

Fair Trade Food: Connecting Producers and Consumers

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1. INTRODUCTION

Fair trade food is increasingly common on the shelves of Northern supermarkets: tea, coffee, rice, avocados, pineapples, chocolate, nuts, wine, muesli, black pepper and fruit juice are just some of the 58 food and beverage product categories available with a label guaranteeing a better deal for their producers in the South (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007a). The UK certified fair trade sector grew 49% between 2005 and 2006 in terms of retail value, with over 3000 products now available (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007b). Fair trade has a longer history in other European countries, notably the Netherlands, the most mature fair trade market (Krier, no date, p. 57), and Switzerland, where 48% of bananas sold are now fairtrade (ibid, p. 12), but the UK has grown rapidly to become the second biggest fairtrade market in the world after the US by retail value (FLO, 2007a, p. 11).¹ Food products now dominate the sector, indeed in 2005 coffee, tea, chocolate/cocoa and bananas constituted almost 78% of the retail value of all products carrying the Fairtrade mark in the UK, with coffee alone making up just over 33% (Fairtrade Foundation, n.d.).

This paper focuses on fairtrade's mission to reconnect producers and consumers in a globalized world. It asks what sort of social, ethical, economic and cultural connectivities fairtrade promotes between Southern producers and Northern consumers, and how these relate to one another. Several authors have sought to conceptualize producer-consumer links in fairtrade, notably Reynolds (2002) and more recently Lyon (2006a), building on material analyses of commodity chains or networks but drawing also on more cultural concerns with representation, agency and identity. This paper consolidates this work, including my own earlier research (Wright, 2004), to provide an overview of debates and to identify areas where more research is required. It uses fairtrade coffee as a case study to illuminate the discussion, with a particular focus on one UK brand, Cafédirect.

The paper begins by introducing fair trade, its central assumptions and characteristics. Thereafter the spectacular rise of fair trade food is addressed, followed by the particular case of Cafédirect. The main body of the paper addresses the connectivities between producers and consumers, considering their degree and content. While there are few opportunities for social interaction on a face-to-face basis, Northern consumers are shown to enjoy virtual and one-way 'meetings' with Southern producers as part of fairtrade's imperative to tell its story about a new way of doing business. Meanwhile, consumers' ethical sensibilities are hailed by the fairtrade project, which offers them a ready-made way to assume some responsibility for producers' welfare, while producers are bound by principles of democracy and sustainability. The economic connectivities may seem straightforward - modest redistribution between consumers and producers as the former pay a 'fair' price for the commodities exchanged - but are shown to be rather more

¹ The US population is 5 times the UK population; its fairtrade sector 25% bigger than the UK's.

complex. Finally, the cultural connectivities between producer and consumers are addressed and argued to rely on the reproduction of difference and 'othering'. In conclusion, it is argued that fairtrade contributes to a global 'ethic of care', widening the responsibility of the 'citizen-consumer' beyond national boundaries and effecting modest redistribution. However, at the same time it relies on a commodification of knowledge about the South and about Southern producers that seriously limit its quest to decrease the social distance between the two.

2. WHAT IS FAIR TRADE?

The most widely cited definition of fair trade comes from FINE, a network of four fair trade organisations whose initials provide its name: Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO); International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT); Network of European World shops (NEWS!); and European Fair Trade Association (EFTA):

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers - especially in the South. Fair Trade organizations have a clear commitment to Fair Trade as the principal core of their mission. They, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. (IFAT, 2007).

Consider also a further definition from FLO:

Fairtrade is an initiative for small farmers and wage workers in the South, who have been restrained in their economical and / or social development by the conditions of trade (= 'disadvantaged'). If fair access to markets under better conditions of trade can help to overcome the restraints of development, they can join Fairtrade. (FLO, 2007a, p. 2).

The central assumptions and characteristics of fair trade can be identified here. First, that the problem is the system of international trade, which is disadvantaging small farmers and waged workers (mainly) in the South. Second, that the inequities of international trade threaten sustainable development. Third, that the solution lies in a different system of trading, fair trade, which is in the hands of Fair Trade organizations and consumers. Fourth, that fair trade involves both new trading partnerships with particular producers and advocacy work to challenge conventional trade. It is notable that the agents of fair trade in these definitions are not the producers/ workers themselves, nor their governments, nor international institutions but, ultimately, (Northern) consumers. Indeed fair trade must be understood in the context of the failure of organised labour, the lack of implementation of ILO Conventions at a national level, the impotence of the ILO in terms of sanctions and the collapse of international agreements seeking to maintain commodity prices.

What is the different system of trading that fair trade embodies? Here I concentrate on the broad principles and draw on Nicholls and Opal (2005, pp. 6-7). First, that trade will be at agreed

minimum prices, usually above the market price, to enable producers to generate a living wage. Second that producer capacity and community development will be promoted through the payment of an additional social premium, which producer groups decide how to spend. Third that trade will be direct, to increase the value returned to the producer, with long run contracts to enhance producer security. Fourth that purchase will be pre-financed up to 60% to enhance producer cash flow and producers' knowledge of the market will be enhanced. Fifth that producers are democratically organised, produce sustainably and without abuse of other labourers.

3. THE RISE AND RISE OF FAIRTRADE FOOD

The origins of fair trade lie in the alternative trade movement's post world-war two initiatives to open up Northern markets for Southern handicraft producers, exemplified by the work of Oxfam and Traidcraft in the UK. Today such handicrafts are still widely available, but it is the food sector that has seen major growth since the certification of fair trade took off in the 1990s. This can be attributed to a range of factors that are categorised here in terms of producer demand; market characteristics; consumer demand; and marketing strategies. First, with primary agricultural commodities at the heart of many Southern economies (Nicholls, 2004, p. 106), producers facing rock-bottom prices asked development NGOs to help generate fairer markets (Low and Davenport, 2005, p. 147). Second, in terms of market characteristics, the challenges of meeting differentiated markets through a global food system provided a space for fair-trade food to establish itself (Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002, pp. 360-1). Moreover, food products were easier to scale up to a mass market than handicrafts, in terms of branding, packaging and level of demand in both the long and short-term (Nicholls, 2004, p. 106). Third, at the level of the consumer, concerns both about personal health in terms of food safety and environmental health in terms of sustainable production (Nicholls, 2004, p. 106; Low and Davenport, 2005, p. 147), together with a mistrust of the global food system and unease that 'experiential knots of connection' with agriculture had been lost (Korthalls, 2001, p. 209), fostered an appetite for knowledge about the places and conditions of food production that fairtrade food could meet.² Represented to consumers as a tangible way to make an immediate difference, the rise of the 2005 'Make Poverty History' movement centred round the G8 summit also fuelled consumer demand for fair-trade food. Finally, the marketing of fairtrade foods has emphasised their premium quality as much (if not more than) their ethical criteria and opened up distribution through supermarkets, enabling them to reach into the mainstream (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, p. 24).

It is perhaps arguable whether or not coffee is a food. As Mintz (1997, p. 360) reminds us, 'Coffee and tea are stimulants without calories or other food value'. At the same time, by categorising them as 'proletarian hunger-killers' and 'drug-foods' (ibid), Mintz simultaneously (re)positions them in relation to food as it is understood in nutritional terms. Moreover, spaces and rules of consumption certainly place coffee in the food category; consider its prominence in supermarket food aisles and on grocery shopping lists; as well as its exemption from VAT in the

² This factor has, of course, also fuelled the growth of the organic food sector. While fair trade food may sometimes be organic as well, and the increasing demand for both may be collated under the umbrella of ethical consumption, they are not synonymous. As Golding and Peattie explain, both organic and fair trade food make a virtue out of how they are produced but the fair trade project is also about solidarity with producers, about altering market structures and relations in their favour (2005, p. 157-8).

UK alongside other food-stuffs. Notwithstanding these dilemmas of definition, coffee makes a very good example of the rapid growth of a fairtrade food, attributable to the factors identified above: producer demand; market characteristics; consumer demand and marketing strategies.

First, Max Havelaar in the Netherlands initiated the first fair trade label to give Mexican coffee producers more favourable market access (Renard, 2003, p. 89) and Cafédirect began as a way to help coffee producers hit by the slump in prices after the 1989 collapse of the International Coffee Agreement (Wright, 2004, p. 666). Second, fairtrade coffee has taken advantage of niches opened up in the coffee market by an emphasis on origin, strength, quality and flavour (Renard, 1999, p. 495; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002, p. 360-1). Third it has a mass market, being the second most traded commodity in the world, and it is amenable to branding via a fair trade label given its relatively standardised production (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, p. 24). Finally, fairtrade coffee was one of the first fairtrade food commodities to be distributed by supermarkets, and it has now captured 20% of the roast and ground market in the UK (Krier, n.d., p. 30).

Indeed supermarket distribution is central to the transformation of fair-trade food from a niche product to a mainstream commodity. Last year the Sainsbury's and Waitrose supermarket chains switched all their bananas to fairtrade certified and in March 2006 Marks and Spencer did likewise with all their tea and coffee. These supermarkets have followed the lead taken by the Co-op, which switched all its own-brand block chocolate to fairtrade in 2002 and all its own-brand coffee in 2003. Not surprisingly, the growth of fairtrade, as well as lobbying by activists, has also drawn the attention of conventional brands. For example, Starbucks introduced a fairtrade coffee in the US in 2000, and in the UK is now supplied a fair trade coffee by Cafédirect to sell under the Starbucks label. In 2002 chocolate and confectionery giant Cadburys bought a 5% share of Green and Black's, the company that sold the first fairtrade chocolate in the UK, Mayo Gold, and in 2005 they returned to buy the rest. Nescafe introduced its controversial fairtrade certified Partners' blend in 2005.

4. CAFEDIRECT

Conceived in the early 1980s, Cafédirect was founded in 1991 by four alternative trade organisations, Oxfam Trading, Traidcraft, Equal Exchange and Twin Trading, each owning a 25% share. The underlying impetus was the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989, the ensuing slump in coffee prices and the consequent poverty experienced by coffee producers. Cafédirect's mission was to buy coffee from such growers on a fairly traded basis and market it to UK consumers, offering growers direct access to the international market for the first time, at a fair price. Initially available only in the small outlets (Traidcraft, Oxfam shops, world stores), it first entered UK supermarkets in 1992 and two years later was carried by branches of all the major chains. Central to this success was the availability of free human capital; via its founders, especially Traidcraft and Oxfam, individuals could be mobilized to put pressure on their local supermarket branches to stock the products, and relied upon to buy them thereafter. Diversification of products and outlets has continued apace since the mid-1990s, taking the beverage company from niche to mainstream. Traidirect was launched in 1998, four new organic coffees were launched in 1999; the first fair trade coffee hit the high street in 2000 when Cafédirect went into partnership with Costa Coffee Shops; and in 2003 Cocodirect was launched, the UK's first 100% fairtrade drinking chocolate. Cafédirect's share of the roast and ground market has risen from around 4% in 1998 to 8% in 2002 and to 20% today; it is now the fourth largest UK coffee brand.

Cafédirect's fair trade credentials were originally certified by the UK's Fairtrade Foundation, formed in 1992, following in the footsteps of the Max Havelaar mark and awarding licences to display its own Fairtrade Mark. Since 1997 fairtrade standards have been under the auspices of FLO, which operates a system of common international standards and launched a new international Fairtrade mark in 2002, enhancing recognition across borders and increasing the flexibility of suppliers to switch markets. In fact, Cafédirect's so-called 'Gold Standards' exceed FLO's fairtrade standards for coffee. Originally owned solely by its four founding NGOs, in 2004 Cafédirect became a public limited company after a share issue. Today Cafédirect is the third largest fairtrade importer in Europe (Krier, n.d. p. 28).

4. CONNECTING PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

One of the principles underpinning fair trade is the quest to promote greater connections between consumers and producers. The Fairtrade Mark includes as its fifth guarantee 'a closer link between consumers and producers' and this aim features in Cafédirect's mission statement: 'To be the leading brand which strengthens the influence, income and security of producer partners in the south and links them directly to the consumer.' Raynolds is optimistic about the prospects of success: 'The case of Fair Trade demonstrates that it is possible to "shorten" the social distance between consumers and producers...' (2002, p. 420). However, my earlier work on Cafédirect advertising left me troubled in that the (virtual) proximity of consumer and producer relied on tropes of difference as it 'rendered the lives and landscapes of the majority world as consumables in their own right, alongside cash crops' (Wright, 2004, p. 678). Goodman has also highlighted how integral 'the commoditization of people and place' is to the development of fair trade, seeing it as the 'commodification of difference [that] can make a difference' (2004, p. 902).

What follows is an attempt to unpack the connectivities between producers and consumers in more detail, focusing where possible on Cafédirect as a case study but also drawing more widely on other fair trade coffees and fair trade foods. I concentrate here on producers and consumers but they are of course part of a wider commodity network of roasters; importers; buyers; labelling organizations; retailers; etc. I'm interested in the degree, quality and maintenance of the relations between the two, in the material as well as the discursive. For analytic convenience I've distinguished between social, ethical, economic and cultural connectivities (and I might include political in the future); they are, of course, intermeshed.

It would seem appropriate to begin by asking who the producers and consumers are. The producers in this case are own-account coffee-farmers mainly in Africa and Latin America. Although fair trade is aimed at poor, disadvantaged producers, those participating are not the poorest groups in their communities in that they have to have access to land, be organised into cooperatives and meet the required production and quality standards (Goodman, 2004, p. 909). Nonetheless, research with Latin American coffee growers supplying fairtrade markets confirmed their relative socio-economic inequality; most had under 5 acres of land and less than 4 years of education (Raynolds et al, 2004, p. 1115). Women may make crucial contributions to production but where land ownership is vested in men be denied official co-op membership, as Tallontire found in Tanzania (2000, p. 170). Cafédirect buys coffee from the 3,000 growers of Gumutindo coffee coop in Uganda, 8,500 growers of COCLA in Peru and 2,300 growers of PRODECOOP in Nicaragua, among others (Cafédirect, no date a).

Consumers are not organised into groups that make them readily distinguishable in the same way as producers, although particular institutions, such as churches, schools and Universities, may be pivotal in recruiting them to fair trade. Moreover, fair trade brands like Cafédirect do not make detailed knowledge of their consumer base public due to commercial imperatives to confidentiality. Nonetheless, it is generally assumed that the price premium of fair trade foods, as well as the cultural capital that their marketing draws on, leave middle class consumers with the greatest capacity for purchase. The UK's Fairtrade Foundation has funded regular sampling to test recognition of the fair trade mark in the UK and is indicative of consumer consciousness. The latest sampling indicates that half the UK population recognise the mark, highest in the 25-34 age-group and among social class ABs but increasing in C1s, and more than three quarters doing so report have purchased a fairtrade product carrying it in the last year, one third at least monthly; of course reported purchases and actual purchases may not be equivalent (Fairtrade Foundation, 2005).

4.1 Social Connectivities

I understand social connectivities here as the social interactions between the two groups, producers and consumers, and the social positions and social roles associated with them. Producers and consumers are, most obviously, involved in a trading relationship, in that goods and money flow between them. However, they do not exchange goods and money directly, face to face in a market place, for example, but across considerable space and time and mediated via several other groups in the fair trade network. So, in the case of coffee, the producer co-operative, TWIN Trading, the transporter, the roaster/processor, the packer, Cafédirect (Fairtrade Foundation, FLO) and the retailer. Producers and consumers do not meet at the point of exchange.

Nonetheless, fair trade organisations facilitate a modest number of face-to-face meetings between producers and consumers. So, for example, Cafédirect welcomed thirteen representatives of producer groups to the UK in 2005/6 (Cafédirect, no date a), and they met consumers and potential consumers both formally at events such as Cafédirect's AGM and Fairtrade Fortnight and informally throughout their visit. Indeed, Cafédirect's earlier initiatives in this respect gave producers important insights into the differences between UK coffee culture and their own, as Penny Newman, CEO, explains:

We took them [producers attending the producers conference in London] on an open top bus about two years ago to tour London... they can see the sights, then we took them to coffee bars to see how people drank coffee. It's completely different from Peru where they boil it and make it into a liquor and it's very, very strong... I mean a lot of them don't understand freeze dried, you know, to them that's like "that's my coffee"... it's in a jar and it's all granules...(Newman, 2001, p. 26).

Obviously these opportunities are only afforded a minority of producers, generally those holding office within a producer co-op rather than 'ordinary' farmers, and the interactions are highly structured around growing the market for fairtrade coffee. There may also be counter trends to producer-consumer proximity; research among cooperatives in Mexico supplying the fair trade market suggests that institutionalisation of the certification system under FLO has increased the gap between the two (Taylor, 2002, p. 10).

For their part, a minority of consumers visit producer co-ops in the South. Traidcraft organises holidays visiting fair trade producers in Africa, Asia and South America, so-called 'Meet the People Tours' (Traidcraft, no date) and numerous journalists and celebrities have visited fair trade groups and reported back; Cafédirect's home page includes a link to a video clip from Ewan McGregor's and Charley Boorman's recent trip to Gunitindo coffee co-operative in Uganda as part of their 'Long Way Down' motorbike tour (Cafédirect, no date a). Again, however, these interactions are structured around the imperative to grow the fairtrade market. Moreover, the actors are very differently placed on the work-leisure spectrum.

Face-to-face meetings are rather rare, then. However, virtual meetings of producers by consumers are ubiquitous, facilitated by fair trade marketing and labels. As I have argued elsewhere, 'Fair trade vignettes' are a commonplace feature of marketing and product packaging; short descriptions of producers' lives stressing the hardships of the 'free' market and the benefits that fair trade brings (Wright, 2004, p. 671). So, for example, Cafédirect's recently relaunched website has a moveable panorama of coffee production across the top through which one can 'meet' several producers, co-op officials and staff. These include Elfazu Nandala, a Ugandan coffee-farmer whose household comprises 18 people and who earned 250,000 Ugandan shillings [£70] in fairtrade premiums for his coffee last year, and Cecilia Mwambebile, tea co-op member from Tanzania, who says: 'Fairtrade is helping us improve our lives. We are able to build businesses now that will support us and help us in the future. Our children will be able to go to school, which means they will get good jobs, their lives will be better...' (Cafédirect, n.d. a).

Such 'meetings' and producer stories are clearly intended to persuade consumers that buying fairtrade makes a difference; that it can transform a 'once upon a time' narrative of arduousness and inequality for producers into a 'happy ever after'. While no such representation could ever be fully referential, these seem particularly simplistic. One would need to know much more about Uganda to judge how much difference an extra £70 a year might make to Elfazu and family. Moreover, there is no necessary link between education and privileged labour market access for Cecilia's children. Nonetheless, these vignettes reflect fair trade's quest to make our relationship with coffee as a commodity also a relationship with those who produced it. Thus it is not surprising that several analyses, including mine, have understood the fair trade movement's consumer education as an attempt to undermine commodity fetishism (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Lyon, 2006a; Wright, 2004).

In the first volume of *Capital*, Karl Marx expounded the concept of the fetishism of commodities (Marx, 1961). Fetishism refers to the ascription of living power to inanimate objects, in Marx's time generally used to refer to the ascription of spiritual powers to religious artefacts. His use of the term refers to the illusion that commodities themselves direct social relations, through the market, an illusion maintained via the separation of use value and exchange value.

Since the producers do not come into social contact with each other until they exchange their products, the specific character of each producer's labour does not show itself except in the act of exchange. In other words, the labour of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labour of society, only by means of the relations which the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. To the latter, therefore, the relations connecting the labour of one individual to that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things (Marx, 1961, p. 73).

Thus our relationship to the circulation of goods becomes a relationship with money rather than with the producers of the goods, and the value of commodities is understood in terms of their exchange value rather than the value of the labour that produced them. This alienation of labour, this concealment of the social relations involved in the human production of the commodity, is for Marx a mask at the heart of capitalism and crucial to its legitimacy. Where money represents the value of the product then as long as the market price is paid there is no further obligation between buyer and seller.

On the other hand, by concentrating on the 'labour behind the label' and by understanding production and consumption as constituting social relations between people, the fair trade movement insists that there is an obligation beyond payment of the market price. Bringing the lives of coffee producers to the attention of consumers seeks to make it their concern if the market price for coffee is below the cost of its production, or below the cost of a minimum standard of living, and simultaneously to offer fair trade purchase as redress. However, this is best understood as but a partial commodity defetishization, still a far cry from realising the 'mutual relations' envisaged by Marx (1961, p. 72).

First, the virtual 'meetings' between producer and consumer are only one-way and necessarily partial. I may 'know' Elfazu's face from the Cafédirect web-site but I can't know him as a person. Moreover, it's highly unlikely that the coffee I buy was grown by him; rather his face and life stand as 'representative' of a largely imagined community of producers. Second, he knows nothing of me as an individual, he can't look at my picture, and he has little opportunity to know me or other consumers more generally. Cafédirect's CEO Penny Newman may insist that producers do know about consumers:

Because we tell them... and they desperately want to know about you. Not you personally but consumers... they're hungry to know about us... what we want, where we buy and so we take out photographs... Our role is very much to paint the picture back to them about people like ourselves and our habits, our consumption habits, our shopping habits, the way that we think... the things that we demand...(Newman, 2001, p. 25).

However, the quote itself highlights producers' lack of knowledge and that what they might glean is both mediated by Cafédirect and premised around growing the market. Meanwhile, research with Guatemalan coffee producers supplying the fairtrade market in the US holds that 'members of the researched co-operative had little knowledge of the consumers who bought their coffee' (Lyon, 2006a, p. 458).

Third, the defetishization is partial in that the lives of producers become commodified, items of consumption for consumers. They are bought with the product, as images and text on its packaging, and consumed as part of its marketing. In fact, images of fair trade producers have now become items for purchase in their own right; Fairtrade media has developed an archive over 1,500 pictures which are now for sale directly and as part of a line of greetings cards, calendars, and wrapping paper (Fairtrade media, n.d.). Moreover, the meanings that circulate about what I have called the 'lives and landscapes' of producers promote 'othering' and cultural disrespect, an argument that will be developed further in the section on cultural connectivities below.

Marx's vision of mutual relations was ultimately to be achieved only as part of a revolution to abolish private property and put the collective in charge of production and distribution of

commodities and services, whereas fair trade's solution is to modify capitalist terms of trade. In educating consumers about the disadvantaged position of producers fair trade appeals to consumers' sense of (in)justice, simultaneously offers them a way to contribute to redress. The next section explores the ethical connectivities between producers and consumers in more detail.

4.2 Ethical Connectivities

If ethics are understood as a set of moral principles or values governing the conduct of individuals or groups, then ethical connectivities are here concerned with the principles or values governing the conduct of consumers and producers viz-a-viz one another. Fair trade can be understood as bringing a new 'ethic of care' into the trading relationship between producer and consumer, in contrast with the ethics of trade in a 'free' market. What this consists of is explored below at an abstract level, before consideration is given to ethical connectivities as experienced and reported.

The moral principles governing consumers and producers in the free market model can be understood at the level of both deontologism and consequentialism. Deontological ethics are derived from the principles surrounding the nature of action, its means, whereas consequential ethics are derived from the outcome of action, its ends. At a deontological level, consumers and producers in a free market model should trade with one another voluntarily, by mutual agreement and free from coercion, in line with the principles of autonomy and freedom at the heart of liberalism. They must honour contracts and property rights, norms backed up by law and state-power, so as not to infringe on the freedom and autonomy of others. Given all the above, they will be trading at equilibrium prices. At the level of consequentialism, consumers and producers in a free market model have a duty to pursue their own wealth and utility because in so doing they will simultaneously promote the greater good. The laws of supply and demand will automatically move the price of goods and services exchanged into equilibrium, whereby they will be distributed according to each consumer's utility for them within the limits of their capacity to pay, and the division of labour will be optimal in terms of comparative advantage. Thus within this model the pursuit of individual self interest is an ethical act.

What are the moral principles and values governing consumers and producers in a fair trade model? In short, that consumers assume some responsibility for both the form of the trading relationship that their consumption relies on and the outcomes of their purchasing decisions (although there are principles governing producers, as discussed below). Consumers need to assume this responsibility on the understanding that the market is distorted; structural factors coerce the market against producers and the pursuit of consumer wealth and utility will not necessarily promote the greater good. First, the market is n't free. Many Southern producers lack market and price information, putting them at a disadvantage; they lack direct market access, having to rely on unscrupulous middle-men; and they lack the capital or credit to enter other sectors of production if prices fall below the cost of production (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, pp. 32-8). Second, there are negative externalities arising from 'free' trade that are not reflected in the market price for commodities but undermine the greater good, for example, unsustainable use of environmental resources and human capital. Third, where Southern governments might have made laws to prohibit or limit the despoiling of the environment, and passed minimum wage and benefit legislation to tackle poverty, there is poor enforcement.

The fair trade model seeks to redress these imperfections of the 'free' market system by adjusting the terms of trade in producers' favour. At the deontological level consumers within

this model can be understood to be informed by Kant's categorical imperative to treat people as an end not as a means to an end. Thus they should treat producers with dignity, reflecting their inherent worth, indeed as they would wish to be treated themselves (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, pp. 62-3). At the level of consequentialism, consumers in the fair trade model are concerned with the impact of their purchase on the well-being of producers and their families and communities. However, since consumers do not buy commodities like coffee directly from producers, and since they are so distanced from producers that they cannot readily see the impacts of their purchase, they rely on the fairtrade system and its certification regimes to put these ethics into practice. They are distilled into principles of direct purchase through long-run trading partnerships at minimum prices to cover production costs and with a social premium for community development.

Academic analysis certainly emphasises the moral and political characteristics of fair trade. For Grimes it is a 'decentralized, grassroots citizen movement' (2005, p. 237); for Goodman 'grocery-line activism' of the 'morally reflexive consumer' (2004, pp. 907-8). According to Strong it is addressing 'the people aspect of sustainability' (1997, p. 36); for Levi and Linton it is an attempt to sell 'the norm that people in prosperous countries should factor global social justice into their buying decisions' (2003, p. 419). In other words, fair trade can be understood to combine consumption – the satisfaction of needs and wants through the purchase and use of goods and services – with citizenship – making a positive contribution to the solving of public problems (McGregor, 2002, p. 1). Its success depends ultimately on those 'consumer-citizens' who are 'concerned for the welfare of the global community and the impact of their individual and collective consumption behaviour' (McGregor, 2002, p. 6), who both consume responsibly and express political preferences through their purchases (ibid, p. 5).

What actually motivates consumers to buy fairtrade and how their motivations relate to ethics remains an under-researched area. According to Barnett et al, it should not be assumed that fairtrade simply meets a disposition for ethical expression that was pre-existing; it may also be producing that disposition (2005, p. 32). Nor should it be assumed that all fairtrade consumers are similarly ethically motivated. A study of the motives of fair trade coffee consumers in France, accessed at the point of purchase, finds that the leading group of motives were socially oriented around the 'wish to attain the value "equality between humans"' (de Ferran and Grunert, 2007, p. 226). However, the second most frequent motives were individually oriented around the wish to attain satisfaction through consumption of 'a good product with a good taste' and there was also a wish to protect oneself and the environment (ibid). Moreover, those purchasing in a supermarket favoured individual values, compared with those purchasing in specialist stores who favoured social values (ibid, p. 227).

This latter finding has surely not been lost on those who market fairtrade food for mass distribution. My analysis of Cafédirect's advertising in the 1999-2002 period argued that interpellation through the pleasures of consumption and distinction was privileged over interpellation through an appeal to ethics: 'whenever the ethical dimensions of fair trade come to the fore the attention of the potential consumers is quickly returned to the theme of self-reward:...this is the coffee that tastes so good to those who have good taste' (Wright, 2004, pp. 668-669). Putting quality before ethics was a strategy the Cafédirect CEO was very conscious of: 'We've really made ourselves look as good, taste as good and be as good at marketing as the biggest brands such as Nescafe or Kenco... and we feel that's the right way to go... [long pause], and by the way, it's fair trade (Newman, 2001, p. 6).

Interestingly, Cafédirect's latest print advert shifts the balance back towards the ethical imperative, although the quality of the product is also emphasised. The tag-line 'There's only half an inch between poverty and paradise' denotes the distance between Cafédirect and non-fairtrade coffees on supermarket shelves and the difference that choosing the 'right' coffee will make for producers' lives. Here ethics become the 'unique selling point' that lights up Cafédirect on the shelf in contrast to its dismal competitors. The impact of fairtrade is exaggerated; it certainly makes a difference to producers but not of the magnitude suggested. And, of course, it is not only the producers who apparently reach paradise but consumers too, both immediately in the 'aromatic, delicate fragrance and floral acidity' of the gourmet coffee Palenque and in the future from having done the right thing by others.

It would be easy to forget that the fair trade model also imposes particular ethical norms on producers. First principles of solidarity, democracy and participation are encoded through making the organisation of producers into a cooperative practising one-farmer, one-vote a requirement of fairtrade certification. (At the same time, progress towards democratic participation of producers in setting and monitoring fairtrade standards has been painfully slow). Second, principles of environmental sustainability are also codified, with certain pesticides banned and a requirement for pesticide use to be documented and managed. So within a fair trade system producers owe it to consumers to organise themselves democratically and to safeguard the environment. However, we know very little about how producers experience these ethical norms. In fact to date there is a paucity of research with producers about their experiences of and hopes for fair trade; most of what circulates being the 'happy ever after' vignettes of fairtrade marketing (Camp et al, 2005). What research has been done suggests that many producers still don't understand the fairtrade system beyond the higher and more stable commodity price (ibid; Lyon, 2006a, p. 459-60), which is the focus of the next section.

4.3 Economic Connectivities

Here the focus is on the flows of resources between producers and consumers, primarily goods and money. While both have something that the other wants, and so they trade (albeit indirectly), the fairtrade offer is that the producer is paid a 'fair' price for the goods rather than the market price, that is, a guaranteed minimum price together with a social premium. This modest redistribution is premised on both the relative affluence of the consumer in relation to the producer, ie s/he can afford to pay a bit more, and the ethical imperative to ensure that producers can cover production costs and provide for their families. What the consumer is offered in return is a high quality product, both intrinsically in terms of use value and extrinsically in terms of virtue.

For coffee, FLO has fixed the minimum price as follows: Robusta beans, 111 US cents per pound; organic Robusta beans, 131 cents/lb; Arabica beans, 131 cents/lb; organic Arabica beans, 151 cents/lb (FLO, 2007b, p. 5). If the market price is above this, then the fairtrade criteria stipulate that the producer is paid the market price plus a 5 cents premium per pound of coffee (ibid). In fact, Cafédirect goes further than this, as part of their 'gold standard', with up to 161 cents/lb for organic gourmet Arabica beans and in the case of market prices above fair-trade prices paying the market price plus 10%. The market price is notoriously volatile and so price stability is a key benefit to producers; Arabica beans reached an all-time low in real terms of 45c/lb in 2001 and were 116c/lb in February this year.

There is little doubt that producers benefit from fairtrade's minimum and stable pricing system. In 2003 coffee producers supplying Cafédirect realised an additional £2.8 million pounds from selling in fairtrade rather than in conventional markets (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, p. 25). Research with Nicaraguan coffee farmers showed that they at least doubled their earnings by selling fairtrade (Utting-Chamarro, 2005, p. 591), while Mexican farmers selling to the fairtrade organic market tripled their earnings (Raynolds et al, 2004). FLO estimates that upwards of 7 million producers and their families in the South now benefit from fairtrade sales (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007b); indeed Cafédirect now estimates that its operations benefit 1 million producers (no date b). However, all is not as straightforward as it might first appear.

First, it should be clarified that most fairtrade coffee producers fail to sell their entire crop on a fairtrade basis, mainly due to lack of demand at the consumption end but also because producers may sometimes choose to sell through conventional markets to meet a need for ready cash. FLO estimates that just 20% of the total production of Fairtrade certified producers is sold under Fairtrade terms (2007, p. 12); a study of coffee farmers supplying the US estimated about 50% of their output was sold fairtrade (Levi and Linton, 2003, p. 417). Second, not all the fairtrade price paid to the co-operative accrues to the individual producer, mainly because the social premium is retained at the cooperative level and its disbursement decided collectively (of course the producer is likely to obtain some benefit from this) but also because the cooperative may retain a percentage to service debts (Utting-Chamarro, 2005, pp. 589-91). Third, while fairtrade coffee prices are always higher than conventional prices within the system, the monetary benefit of fairtrade to the producer depends on the state of the market; it is greatest in a low-priced coffee market.

The fourth complication is the most important, rather obvious and yet easily overlooked. What the producer has to sell – raw coffee beans – is not what the consumer buys, as s/he purchases roast and ground coffee for the cafetière or a jar of instant coffee in the supermarket, or a latte on the high street. The majority of the value added that accrues to coffee does so in the North. The gap between the extra that a consumer pays for fairtrade coffee and the money that the producer receives at the farm-gate varies, depending on the mark-up of roasters, marketing companies like Cafédirect and retailers. Volume differences also complicate matters: the fairtrade price is quoted per lb of beans, but ground coffee is typically sold in 227g packs (half a pound) and the weight of beans in instant coffee or that high-street latte is even trickier to work out. Nicaraguan coffee producers, upon learning from their co-operative manager's visit to the US that cups of their coffee were selling for \$US3 apiece, were certainly very keen to know how many cups one pound of their coffee could make! (Lyon, 2006a, p. 458). Putting the money into percentage terms, one example suggests that the producer supplying fairtrade coffee gets 11% of the retail value of the coffee (compared with 7% in the conventional market), with the co-op taking 6%, the roaster 38%, the coffee company 14% and the retailer 30% (Nicholls and Opal, 2005, p. 83).

All in all, consumers who imagine that the extra they are paying for fairtrade coffee is going straight out of their pocket into the pocket of the producer are going to be very disillusioned. And yet the way that fairtrade coffee is marketed, promising the romance of a full and transparent social relationship with named coffee producers, may well perpetuate this myth. Recent media coverage has focused on the mark-up of mass distribution retailers: an article in the Spectator in 2005 estimates that one leading supermarket was reaping a 160% gross margin on its own-brand fairtrade coffee (Oppenheim, 2005). Indeed the charge that some retailers are cashing in on the popularity of fair trade and the relatively inelastic demand for fairtrade products among affluent consumers may prove damaging to fair-trade's prospects. The retailers' margin is not something that the fairtrade system can govern; indeed if it tried to do so it would

be in breach of competition law (Lamb, cited in Purvis, 2006), so the onus can only be on consumers to shop around.

In the meantime, fairtrade organisations draw consumers' attention to the other economic benefits that producers reap in a fair trade market. As well as stable trading relationships and a decent farm-gate price, there is the fairtrade premium, which producer co-operatives typically choose to invest in schools, clinics and roads in the community, as well as technical training, new warehouses and quality control mechanisms that increase the value of their product. Moreover, the most progressive fairtrade companies also invest in developing producer capacity to add-value to their product and pool risk through diversification. For its part, Cafédirect's Gold Standard principles have seen it re-invest an average of 60% of its profits in a Producer Partnership Programme between 2003 and 2005, some £684,000 in the 2005/6 financial year (Cafédirect, no date b). Raynolds et al argue that in the long-term this sort of capacity building is more important for producers than higher prices (2004). Modest stakes by producers in fairtrade brands offer further potential for income redistribution. In 2004, when Cafédirect raised £5 million through a public share issue to fund expansion, its producer partners bought a 5% stake in the company, thereby benefiting from the first dividend paid in 2006.³

Fair trade may promote modest redistribution from Northern consumers to Southern producers. However, critics question the levels of redistribution, its sustainability if consumer preferences change and the appropriateness of recruiting affluent consumers to 'redeem' poor producers through their consumption choices (Utting-Chamorro, 2005, Lyon, 2006a; Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003). Maldistribution, they argue, needs to be understood structurally and tackled politically, not reduced to individualized projects of consumer choice. Instead, fair trade perpetuates historical inequalities, it promotes 'monocultural production for export' and 'dependent development in which third world producers are whipped by the whims of first world colonial-style luxury consumption' (Starr and Adams, 2003, p. 23). There is also disquiet that fairtrade marketing mimics the 'discursive imaginaries established during colonial times' (Bryant and Goodman, 2004, p. 345). The cultural representations of fair trade producers and consumers are considered in the last section.

4.4 Cultural Connectivities

Here the focus is on the meanings about producers and consumers that circulate through fair trade. How are they represented, textually or discursively constructed and what do they know of each other?

As the section on social connectivities argued, fairtrade marketing seeks to bring consumers closer to producers by making visible the social conditions of production. The aims are laudable – to promote redistribution – but the marketing produces 'voyeuristic knowledge' (Goodman, 2004, p. 900), commodifying producers' lives. It reduces them to one-dimensional stories of poverty and exploitation before fairtrade and a better life afterwards, to what Bryant and Goodman call a 'spectacle' for Northern consumers (2004, p. 359). Producers may well be aware of their role in the process - coffee co-op leaders in Mexico expressed a dislike of coffee marketing because of its depersonalization and promotion of stereotypes (Taylor, 2002, p. 28) – but have little choice in the quest to 'grow the market'.

³ Cocoa producers have a rather more substantial share of the fairtrade chocolate marketing company Divine Chocolate Ltd; their co-operative's 45% stake yielded almost £50 000 when the first dividend was paid earlier this year.

If producers have little control over what consumers know about them, little chance to develop their self-image for public consumption, they also have limited opportunities of a 'reverse gaze'. As Goodman notes, what producers know of consumers is an under-researched area (2004, p. 910). However, given the emphasis on continual product improvement within fairtrade networks it is feasible to assume that producers 'know' consumers mainly through their 'good taste', a taste that has to be satisfied to safeguard market access. They may know little else of them, including how they consume the coffee producers have grown. In fact producers may not even know what that coffee tastes like, since they don't drink export quality coffee or generally see it in its processed form.

Fairtrade marketing commodifies not only producers' lives but also their landscapes, as it indulges in what Bryant and Goodman call 'Edenic myth-making' (2004, p. 350), the invoking of beautiful, fecund and untouched places. I argued in an earlier analysis of Cafédirect's advertising that it positioned its coffee to promise 'an escape from the trials of a post-industrial world via an imaginary location... circulating as an image empty of the meanings its inhabitants might provide' (Wright, 2004, p. 678). We might consider today the moveable panoramic banner on Cafédirect's latest web-site, a collage of verdant sunny landscapes and happy, laughing producers, with birds flying overhead. Meanwhile, this was Lyon's conclusion about the market for shade grown coffee, 'shaped by North American fantasies of pure untouched nature and romantic portrayals of small coffee farmers as natural conservationists, eager to protect birds, biodiversity and natural resources' (2006b, p. 378). As well as colonizing the production of meaning, such myth-making belies the material realities of the places of coffee production.

In essence, then, fairtrade accomplishes a commodity defetishization that is but partial (Wright, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Lyon, 2006). According to Goodman the fetish is 're-worked': fairtrade accomplishes 'the removal of the commodity veil, but also a replacing of the fetish in the images of indigenous producers, tropes of productive tropical nature, and meanings of alternative development' (2004, p. 902). How can we make sense of this failure to defetishize? For Castree it is an inherent problem. The unveiling of commodity fetishism is inevitably constrained by categories of thought prone to the essentialising of places and cultures (2001, p. 1520); there are no 'deeper' realities that can be exposed beyond social construction. It could also be understood in terms of consumer society's preference for goods that are, in Reynolds' words, 'pre-packaged with lifestyle signifiers' (2002, p. 413).

From a neomarxist perspective the commodity fetish is actually two-fold, both an obscuring of the story of production and an imbuing of the commodity with symbolic value, that is, with aesthetic qualities beyond its use-value. This generates both economic surpluses for capital, in the form of rent (Guthman, 2002, p. 305) and cultural surpluses for consumers, in the form of satisfaction and identity. According to Hudson and Hudson this type of commodity fetishism is intrinsic to modern capitalism (2003). Alienation from their own labour means consumers seek creativity or satisfaction in consumer goods rather than in productive work, 'in the self-interested pursuit of satisfaction through ownership of the products of commodity exchange' (ibid, p. 416). Since fairtrade goods circulate through capitalism, their marketing fetishizes them to attract consumers and grow market share.

Over-simplistic narratives about the redemption of producers through fair-trade make consumers an agent of justice and development, confirming an ethical identity project. As Dolan concludes, writing about fair trade flower and vegetable production in Kenya, African labor is an arena in which discourses of justice are played out, as a consuming public (re)constitute the African

worker as an object of their duty and obligation' (Dolan, 2005, p. 365). However, the 'virtue orientation' is insufficient to capture mainstream markets (Golding and Peattie, 2005, p. 158); recall the more individualistic orientation of fair trade supermarket shoppers noted above. Thus personal satisfaction is also on offer. Enchanting Cafédirect with imaginative stories of escape, authenticity, leisure, and luxury signifies the ease of the consumer taking a break from the stresses and strains of late modernity. Meanwhile, insisting on the quality of fair trade products flatters and affirms the consumer's good taste.

This perpetuation of commodity fetishism is certainly troubling, with its colonial-style tropes of Southern labour and landscape ripe for expropriation, but may yet persist. As brands like Cafédirect seek to grow market share further they will need to keep promising the consumer more than coffee itself. Moreover, commodity fetishism may in the end persist if and until relations of production in the North are transformed so meaning, values and identity don't rely so heavily on consumption (Hudson and Hudson, 2003).

5. CONCLUSION

Hendrickson and Heffernan (2002) conceive alternative systems of food production and consumption as attempts to wrest food from what Habermas called the systems world, governed by power and money, and (re)place it in the life world, the sphere of social relations. Fairtrade might declare itself to have similar aims, to re-connect producers and consumers and reduce the social distance between them. Ultimately, however, I would argue that it is unable to resist the colonization of and encroachment of the systems world.

The social connectivities fostered by fairtrade have the potential to encourage respect for difference and promote equality, but they are hampered by the one-way commodification of producers' lives used to get the message home to consumers. Ultimately producers are confirmed in and reduced to the role of workers to be helped, by leisured consumers who can remain anonymous as they enjoy stories of hardship relieved from afar. Indeed the marketing of fairtrade treads a careful line between invoking an ethical connectivity between consumers and producers, whereby the former recognise and assume some responsibility for the former, and privileging consumer satisfaction. Fairtrade does achieve valuable redistribution from consumers to producers, but not as much as consumers might first assume, and alongside the risk of misrecognition. Cultural connectivities leave a lot to be desired, establishing consumers as the subjects and agents of cultural knowledge (about producers and the South; about charitable largesse, about their own superiority). Moreover, there is a risk that making consumption the new theatre of development (Goodman, 2004, p. 892) only contributes to the further individualisation of social problems such as poverty and inequality.

As fair trade sales go from strength to strength, and as some of 'the big boys' begin to reap the rewards of 'fairwashing', the tensions embodied by being both in and against the market are becoming acute. Many researchers have identified fairtrade's failure to put producers at the heart of the movement, enabling them to become the agent's of their own empowerment. Indeed it is noticeable that the gaps in knowledge about the fairtrade system often relate to producers: how do they conceive consumers, what does fairtrade mean to them, how would they like to be represented? As Frank (2003) concluded of earlier mobilizations of consumers on behalf of working people, such as the 19th century union-label movement, 'Where are the Workers?'

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