Fairtrade Food: Connecting Producers and Consumers

**Draft chapter for Gimlin, Debra and David Inglis (Eds)
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INTRODUCTION

Fairtrade food is increasingly common on the shelves of Northern supermarkets: tea, coffee, rice, avocados, chocolate, wine, 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 Fairtrade sector grew 49% between 2005 and 2006 in terms of retail value, with over 3000 products now available (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007b). Fairtrade has a longer history in other European countries, notably the Netherlands and Switzerland, but the UK has grown rapidly to become the second biggest Fairtrade market in the world after the US by retail value (FLO, 2007a: 11).[1] Food products dominate the sector, with coffee, tea, chocolate/cocoa and bananas constituting 78% of the retail value of all UK Fairtrade certified products in 2005 (Fairtrade Foundation, n.d.). This chapter addresses this growth in the production and consumption of Fairtrade food both in the context of globalization and within a tradition of theorising food as both material and symbolic good. It charts the specific development of Fairtrade labelled food in the UK economy as it goes from niche outlets to mainstream supermarkets, drawing on coffee for purposes of illustration. Particular attention is then paid to Fairtrade's mission to reconnect Southern producers and Northern consumers in a globalized world, using the concept of commodity fetishism.

The chapter begins by introducing Fairtrade, its central assumptions and characteristics, and by introducing food, a very special commodity. It then seeks to embed Fairtrade food in the context of globalization. Thereafter the specific development of the UK's Fairtrade food sector is addressed, charting the origins of fair-trade labelling among non-governmental organizations, the rise of specific Fairtrade brands, and the subsequent arrival of mainstream food retailing capital in the Fairtrade sector. The spectacular growth of Fairtrade food purchases is argued to lie not only in consumers' concern with 'fairness' for producers but also in their concerns about the safety and quality of globalized food. There then follows an analysis of the degree and content of the connectivities between producers and consumers that Fairtrade food promotes. It is argued that while Fairtrade seeks to educate consumers about

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

producers and hails them to make a difference to their lives, its embedding in a capitalist market sees a simultaneous commodification of producers' lives and landscapes as well as commodification of the ethics and politics of Fairtrade itself.

WHAT IS FAIRTRADE AND WHAT IS FOOD?

Fairtrade began as an initiative to improve market access and trading conditions for small scale producers in the South who were considered 'disadvantaged'. Originally focussed on handicrafts, Fairtrade certification from the 1990s concentrated mainly on food. Labelling initiatives developed to signal to consumers that all or part of the commodity being purchased conforms to the following principles:

1. Trade at agreed minimum prices, usually above the market price, to enable producers to generate a living wage.
2. Promotion of producer capacity and community development through the payment of an additional social premium which producer groups decide how to spend.
3. Direct trade (cutting out 'middlemen') to increase the value returned to the producer, and long run contracts to enhance producer security.
4. Up to 60% pre-financing to secure producer cash flow and enhancements of producers' knowledge of the market.
5. Democratic organisation of producers, who must produce sustainably and without abuse of other labourers (Nicholls and Opal, 2005:6-7).

Early Fairtrade certification was nationally organised and NGO led. Max Havelaar was the first Fairtrade label, launched in the Netherlands in 1988 for Mexican Fairtrade coffee; the UK's Fairtrade Foundation label first appeared in 1994 on Green and Black's Maya Gold chocolate and Cafédirect coffee; and the US Transfair label was launched in 1999. In 1997 the Fairtrade Labelling Organization (FLO) International was founded as an umbrella organisation to harmonise national labelling bodies; it now sets the criteria for Fairtrade on a commodity by commodity basis. The certification of tea and sugar, largely plantation grown, has seen the remit of Fairtrade expanded to encompass Southern agricultural wage

labour as well as own-account producers. As part of a wider Fairtrade movement, it is important to note that certified Fairtrade has ambitions beyond what is codified to transform all international trade, by informing and mobilising consumer purchasing power; setting a good example; and lobbying for changes to the international trading system (Murray and Raynolds, 2007:5).

According to Madeley, food is a special commodity that differs from any other (2000:25). A basic need, providing the nutrients we require to stay alive, and a human right under the UN Charter, lack of food or the right combinations of food mean (often serious) illness at best, starvation and death at worst. Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations show that one seventh of the world's population faces severe food insecurity (FAO, 2007). While the ingestion of food helps govern both our quantity of life and its quality in terms of health, it also shapes and is shaped by broader qualities of life. Food and how we process and eat it is central to our identities, our sense of place, our history, our social interaction, our rituals, our sense of belonging (or exclusion) (Korthals, 2001:206-9). In short, food is both a material and cultural good par excellence.

What does this mean for Fairtrade food? Small producers in Africa, Asia and South and Central America have a long history of producing food crops for export to the North, along trade routes shaped by colonial and post-colonial links. Central to the global food economy, it is more than ironic than many earn insufficient from food cash-crops to achieve food security for themselves and their families. It is in this context that Fairtrade seeks to enhance producer livelihoods and security, by transforming the terms of trade. Moreover, the production and marketing of Fairtrade foods brings new symbolic values to the field and the table. For producers, these include pre-occupations with food quality to satisfy consumer tastes, for consumers, stories of places and producers far away and moral norms about consumer responsibilities to them; both are addressed later.

GLOBALIZATION AND FAIRTRADE FOOD

Globalization is a much invoked but highly contested concept: what it is, when it began, whether its impact is positive or negative, the extent to which it can be governed, how it is resisted and reshaped (Held, 2004). Often when globalization is cited what is being referred to is economic globalization, the idea of an increasingly global economy for the production of goods and services, dominated by multinationals. At the same time, political globalization has also received considerable attention, the idea that power to shape their destiny is shifting from nation-states to regional, transnational and supra-state organizations. Cultural globalization is also part of the debate, the idea that cultural practices and cultural goods are increasingly global as we eat the same food brands, watch the same films, and use Google all around the world. A fourth element, social globalization, is sometimes added to this trio, the idea that our social relations and identities are less attached to particular places and may be virtual as well as transnational (Munck, 2007:8). What does seem clear is that globalization is an uneven and partial process, variously resisted; precisely not as all-encompassing as the metaphoric ink stain Whatmore and Thorne set against their more nuanced account (1997:287).

Murray and Raynolds understand Fairtrade as a response to (economic) globalization's adverse impact on the livelihoods of small agricultural producers (2007:6). Certainly trade liberalization has generally worsened primary commodity prices (Scholte, 2000:215). In the case of coffee, following the collapse of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989 the average price on world marks almost halved from US$1.34 (1984-8) to US$ 0.77 (1990-4) (Daviron and Ponte, 2005:88) and has dipped below US$0.50 since. Fairtrade sees conventional trade as the problem and a new, alternative system of trading partnerships with particular producers as the solution. Fairtrade can also be understood as a response to political globalization. It has emerged from the NGO sector and has sought to mobilize consumers to effect change through a new Fairtrade market, in the face of ineffective state power viz-a-viz global commodity markets and social justice. For example, during the 2005 'Make Poverty History' movement, Fairtrade food purchases were highlighted as an immediate and tangible way consumers could make a difference as they waited (somewhat in vain) on world leaders. Where Fairtrade governs the conditions of wage labour it also speaks to state failure to implement ratified ILO Conventions and ILO impotence in terms of sanctions. Cultural globalization is also addressed by Fairtrade food, in that it seeks to

counter the de-localisation of food production that began with industrialization and has accelerated through economic globalization, emphasising instead the places (and people) of production.

According to Robertson, 'anti-global gestures [are] encapsulated within the discourse of globality' (1992:10). Certainly Fairtrade operates both within and against globalization, seeking to influence multinationals rather than eradicate them; increasingly relying on conventional capital as importers, processors and retailers of Fairtrade commodities (Raynolds and Long, 2007:19); and premised on mono-crop production for export. Moreover, FLO's work to harmonise fair-trade labels and increase brand recognition for the Fairtrade Mark contributes (modestly) to cultural globalization, just as their advocacy relies on the space-transcending technology of the internet and the quest to shorten the social distance between producers and consumers speaks to social globalization.

THE RISE AND RISE OF FAIRTRADE FOOD

The growth of certified Fairtrade food can be attributed to a range of overlapping factors categorised here in terms of producer demand; advocacy; market characteristics; consumer demand; institutionalisation; marketing strategies and corporate participation. First, the plight of producers facing rock-bottom prices was the stimulus for Fairtrade food certification. Since then the queue of producer groups seeking participation, as well as the reality that most can only sell a fraction of their total output Fairtrade, maintains the pressure to grow the market. Second, the NGO-led initiatives that first developed Fairtrade food successfully mobilized their supporters to buy the products in niche outlets and, when mainstream distribution began, to lobby their local supermarkets to list them. Third, the market for food provides opportunities for scaling up Fairtrade, in terms of branding, packaging and level of demand (Nicholls, 2004:106) and in terms of differentiation; Fairtrade situates itself in the growing high value food niche (Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002:360-1). Fourth, Fairtrade food speaks not only to consumer concerns for social justice but also wider concerns about food safety and sustainable production (Nicholls, 2004:106; Low and Davenport, 2005:147). These trends, together with a mistrust of the global food system and unease that 'experiential

knots of connection' with agriculture have been lost (Korthals, 2001:209), foster an appetite for knowledge about the places and conditions of food production that Fairtrade food can meet.[2]   Fifth, the institutionalisation of Fairtrade commodities under FLO has enhanced the product range[3], bananas being particularly successful, and raised the profile of Fairtrade food. Sixth, the marketing of Fairtrade foods emphasises premium quality as much (if not more than) ethical criteria and opens up distribution through supermarkets, enabling them to reach into the mainstream (Nicholls and Opal, 2005:24). Finally, having been persuaded to stock independent Fairtrade food brands and seen their success, supermarkets have developed 'own brand' Fairtrade goods (Barrientos and Smith, 2007).

Setting aside definitional questions as to whether coffee is food, it provides an excellent example of the rapid growth of Fairtrade food in line with the above factors. The first UK Fairtrade coffee initiative, Cafédirect, was founded in 1991 by four alternative trade organisations, Oxfam Trading, Traidcraft, Equal Exchange and Twin Trading, and their coffee was labelled Fairtrade certified from 1994.[4] Cafédirect relied on ATO supporters to promote and buy the new coffee, initially through Oxfam and Traidcraft then from the mid-1990s in all major supermarkets. Fairtrade coffee has mass market potential, coffee being the second most traded commodity in the world, and relatively standardised production makes it amenable to branding via a Fairtrade label (Nicholls and Opal, 2005:24). It has taken advantage of product niches, emphasising origin, strength, quality and flavour, to both position itself and diversify (Renard, 1999:495; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002:360-1). Cafédirect launched Teadirect in 1998, four new organic coffees in 1999, started supplying a Fairtrade coffee to Costa Coffee from 2000; and launched Cocodirect in 2003; it is now the fifth largest UK coffee brand and the third largest Fairtrade importer in Europe (Krier, 2005:28). Recently, it has faced competition from supermarket 'own label' Fairtrade coffee. Sainsburys first initiative in 2002 has been widely emulated, the Co-op switched all its 'own label' coffee to Fairtrade certified in 2003 and Marks and Spencer followed with both tea and

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[2] This factor has also fuelled the growth of the organic food sector. While Fairtrade food may sometimes be organic, the two are not synonymous.   As Golding and Peattie explain, both types of food make a virtue out of how they are produced but the Fairtrade project is also about solidarity with producers, about altering market structures and relations in their favour (2005:157-8).

[3] FLO certification has concentrated on food products but cotton, cut flowers, ornamental plants and sports balls are also covered.

[4] In fact, Cafédirect's so-called 'Gold Standard' exceeds FLO's Fairtrade standards for coffee.

coffee in 2005. Other mainstream brands have also introduced a Fairtrade offer to their range, for example, Percol as early as 1996 and Nescafe in 2005.

Supermarket distribution may be central to the growth and mainstreaming of Fairtrade food, but involvement of the corporate sector is not without its critics. There is concern that supermarkets are opportunistically cashing in on the work ATOs have done to develop the Fairtrade brand; that consumers cannot easily tell how far Fairtrade extends across a product range; that the supply side imperatives of going mass market will favour plantation production rather than small producers; and that the capacity of FLO and other NGOs may be insufficient to negotiate effectively with large enterprises supermarkets chains (Barrientos et al, 2007:58). At the same time, research shows that supermarket approaches to Fairtrade are differentiated, some showing more commitment to Fairtrade than others and being more likely to foster long-term relationships with producers based on dialogue and respect (Smith, 2008).

CONNECTING PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

The Fairtrade Mark includes as its fifth guarantee 'a closer link between consumers and producers', a quest that 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 Fairtrade demonstrates that it is possible to "shorten" the social distance between consumers and producers…' (2002:420).   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, 2004:678). Goodman has also highlighted how integral 'the commoditization of people and place' is to the development of Fairtrade, seeing it as the 'commodification of difference [that] can make a difference' (2004:902).

Here I seek to unpack the connectivities between producers and consumers in more detail[5], focusing where possible on Cafédirect as a case study. The term connectivities is borrowed from Whatmore and Thorne, who use the phrase 'mode of ordering of connectivity' to refer to the discourse of 'partnership, alliance, responsibility and fairness' that characterises the alternative commodity network (1997:295). Connectivity privileges fairness to producers on the part of consumers, being distinct from an 'enterprise mode of ordering' that privileges cost minimisation by consumers. I'm interested to look in more depth at the degree, quality and maintenance of connectivities between producers and consumers, both material and discursive. For analytic convenience I've distinguished social, ethical, political, economic and cultural connectivities; they are, of course, intermeshed. Conceptually, I draw on the concept of commodity fetishism, widely used in analyses of Fairtrade (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Lyon, 2006a; Watson, 2006; Wright, 2004).

In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx expounded his theory of the fetishism of commodities (1961). This is the illusion at the heart of capitalism whereby our relationship to goods becomes a relationship with money rather than the producers of the goods, and the value of the commodity is understood in terms of its exchange value not the value of the labour that produced it (ibid:73). 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. From a neomarxist perspective the commodity fetish is actually two-fold, both an obscuring of the relations 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, 2002:305) and cultural surpluses for consumers, in the form of satisfaction and identity. According to Hudson and Hudson this latter commodity fetishism is intrinsic to modern capitalism as consumers alienated from their own labour seek creativity or satisfaction in consumer goods rather than in productive work (2003:416).

Who are the Producers and Consumers?

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[5] Producers and consumers are of course part of a wider commodity network of roasters; importers; buyers; labelling organizations; retailers; etc.

The producers in this case are own-account coffee-farmers mainly in Latin America, producing 83% of certified Fairtrade coffee (Raynolds and Long, 2007:25) and Africa. Although Fairtrade is aimed at poor, disadvantaged producers, those participating are not generally the poorest in their communities, as access to land and capacity to meet production and quality standards is required (Goodman, 2004:909). 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, 2004:1115). 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 (2000:170). 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, although institutions such as churches, schools and Universities may be pivotal in recruiting Fairtrade consumers. Nonetheless, the price premium of Fairtrade foods and the cultural capital its marketing draws may be assumed to leave middle class consumers with the greatest capacity for purchase. The UK's Fairtrade Foundation has funded regular sampling to test recognition of the Fairtrade mark; this 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. More than three quarters recognising the mark report having purchased a certified Fairtrade product in the last year and one third say they do so at least monthly; of course reported and actual purchases may diverge (Fairtrade Foundation, 2005).

Social Connectivities

What are the social interactions between producers and consumers and their associated social positions and social roles? Producers and consumers are in an indirect trading relationship; they do not exchange goods and money directly but across considerable space and time and mediated by other actors in the Fairtrade network. Face-to-face meetings are very rare; Cafédirect and other Fairtrade brands typically bring producer group representatives to the

UK for Fairtrade Fortnight and some consumers may visit producer co-ops in the South. In contrast, virtual meetings of producers by consumers are ubiquitous, facilitated by Fairtrade marketing and labels. As I have argued elsewhere, 'Fairtrade 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 Fairtrade brings (Wright, 2004:671). So, for example, Cafédirect's website has a moving panoramic banner 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 Mwambebule, tea co-op member from Tanzania, who says: 'Fairtrade is helping us improve our lives' (Cafédirect, n.d. a).

Such 'meetings' and producer stories are clearly intended to persuade consumers that buying Fairtrade makes a difference; 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 are rather simplistic; one would need to know much more about Uganda to judge what difference an extra £70 a year might make to Elfazu and family. Nonetheless, these vignettes reflect Fairtrade's quest to make our relationship with coffee also a relationship with those who produced it, thereby undermining commodity fetishism in Marx's original sense. However, the way the story about the 'labour behind the label' is told makes it but a partial defetishization, still a far cry from realising the 'mutual relations' Marx envisaged (1961:72). Moreover, there is a simultaneous refetishization in terms of symbolic value, as the story of production is itself commodified.

First, the virtual 'meetings' between consumer and producer are 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 he grew the coffee I buy; rather his face represents an imagined community of producers. Second, he knows nothing of me as an individual; he can't see my picture and 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… 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, 2001:25)

However, the quote itself highlights producers' lack of knowledge and that what they might glean is both mediated by Cafédirect and premised around market growth. Meanwhile, research with Guatemalan Fairtrade coffee producers holds that 'members of the researched co-operative had little knowledge of the consumers who bought their coffee' (Lyon, 2006a:458). Third, and crucially, this limited defetishization simultaneously refetishizes the commodity, as the lives of producers become commodified, rendered items of consumption in themselves as images and text on the product packaging. In short, Fairtrade may reduce the anonymity of the trading relationship between consumer and producers but in a form that typically renders producers the known about object, rather than the knowing subject.

Ethical Connectivities

What principles or values should govern the reciprocal conduct of producers and consumers? Following Nicholls and Opal (2005), it is helpful to distinguish the principles surrounding action (the deontological) from those concerned with the outcome of actions (the consequential). It is also useful to contrast the ethical imperatives of the conventional liberal and Fairtrade markets. In the liberal market model the principles of action are voluntary trade and the honouring of contracts and property rights, backed up by law and state-power. Consequentiallly, consumers and producers have a duty to pursue their own wealth and utility so as to simultaneously promote the greater good: the 'invisible hand' will bring prices into equilibrium, optimizing utility and the division of labour. On the other hand, the Fairtrade model begins from the premise that the liberal market is distorted against producers. It isn't free: many producers lack price information and market access, having to rely on unscrupulous middle-men, as well as capital or credit to switch to other sectors of production if prices fall below costs (Nicholls and Opal, 2005:32-8). Moreover, there are negative externalities that undermine the greater good, for example, unsustainable use of

environmental resources and human capital. The Fairtrade model seeks redress by adjusting the terms of trade in producers' favour. The principle of action for consumers is treating producers as an end in themselves not a means to an end, thus according them dignity and respect. In terms of the consequential, consumers are to be concerned with the impact of their purchase on the well-being of producers, their families and communities. Since consumers do not trade directly, they rely on the Fairtrade system and its certification regimes to put these ethical principles into practice.

The ethical dispositions of Fairtrade consumers are under-researched. One study of Fairtrade coffee purchasers in France finds their leading motives socially oriented around the 'wish to attain the value "equality between humans"' (de Ferran and Grunert, 2007:226). However, the second most frequent motives were individually oriented, around the satisfaction of 'a good product with a good taste' and a wish to maximize health (ibid). Moreover, those purchasing in a supermarket favoured individual values while those purchasing in specialist stores favoured social values (ibid:227). This latter finding has surely not been lost on Fairtrade marketers. My analysis of Cafédirect's print advertising from 1999-2002 argued that interpellation through the pleasures of consumption and distinction was privileged over interpellation through an appeal to ethics: 'whenever the ethical dimensions of Fairtrade 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, 2004:668-9). 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… long pause], and by the way, it's Fairtrade (Newman, 2001:6).

A more recent advert for Cafédirect shifts back to the ethical imperative. 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 choosing the 'right' coffee will make for producers. Here ethics become the unique selling point lighting up Cafédirect in contrast to its dismal competitors. The impact of Fairtrade is obviously exaggerated 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 and in the future from having done the right thing by others. As Watson argues, 'consumers are able to express solidarity for distant strangers through the purchase of fairly traded products, but on the other [hand] they also buy for themselves additional feelings of self-worth for knowing that they have acted in this way' (2006:436). Here the fetishism of the commodity in terms of symbolic value includes commodification of the 'ethic of care' itself, as consumers 'pay to enact such displays of conscience (ibid:444).

It would be easy to forget that the Fairtrade certification model also imposes ethical norms on producers. Principles of solidarity, democracy and participation are encoded, requiring producers to associate and practise one-farmer, one-vote. Principles of environmental sustainability are also codified, pesticide management being required and some pesticides banned. So within a Fairtrade 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 existing research suggests that many producers don't understand the system beyond the higher and more stable commodity price (Camp et al, 2005; Lyon, 2006a).

Political Connectivities

How are producers and consumers connected politically? Most attention has been paid to Fairtrade consumers, 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, 2002:1). In this case the responsibilities of the citizen-consumer are extended beyond other nationals to a global level, attuned to a feature of globalization Robertson calls an 'intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (1992:8). So, as argued above, the Cafédirect consumer is simultaneously purchasing a high quality cup of coffee and the opportunity to make a (modest) difference to remote coffee producers' lives. Goodman characterises Fairtrade purchase as the 'grocery-line activism' of the 'morally reflexive consumer' (2004:907-8) and Grimes emphasises the collective power of consumers by describing Fairtrade as a 'decentralized, grassroots citizen movement' (2005:237). Certainly while the terrain of

political action is everyday consumption choices, the political ripples may be wider. Fairtrade consumers can be understood to contribute to a new form of civil regulation, whereby business standards are increasingly set and regulated by civil society organisations such as NGOs, rather than by state or supra-national bodies (Harrison, 2005:65-66). Consumers are also expressing 'economic votes' through their Fairtrade purchases. Indeed the indirect effect of increasing Cafédirect sales on multinational coffee retailers, nudging them towards a Fairtrade offer (or at least to pay more attention to producers in their commodity chain), arguably has more transformatory potential than its direct impact (ibid, p. 63). However, others are more sceptical about the extent to which consumers are sovereign and how far and how fast market choices can be transformatory (Shaw et al, 2008).

It is rather less clear how producers link politically with consumers; as argued above, they have little opportunity to know them concretely or imaginatively except perhaps as demanding high quality coffee. According to Watson (2005), this has important repercussions for the type of political act that Fairtrade purchase constitutes. Generally assumed to be an act of (re)distributive justice, whereby the rights-based claims of producers are recognised and the injustices of the conventional market are corrected, Watson argues from a Smithian perspective that it is better understood as an act of beneficence. This is both because producers know so little of consumers that the relationship between them inevitably lacks the mutual sympathy that justice requires and because Fairtrade addresses a generalised absence of good (to Southern producers) rather than a specific harm (to a specific producer) (ibid:281-283).

Where consumers and producers may be more equivalent politically is that both are largely excluded from the governance of Fairtrade, the setting of standards, their monitoring and verification. According to Reed, FLO has a legitimacy deficit in that it is not democratically organised and it is not sufficiently accountable to producers or consumers (2008). This exclusion has also been expressed by producer groups themselves and is beginning to be taken seriously; FLO is currently reviewing its governance and the representation of producers is on the agenda. For its part, Cafédirect has two producer representatives on its Board of Directors and, following a public issue in 2005, producer groups own 5% of its shares.

Economic Connectivities

What resources flow between producers and consumers? The producer is paid a 'fair' price, that is, a guaranteed minimum price together with a social premium. For coffee this means a Fairtrade price of 125 cents/lb for washed Arabica beans from 1 June 2008, together with a 10 cents/lb premium, against a market price as low as 45 cents/lb in 2001 and 116c/lb in February 2007. In return, the consumer is offered a high quality product, both intrinsically in terms of use value and extrinsically in terms of virtue. Most research indicates at least a doubling of earnings for producers selling in Fairtrade rather than conventional markets (Utting-Chamarro, 2005:591; Raynolds et al, 2004) and in 2003 coffee producers supplying Cafédirect realised an additional £2.8 million pounds from so doing (Nicholls and Opal, 2005:25). FLO estimates that upwards of 7 million producers and their families in the South now benefit from Fairtrade sales (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007b).   However, Fairtrade's redistribution is not as straightforward as it might first appear.

First, most Fairtrade coffee producers fail to sell their entire crop on a Fairtrade basis, mainly due to lack of demand at the consumption end.   Second, while Fairtrade coffee prices are always higher than conventional prices, the monetary benefit of Fairtrade to the producer varies, being greatest in a low-priced coffee market. Third, what the producer has to sell (raw coffee beans) is not what the consumer buys (a latte on the highstreet; roast and ground coffee for the cafétiere; a jar of instant) and the majority of value added accrues in the North. The gap between the extra the consumer pays for Fairtrade coffee and what the producer receives varies depending on the mark-up of intermediaries. In one estimate the producer gets 11% of the coffee's retail value (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, 2005:83). Certainly consumers who imagine a direct transfer from their pocket to that of producers face disillusion. Yet Fairtrade marketing may well perpetuate this myth, promising the romance of a full and transparent social relationship with named coffee producers. One leading supermarket was said to be reaping a 160% gross margin on 'own

label' Fairtrade coffee (Oppenheim, 2005) and the charge that some retailers are cashing in on the popularity of Fairtrade may damage its prospects.

In the meantime, Fairtrade organisations draw consumers' attention to other economic benefits for producers than price, notably stable trading relationships and the Fairtrade premium. Producer co-operatives typically choose to invest premiums in community infrastructure (schools, clinics, roads) as well as product infrastructure (technical training, new warehouses, quality control) and income diversification. Raynolds et al argue that in the long-term this capacity building is more important for producers than higher prices (2004). Modest stakes by producers in Fairtrade brands offer further potential for income redistribution. While Cafedirect producers own a 5% stake, the Co-operative supplying Divine Fairtrade chocolate enjoys 45%, yielding almost £50 000 when the first dividend was paid in 2005.

Fairtrade 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, Fairtrade may perpetuate historical inequalities in promoting '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, 2003:23).

Cultural Connectivities

How are producers and consumers represented by Fairtrade and what do they know of each other? As argued above, Fairtrade marketing has laudable aims - to promote redistribution – but produces 'voyeuristic knowledge' for consumers (Goodman, 2004:900). It commodifies producers' lives, reducing 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 (2004:359). Producers may well be aware of their role - coffee co-op leaders in Mexico expressed a dislike of coffee marketing because of its depersonalization and promotion of stereotypes (Taylor, 2002:28) – but have little chance to represent themselves. They also have limited opportunities of a 'reverse gaze'. What producers know about consumers is under-researched but it is feasible that producers 'know' consumers mainly through their 'good taste', a taste that has to be satisfied to safeguard market access (Goodman, 2004:910). They may know little else of them, including how they consume the coffee itself.

Fairtrade marketing commodifies not only producers' lives but also their landscapes, as it indulges in what Bryant and Goodman call 'Edenic myth-making' (2004:350), 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, 2004:678). We might consider today the moveable panoramic banner on Cafédirect's 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: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 only a partial commodity defetishization (Wright, 2004). It accomplishes 'a 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' (Goodman, 2004:902), all cultural surpluses for the consumer to enjoy. According to Castree the unveiling of commodity fetishism is inevitably constrained by categories of thought prone to the essentialising of places and cultures (2001:1520). Moreover, selling in capitalist markets subordinates Fairtrade to consumer preference for goods 'pre-packaged with lifestyle signifiers' (Raynolds, 2002:413).

As for consumers, Fairtrade marketing assumes and affirms their entitlement to high quality products alongside their 'good taste', thus conferring distinction. Cafédirect coffee is not only enchanted with imaginative stories of escape, authenticity, leisure, and luxury for the consumer, offering a break from the stresses and strains of late modernity, it also offers them 'temporary peace of mind' that they have done the right thing by far-away producers, and can be seen to have done so (Watson, 2006:445). Over-simplistic narratives make consumers agents of justice and development. As Dolan concludes, writing about Fairtrade flower and vegetable production in Kenya, 'a consuming public (re)constitute[s] the African worker as an object of their duty and obligation' (2005:365). Thus consumers are represented as redeeming both themselves and producers.

CONCLUSION

The spectacular growth of Fairtrade food is usefully understood as both a response to the negative features of globalization and simultaneously embedded within its trends. It perpetuates global economy and global brands just as it seeks to reform them; its attempts to re-localize food contribute to one-way social globalization; it offers a politics from below that is largely unaccountable. Part of its success story lies in Fairtrade food's capacity to capitalise on wider trends in food retailing, such as consumer concerns for food safety and provenance and the growth of high value foods in an increasingly differentiated sector.

Now selling in a mainstream capitalist market, it should not surprise us that the Cafédirect brand needs to keep promising the consumer more than coffee itself. Moreover, the Fairtrade project means that these cultural surpluses go well beyond the invocations of luxury, status, entitlement and authenticity that characterise other medium to high-priced coffees. Product labels and marketing invite consumers to 'meet' the producers they are invoked to take some responsibility for. This process simultaneously defetishizes the commodity, (partially) revealing the social relations of production, and refetishizes it, as new cultural surpluses of appropriation and redemption of distant lives and landscapes are generated.

While consumers may claim various connections to producers through Fairtrade, producers remain barely connected to consumers except in terms of benefitting economically from modest redistribution. Of course one must ask if this matters given that the original purpose of Fairtrade is to offer direct market access to producers at a fairer price. On the one hand, it could be argued that the means justify the ends; the more Fairtrade food takes off the better for small farmers in the South. On the other hand, it could be argued that the means contradict the ends. If the recognition of producers embodied in a fair price and a fairer trading relationship is undercut by the one-way commodification and 'othering' of their lives, and by their lack of ownership and control of a system designed for them but not by them, then Fairtrade's transformatory potential is compromised.

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 in going mainstream Fairtrade has been unable to resist the colonization of and encroachment of the systems world. It remains to be seen whether Fairtrade's failure to put producers at the heart of the movement will be addressed in the future and how far new research will examine how producers conceive of consumers: what Fairtrade means to them and how they would wish to be represented. In the end these lacunae have a long history; 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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