in mind, putting a shop on the map means interpreting a retailer's business practice as in accordance with some political – or at least ethical – goals. The categories one can find on the map are organic and fairtrade (regarding cotton), social and local (regarding production), and second-hand. Whereas the first three categories (organic, fairtrade and social) refer to domains where labels and initiatives have spread during recent years and upon which the CCC has critically commented, the two latter categories (local and second-hand) refer to more marginal criteria which are present in the larger political consumerist movement although they play a minor role in the CCC. What is interesting is that in these cases, the political interpretation offered by the producers of the map is not necessarily

congruent with the shops' philosophies. Brands which are produced locally (in Switzerland) might do this for reasons other than the ones put forward in the map (working conditions and short transport routes), or with different motivations (for example, as they are often very small, offshoring might cause higher costs than producing in Switzerland).

Regarding second-hand clothes, the map text argues that they constitute a true alternative to new mass commodities because they contribute to the reduced wasting of resources. While this, along with a means of assisting the less fortunate, is the rationale of charity organizations' second-hand shops, others are much more interested in vintage fashion and, as one volunteer who contributed to research for the map puts it, 'getting last year's Gucci for less money'. Rather than fighting against resource wasting, these shops seem to make a living out of it. The volunteer continues: 'It was strange when I was talking to these people (in the second-hand shops), they didn't know why they should figure on such a map'.[13]

What is considered to be political is a matter of framing. Different actors' views and intentions need not be congruent with that question. Whereas campaign actors view second-hand shopping as a politically meaningful act, second-hand shopkeepers might have a very different rationale. This discrepancy and diversity of meaning is potentially even more important when considering individual political consumers' motivations. It is therefore not necessarily their individual purchase motivations that make consumption a political matter; it is the public claims-making of political entrepreneurs that does. Political entrepreneurs enable individual consumerist behaviour and give voice to it, to use Hirschman's terminology (2004), thereby establishing certain consumption practices as political.

Conclusion

This case study has attempted to show that political consumerism as an individual practice is shaped by the tactical repertoire and by the public framing of collective campaigns. This vision is somehow at odds with another narrative on political consumerism, analysing the practice as a new form of individualized political participation which is based on consumer behaviour. This dominant literature on political consumerism sees the phenomenon as an expression of individual consumers' will to incorporate ethical and political concerns into their purchasing behaviour (Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti *et al.*, 2004; Peretti & Micheletti, 2004; Stolle *et al.*, 2005). Political consumerism is often presented as based on loose networks of grassroots action groups which heavily rely on the Internet to coordinate campaigns. Individualized collective action, as Micheletti best describes this form of activism, is defined as

> the practice of responsibility-taking for common well-being through the creation of concrete, everyday arenas on the part of citizens alone or together with others to deal with problems that they believe are affecting what they identify as the good life. (Micheletti, 2003, p. 26)

However, by studying the Swiss CCC, one finds a much more centralized and highly professional campaign organization which appeals to citizens in different ways by opening up possibilities for participation, similar to Keck and Sikkink's (1998) description of advocacy networks with specific targets and accounts of top-down civic engagement in America (Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999). The incorporation of the 'politics behind products' into a particular good (clothing) is largely produced by collective political campaigns

using a tactical repertoire consisting of protest, conventional and consumerist actions. My study leads me to emphasize the role of the campaign as a collective claimsmaker and an incentive to political consumerist behaviour (similar views are expressed by Clarke *et al.*, 2007a, 2007b; Micheletti & Stolle, 2007).

In addition to challenging overly individualized visions of political consumerism, this study offers insights into the analysis of tactical repertoires in political consumerist campaigns. Studies on tactical repertoires have hardly explored the ways in which different performances articulate in a given campaign. This analysis shows how continuous contentious interaction, maintained by a mix of both consumerist and classic social movement action forms like petitioning and protest, allows the campaign actors to target corporations. On the one hand, contentious performances develop and maintain the pressure on corporations. On the other hand, these action forms and the information they publicize are instruments that allow consumers to integrate political criteria into their purchase behaviour. Thus, the tactical repertoire does not only target corporations instrumentally; it is designed to address different audiences, and especially potential political consumers, who are used as leverage to make pressure, but who are also an audience in their own respect, since the campaigning produces information they can use to guide their purchase choices. Therefore, our analysis stresses two important points: first, tactical repertoires in political consumerism have an important collective stance; second, they serve both to target companies and to produce the demand for ethical goods they claim to represent.

Finally, I argue that whether or not political consumerism can be seen as a form of political participation depends on the ways in which it is framed by campaign actors. While the framing consists in part of market-based arguments in order to incite corporations to respond to their claims, it also uses political arguments on the responsibility of Western corporations and workers' rights in developing countries, using frame blending (Raeburn, 2004) as a tactic to appeal to different audiences. When evaluating corporate social performances, the campaign tends to interpret certain shopping and corporate behaviours in political terms and thus give political meaning to them. But such public discourses need not coincide with the self-understanding of market actors or consumers, who might purchase such goods for other motivations than those intended by the campaign. Only a collective work of homogenization makes them all appear as political and pursuing a common goal. Far from being specific to political consumerism, this configuration is consistent with all types of political participation and more generally, the process of classification and the construction of social groups (Bourdieu, 1985, 1989). In elections (Offerlé, 1988), demonstrations (Fillieule & Tartakovsky, 2008), or petitions (Contamin, 2001), but also in other instances of collective behaviour such as cheering crowds (Mariot, 2001, 2006), politically or otherwise collectively framed activities contain all sorts of personal motivations for participation. What makes these practices political is their collective framing as such, not individual motivations of participants. Political consumerism, in this respect, is no exception.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. For instance, during the Second World War, everyday consumption in the USA was reinterpreted as a patriotic way of supporting the troops abroad. Responsible consumption becomes a politically significant method which individual consumers adopt (Cohen, 2003).
2. In the 1970s, an organization called Konsumenten Aktions Gruppe (KAG) put into place alternative distribution channels for free-range eggs and targeted the state and corporations in a campaign on the issue. The actions of this group illustrate how social movement actors can contribute, in different manners, to market changes.
3. This way of targeting companies by sending postcards draws on previous experiences. It had been used in a very similar campaign that targeted sneakers producers, a campaign which preceded the launch of the Swiss CCC. But it had been applied much earlier, in the early 1980s when consumers were asked to sign statements renouncing the purchase of tropical fruits and to send them to retailers, and constitutes a core tool of the NGOs' action repertoire for mobilizing public opinion.
4. The number even rose to 70,000 in April 2003. This does not mean, however, that 70,000 people participated, as the same person can send several postcards to different companies.
5. Interviews with campaign official, July 2007, and with company's head of public affairs, August 2007.
6. Finances basically consist of the salary of one employee. Extra resources are sometimes available, as the DB focuses every year on one major public campaign, and sometimes the CCC benefits from this status; thus, there is a competition inside the organization as to which campaign gets more attention and financial resources. One employee and sometimes an intern constitute the professional personnel. In addition, one has to take into account the volunteers (see note 7). At the beginning of the campaign, resources were more important, as three organizations participated in the campaign.
7. Three such volunteer groups which consist of 5 to 10 members currently exist. The DB formerly relied much more upon volunteer groups, but all but one of them disappeared at the beginning of the 1990s (for a study on activists of the BD, see Passy, 1998). Two new groups were founded at the beginning of the century, and one of them has been particularly active within the action framework of the CCC.
8. They are either national, as with the postcard petitions, or in the case of the so-called urgent appeals, at the level of the International Secretariat.
9. The activists do not launch a real popular referendum here. They simply draw on the extremely well-established and recognized imaginary of popular referendums, by letting people 'vote' in ballots. They thus play with the very legitimate action form of popular votes, but it is actually a petition without any compelling judicial value.
10. All the quotes from the CCC booklet are my translation from the German version.
11. Each year during the counter-forum to the World Economic Forum, the DB presents the 'Public Eye Award', which recognizes poor social and environmental corporate performances. This action mode is not linked directly to the CCC, but pursues similar goals.
12. For example, during a campaign against Swiss underwear producer Triumph which fabricates its products in Burma, the DB published an advert in the Swiss press displaying a woman wearing a bra made of barbed wire. The publication of this advert had been preceded by discussions about the appropriateness of the use of sensationalist methods, and it was subsequently justified in the members' magazine.
13. Interview with a volunteer from the BD, July 2007.

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