

Fairtrade South Africa (FTSA)

ALISON KETTER



I am currently conducting dissertation fieldwork in the Western Cape, Northern Cape, and Limpopo Provinces of South Africa. My research focuses on how policy transformations within Fairtrade South Africa (FTSA) affect farm owner and worker livelihoods, impact land and agrarian policy in South Africa, and reshape the global Fairtrade consortium.

Fairtrade is an international economic initiative that aims to empower marginalized producers across the global south through the promotion of equitable production, distribution and consumption practices. Based on a “trade-not-aid” approach to sustainable development, Fairtrade was officially launched on a worldwide scale in 1997. It is now a widespread template for agrarian reform, encompassing over 50 producer states in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

My study focuses on FTSA’s implementation of South-South alternative trade, the process whereby agricultural goods that are produced in South Africa are also marketed and sold there, rather than being exported to the global north. FTSA hopes to expand the label domestically in order to: 1) unseat the accepted Fairtrade practice of marketing certified goods only in the global north, thus allowing the global south greater autonomy over the construction of their own socioeconomic models; 2) increase the sales of Fairtrade goods so that more smallholders and farm laborers will reap the benefits; and 3) lessen the carbon footprint of Fairtrade certified goods. Still, this new policy brings to the fore numerous questions about market access for emerging black farmers, Fairtrade’s ability to reconfigure the inherited terms of economic privilege in rural communities,

and new opportunities for alliance and interdependence between South Africa and other leading southern states.

In order to conduct this research, I am meeting with a range of actors including farm workers, land beneficiary farmers, established commercial farmers, FTSA personnel, government agents, global Fairtrade personnel, etc. I am studying how these policy transformations develop and their tangible and intangible consequences primarily through the lens of four vineyards, but also through that of numerous other relevant stakeholders.

Alison Ketter is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology. Her research is funded by Fulbright IIE and the National Science Foundation. She was a 2007-08 and 2008-09 FLAS fellow in Swahili. She was also a 2010 Summer FLAS Fellow in Afrikaans, for which she attended the Summer Cooperative African Language Institute (SCALI).