CHAPTER X

Conversion or co-option? The Implications of 'Mainstreaming' for Producer and

Consumer Agency within Fair Trade Networks

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In October 2005, Nestlé, the largest of the world's big four coffee multinationals, launched a certified fair trade coffee in the United Kingdom. With net profits in 2005 of approximately $US6.5 billion from the sale of some 8,500 product lines (Nestlé 2007), the introduction by Nestlé of a single fair trade product to just one of the countries in which it operates was bound to generate cynicism. By contrast, the involvement in fair trade of Starbucks – the world's largest 'specialty' coffee roaster and retailer – has invited a more mixed response. In fiscal year 2006, Starbucks purchased some eight million kilograms of certified fair trade coffee. This represented 14 per cent of global fair trade coffee imports and about 6 per cent of Starbucks' own coffee requirements, making Starbucks the largest importer of fair trade coffee in North America (Starbucks 2007). According to civil society organisations, however, Starbucks' entry into fair trade has been a slow and reluctant response to campaigning and consumer pressure (Renard 2003).

It is not the intention of this chapter to assess in detail the particular claims to corporate social responsibility of Nestlé or Starbucks, but to examine more broadly the implications of market expansion and multinational involvement for our understanding of fair trade production and consumption. The chapter will commence, therefore, with a review of debates concerning the potential social and ethical consequences of the

apparent mainstreaming of fair trade food consumption before moving to an examination of what we actually know about those people who have been mobilised as fair trade consumers.

Conversion or Co-option? The Mainstreaming of Alternative Consumption

Rapid growth in demand for, and sales of, certified fair trade products has stimulated considerable debate over whether fair trade commodity chains risk co-option by the mainstream food sector; whether the opportunity for fundamental trade reform is being undermined; or whether, in fact, any form of international trade is likely to offer sustainable livelihoods to the millions of small farmers of the South (Shreck 2005). Contemporary fair trade organisations and networks, according to Wilkinson (2006), can be categorised into three broad groups:

1. *Alternative trading networks* which link producer groups, traders, dedicated 'world' shops and consumers. While these networks operate often on the basis of interpersonal interaction and trust rather than on formal product guarantees, it is increasingly common for participating groups to seek certification as Fair Trade Organisations by the International Fair Trade Association (IFAT). By 2007, over 150 organisations were registered through IFAT and licensed to display the FTO Mark as a signifier of their commitment to fair trade (IFAT 2007).

2. *Fair trade certification and labeling schemes* that focus on verification and communication of product attributes. Since 1997, most national certification schemes have been affiliated with the Fairtrade Labeling Organisation International (FLO) which sets standards encouraging long-term contracts, direct trading relationships, advanced credit, guaranteed minimum prices and price premiums. Compliance with these standards is audited by autonomous third party inspection and certification bodies while licenses to attach the fair trade logo to certified products are offered to manufacturers, retailers and others. This enables certified fair trade products to move through mainstream processing and retailing channels dominated by companies that would struggle to meet the standards for Fair Trade Organisations set by IFAT in other aspects of their operations.

3. *Campaigning and advocacy groups* whose focus is not solely on expanding the market for

certified fair trade organisations and goods but on promoting more fundamental reform of the rules of international trade in order to make all trade fair and achieve more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.

Has mainstreaming the potential to undermine alternative trading networks and/or wider projects of trade reform and poverty alleviation? According to a number of commentators, the answer is yes; for while mainstreaming may assist, in the short term, to secure more access to high value markets for poor Southern producers, it does so by diluting, in a variety of ways, the challenge that fair trade actually poses to dominant patterns of trade and consumption. For the sake of convenience, concerns over mainstreaming, will be referred to here as the 'co-option thesis', the core components of which can be summarised to include the commodification and consumption of justice, the logical contradiction of trying to work 'in and against the market', obscuring relations of production, codification and de-radicalisation, exclusion and polarisation, subsumption of control, and erosion of standards.

Commodification and Consumption of Justice

It is possible to argue that there is something fundamentally wrong with offering up for sale the rights of some – rights such as freedom from poverty and access to education – as items of personal consumption for others. Such an argument may seem particularly apt in the case of fair trade markets dominated by largely unnecessary luxury goods such as coffee, chocolate and tea (Wilkinson 2006). More pragmatically, it might be argued that justice simply is not something that can effectively and efficiently be bought and sold through existing market mechanisms without: first, creating relationships of dependency between those in need of economic justice and the consumers who may, or may not, dispense it according to their own perceived needs, responsibilities and capacities (Bryant and Goodman 2004); and second, without allowing those whose

labour and produce is not 'in demand' simply to fall through the gaps.

Consumer demand is both fickle and finite. It is likely, if not inevitable, that particular markets for fair trade produce will become saturated as a consequence of rising production and/or falling demand and producers will be forced to sell their goods on the conventional market as coffee producers already are forced to do (Bryant and Goodman 2004; Murray et al. 2005). And they may make other sacrifices. Getz and Shreck (2006), for example, describe how some fair trade banana networks privilege consumer expectations of consistency in supply over the careful implementation of principles such as democratic organisation at the local level.

The Contradiction of Working 'In and Against the Market'

According to Renard (2003), it is possible to discern two competing visions of the relationship between fair trade and neoliberalism. The first, and more pragmatic, vision is to use fair trade as a mechanism to insert more products from the South into global markets at a reasonable price. The second, and more radical, vision sees fair trade as a transitional strategy through which to challenge and modify dominant forms of economic organisation. While some authors refer to this later vision as a strategy to work 'in and against the market' others, like Renard (2003), see it as inherently contradictory; raising the possibility that the mainstreaming of fair trade may not only dilute its challenge to neoliberal market fundamentalism, but serve to reinforce it.

By defining poverty as an outcome of market failure – rather than of inequitable access to resources – neoliberalism identifies trade liberalisation as the only sustainable macro-economic solution and entrepreneurial self-help as the only sustainable micro-economic solution. In what may appear something of a paradox, many proponents of fair trade move from a critique of neoliberalism, associated processes such as

globalisation, and institutions such as the World Trade Organisation which promote them, to ostensibly similar solutions. Macro-economic market reform is advocated to remove 'distortions' such as production subsidies and import tariffs which limit access to high value Northern markets. And micro-economically, capacity building and standards development is promoted in order to enhance the ability of producers to meet market demands (Wilkinson 2006). Further, as Johnston (2001) argues, despite the benefits of capacity building programs and price premiums for fair trade producers and communities, it remains that case that the lifestyles of fair trade consumers remain hopelessly out of reach to those supplying them with coffee, handicrafts, and other signifiers of an ethical life. Not only, in this respect, can fair trade be seen to accept a degree of inequality, but by allowing the wealthy citizens of the North to buy a clear conscience through their purchase of fair trade goods it can also be seen to absolve them of responsibility to participate in campaigns for more far-reaching political and economic change (Renard 2003). This consistency between neoliberal and fair trade prescriptions for self-help and entrepreneurialism suggests that fair trade is more likely to support limited reform of dominant economic forms than it is their transformation.

Obscuring Relations of Production

Foods often are packaged and labeled with a range of images and pieces of information associated with spaces of production and consumption. However, as Cook and Crang (1996) point out, such imagery and information may relate to the agroecology and social conditions under which those foods actually have been produced, but equally it may relate to a whole set of other meanings evoked by food consumption that have little connection with the realities of production. This can be illustrated through comparison of the actual social conditions facing coffee farmers since the onset of the 'coffee crisis'

(Bacon 2006) and the romanticised images of a sophisticated European café society and an exotic smiling peasantry that are made available for consumption by Northern coffee buyers (Smith 1996).

Fair trade claims to challenge this trend by focusing the attention of consumers on the impacts of their choices on the livelihoods and well-being of Southern producers. But does this result in a genuine de-mystification of fair trade production and exchange? There are at least two important ways in which critics assert it does not. First, any de-mystification is, at best, partial, as most aspects of the trading networks that supply fair trade products remain unexamined. Packaging and/or advertising for many fair trade products contains no more information than a certification logo and a generic statement as to its meaning. Where more information is provided, it tends to follow a familiar narrative structure in which basic background details on the farmer or producer cooperative's location and ethnic identity are followed by a brief good news story on the benefits they derive from fair trade (Lyon 2006; Wright 2004). More detailed information on political campaigns and the causes of global inequality are available for the consumer who wishes to go digging through fair trade organisation websites and newsletters, but the over-riding message attached directly to fair trade products is a one dimensional and unchallenging representation of distant small farmers who benefit from the consumption of those products (Johnston 2001). Entirely unexamined are questions such as the differential between premiums paid to fair trade producers and the prices charged to consumers (Moberg 2005); the profit margins of distributors and retailers dealing in fair trade products; the success, or otherwise, of attempts to reduce the costs to farmers of dealing with transport operators and other supply chain intermediaries; the fate of farmers who are not able to comply with fair trade standards; and so on.

This brings us to the second way in which it is alleged that fair trade fails to de-mystify production and exchange; namely, the targeting of fair trade information and imagery towards the putative fair trade consumer. Not only is little information available to fair trade farmers on the consumers of their produce (Wright 2004), some case studies have found that few participating farmers have even a rudimentary knowledge of what fair trade is (Getz and Shreck 2006; Murray et al. 2005; Shreck 2005). Rather than a genuine partnership for development or act of solidarity between Northern consumers and Southern producers, fair trade organisations commodify and sell opportunities for privileged Northerners to engage in consumption that they regard as at once ethical and pleasurable (Lyon 2006). For critics of mainstreaming, the point is not that fair trade has not benefited many Southern producers, but that it is misleading to argue such benefits have been achieved by de-mystifying commodity exchange.

Codification and De-Radicalisation

Entry of fair trade products into mainstream distribution and retail channels has been enabled by the development of clearly documented and verifiable standards. In contrast with the more informal and subjective processes possible within alternative trading networks small enough to allow direct interpersonal relationship building and trust, product-based certification requires compliance with the rules, norms and expectations associated with conventional quality assurance regimes. There are two main issues related to the codification of fair trade values in this manner. The first relates to the complexity of the social and agroecological issues implicated in the notion of fair trade and the impossibility of codifying these into one universally applicable set of standards (Lockie and Goodman 2006). The FLO has demonstrated an awareness of this issue through the development of differentiated standards for major varieties and regions of

origin for coffee (Lockie and Goodman 2006) and of variation in the environmental standards applied to banana production (Moberg 2005) in order to reflect better the social and ecological characteristics of particular production environments.

The second issue related to the codification of fair trade values is the need for that codification to comply with rules for standards setting, auditing and certification established by transnational bodies into which the fair trade movement has no avenue for involvement or influence and which exist principally to support market liberalization. Certification practices have been 'profoundly restructured' since the late 1990s as a consequence of harmonisation with transnational standards established by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) and World Trade Organisation (Mutersbaugh 2005, 397), specifically in relation to the use of independent third-party auditors. Networks once based on common values and self-regulation are replaced with networks based on contractual relationships governed by centrally imposed standards and specialised bureaucracies (Renard 2005).

Exclusion and Polarisation

The logical corollary of auditing and certification being used to govern market access is that standards act as a barrier to entry to anybody who cannot *demonstrate* compliance with them (Guthman 2004). As we have seen, considerable debate within the fair trade movement has focused on whether standards need to be modified in order deliberately to exclude multinational food processors and retailers who are not widely perceived to operate, in the main, according to the principles of fair trade. An equally important debate has focused on what some see as the unintended potential of certified product standards to exclude large numbers of particularly marginal farmers who cannot afford the expense of auditing and certification (Lockie and Goodman 2006; Renard 2005),

meet required production standards (Getz and Shreck 2006; Moberg 2005; Murray et al. 2005; Renard 2005; Shreck 2005), or otherwise establish themselves as members of fair trade networks. Particular concerns, for example, have been raised about the extent to which fair trade cooperatives have challenged traditional patterns of gender inequality and facilitated women's access to fair trade opportunities (Murray et al. 2005).

While the cost of farm auditing and certification was initially supported through the licensing fees paid by processors and retailers wishing to market fair trade products, growth in producer numbers, combined with the need to comply with ISO standards for auditing and certification, has seen these costs redirected to the cooperatives through which farmers are organised (Lockie and Goodman 2006; Renard 2005). Prior to certification, cooperatives are also required to provide evidence of a market or buyer for their produce (Lockie and Goodman 2006), a significant challenge given the generalised conditions of oversupply in the fair trade market. Obviously enough, this creates pressures to be particularly diligent about meeting market expectations and a number of researchers have detailed cases of farmers thus excluded from fair trade certification because they were unable to adopt required environmental or quality management practices. Lockie and Goodman (2006) conclude that even though FLO continues to work with donors and development organisations to support less well resourced producer organisations, the harmonisation of certification requirements with ISO standards and the increasing movement of fair trade products through mainstream retail channels have created conditions that are far more favourable to larger and more well-established cooperatives with established reputations for quality, professionalism, and adaptability.

Subsumption of Control

A basic feature of production standards is the imposition of constraints on the ability of producers to implement whichever production, labour or environmental practices they might choose in response to personal goals, local knowledge, farm agroecologies, family needs, cultural obligations, and so on. A number of commentators have pointed to the origin of most fair trade standards in the North and the lack of genuine opportunity for the vast majority of farmers to participate in standards setting or evaluation (Lyon 2006; Shreck 2005). While it might be argued that fair trade standards have been established with the 'best of intentions' and that the membership of IFAT and FLO is gradually coming to be dominated by Southern organisations (Wilkinson 2006), it has also been argued that the need to comply with ISO procedures has eroded opportunities to democratise both the setting of standards and their interpretation and implementation at the village and field level (Mutersbaugh 2002, 2004). Even where fair trade standards do not directly impose major changes in farm management they do impose a range of organisational and administrative requirements in order to validate compliance. Further, as we have seen, access to fair trade markets often is dependent on the ability of farmers to meet additional requirements related to product quality; requirements which very likely do entail more profound changes in farm management practice.

Erosion of Standards

Despite its ostensive challenge to mainstream trading relationships, fair trade is attractive to mainstream food processors and retailers for a number of reasons. First, it represents a rapidly growing niche within food markets that are generally characterised by static demand (Renard 2005). Second, it is consistent with the increasingly widespread response to static demand of seeking ways to compete on quality as opposed

to competing on price (Renard 2005). Third, it is consistent with growing interest in finding ways to demonstrate corporate social responsibility and thus to avoid public criticisms and potential liabilities (Hughes 2001). The fear is, of course, that the more fair trade networks engage with mainstream food businesses the more pressure will be created to water down those aspects of fair trade standards that are seen as unfavourable to mainstream businesses (Getz and Shreck 2006). A number of large coffee producers and importers, for example, including Starbucks, have lobbied for changes to fair trade standards so as to permit plantation grown coffee (Murray et al. 2006; Renard 2005). Proponents argue that there are many more poor farm workers who could benefit from fair trade than there are small farmers; that plantation production is permitted for cocoa and tea; and that such a change would make fair trade coffee more attractive to large coffee roasters (Murray et al. 2006). In fact, some large roasters have indicated their willingness to make fair trade a centrepiece of their product lines provided that certification is extended to the plantations that already dominate their supply chains. With small fair trade farmers struggling to sell more than 20 per cent, on average, of their coffee on fair trade markets this is clearly a proposal more related to economies of scale than an expression of corporate social responsibility. The fear that is raised, not surprisingly, is that such a shift would see small farmers squeezed from the fair trade market (Murray et al. 2006) by plantations which are already well-placed to attract premium prices and which ought anyway to ensure reasonable pay and working conditions for their employees.

Standards may also be eroded less directly. In addition to the use of small volumes of fair trade to clean up corporate images while doing little to help the majority of suppliers (Raynolds 2002), large food processors and retailers have developed a

range of competing standards and labelling schemes that are difficult for the majority of consumers to distinguish from FLO and IFAT standards (Mutersbaugh 2005; Renard 2005). Concerns about 'greenwashing' and 'image laundering' notwithstanding, the key difference between ethical trade, as such schemes are known, and fair trade, is that the emphasis is shifted away from the development aspirations of fair trade and towards a conception of social responsibility based on the avoidance of illegal labour practices and other human rights abuses (Hughes 2001). The Utz Kapeh Foundation, for example, certifies coffee as socially 'responsible' against audited compliance to national labour laws, International Labour Organisation conventions, occupational safety, and access to housing, education for children, health care and clean drinking water. There is no minimum price or guaranteed premium. Utz Kapeh argues that certification adds value which is explicitly determined through negotiation between the buyer and the seller (Utz Kapeh 2007). As Renard (2005) points out, some South and Central American growers cooperatives supplying Utz Certified coffee have received half the fair trade price and barely more than the world price. Yet with large volumes of fair trade coffee failing to find a market, farmers cooperatives are forced to look at alternatives such as Utz Kapeh and a growing range of retailer and roaster 'own brand' quality and labelling schemes.

Limits to the Co-option Thesis

The co-option thesis is open to a number of criticisms. Proponents of ethical trade (as contrasted with fair trade), for example, argue that the imposition of minimum prices and price premiums distorts the coffee market by encouraging growers to plant more coffee at the very time that over-production is forcing down the world price and throwing small growers into poverty (see Moore 2004). Market logic suggests that these growers would be better off, in the longer-term, by abandoning coffee and reinvesting

their resources in more profitable enterprises.

However, there are a number of problems with this argument. First, it fails to acknowledge the extent to which buyer oligopolies lead to their own distortions in the world coffee price. Second, it ignores the limited opportunities that many small farmers have for diversification. Alternative crops must be suited to the agroecologies and human resource bases of existing small coffee farms; they must be non-perishable enough to market without access to refrigerated storage and transport; and they must themselves be in demand. Third, the over-production argument ignores the extent to which the global coffee market is increasingly differentiated into a large number of specialty coffees, each with their own quality, flavour, ethical and symbolic characteristics (Bacon 2006; Giovannucci 2001; Renard 1999). When all of these factors are taken into consideration it becomes possible to argue that instead of distorting market signals, fair trade conveys them with far greater clarity and evenhandedness than do the major alternatives (Lyon 2006). As such, those aspects of the co-option thesis related to image laundering and the erosion of standards remain legitimate concerns due to their potential to suppress market growth by stimulating consumer cynicism and/or deflecting consumer demand towards 'ethically traded' goods that provide producers with lower returns.

The more pressing criticism of the co-option thesis is that it potentially overstates the extent to which mainstreaming of distribution and retail channels actually undermines fair trade standards and, most importantly, benefits for small producers. Such a view pre-empts the need to extend the monitoring of fair trade impacts in order to better inform such debates (see Raynolds et al. 2004). It discounts the potential for even small gains in producer incomes to reduce short and long-term threats to

producers' livelihoods by helping to keep children in school, access healthcare etc (Bacon 2006). And it ignores the potential for fair trade products – even fair trade products accompanied by highly simplified images and information – to contribute to the development of moral economies based on what Goodman (2004) refers to as consumers' 'spatial dynamic of concern'. The issue that will be dealt with here, however, is the relative neglect within the co-option thesis of the potential for producer and consumer agency to continue shaping fair trade outcomes despite the mainstreaming of distribution and retailing.

Producer and Consumer Agency within Fair Trade Networks

Case studies of fair trade impacts within production communities highlight that, in addition to monetary and social impacts, those communities benefit in a number of ways that may be seen to enhance their influence within trading networks.

- First, fair trade facilitates the organisation of producers into cooperatives and marketing associations that increase their collective economies of scale, knowledge bases, and bargaining powers (Bacon 2004).

- Second, in so doing, fair trade reduces the number of market intermediaries with whom producers must deal in order to sell their produce (Hudson and Hudson 2003; Murray et al. 2005) and has potential both to reduce transaction costs and to improve the communication of market requirements.

- Third, while low demand plays a major role in forcing the sale of around 80 percent of potentially fair trade certified coffee on the conventional market, so too do high quality requirements within the specialty coffee market in which fair trade coffee competes (Bacon 2004). Those grower organisations which have been able to use fair trade premiums to support improvements in product quality have found this to improve market acceptance and to consolidate relationships with coffee buyers (Renard 2005; see also Lyon 2006). In the absence of fair trade, it is likely that such 'preferred supplier' status would remain available only to plantations and other large growers.

- Fourth, by enhancing environmental sustainability and occupational health and safety

(Hudson and Hudson 2003) — both of which embody their own intrinsic value — fair trade helps producers to stabilise and improve production, to improve tangible aspects of product quality such as taste, and to highlight intangible aspects of product quality such as claims to environmental responsibility.

Notably, each of these points relates to the capacity of fair trade producers to position themselves more favourably within mainstream commodity trading networks. None of them relate to the sorts of direct and transparent relationships with consumers that are implied by notions of solidarity. This is not to say that such relationships do not exist in some alternative trading networks. It is to say, however, that there is very little evidence with which to challenge the argument made above that mainstreaming the distribution and retailing of fair trade products leads to an emphasis on the marketing of lifestyle choices about which Northern consumers may feel good rather than on the provision of comprehensive information about production conditions or on opportunities for direct interaction.

In contrast with other varieties of ethical consumption, relatively little is known about the consumers of fair trade products. In a Canadian study, Arnot et al. (2005) found that consumers were less price sensitive when presented with choices regarding fair trade coffee than they were when presented with other choices. Yet, in De Pelsmacker et al.'s (2005) Belgian study, it appeared that price premiums for fair trade coffee (27 per cent) were higher than the majority of people otherwise interested in purchasing them were willing to pay (10 per cent). Those who did buy fair trade coffee despite the premium were not sociodemographically different to those who did not. Although these few studies do not, by themselves, move us a great deal closer to understanding whether consumer agency is likely to be a force either for or against the co-option of fair trade, it is interesting to note their consistency with research on the

consumption of certified organic foods. Organic consumer research has consistently pointed towards a profile of the 'organic consumer' who, while more likely to be female than male, might come from any social class and whose consumption behaviours are influenced by a complex mix of ethical and personal motivations combined with the material opportunities for consumption afforded by market organisation and retailing practices (see Lockie et al. 2006). According to Lockie et al. (2006), the growth of organic food sales in mainstream retail channels has tended to stimulate demand and expand the organic market rather than to parasitise other outlets. For while the values that underpin organic food production (environmental protection, animal welfare, consumer safety and so on) are not controversial, only a small number of particularly dedicated ethical consumers will actively seek out certified organic foods. With so much food purchasing influenced by habit and convenience, the visibility and availability of organic foods have been critical to expansion in sales. Further, there is some evidence that the availability of organic foods in mainstream retail outlets might play an educative role that ultimately leads more people to participate in alternative distribution and retailing networks such as farmers' markets (Lockie et al. 2006). Noting that the mainstreaming of fair trade distribution and retailing has been accompanied by a professionalisation and revitalisation of alternative trading networks, along with a dramatic rise in voluntary activism on fair trade issues, Wilkinson (2006) argues that a similar 'virtuous dynamic' may be at work in the fair trade sector.

As Holzer (2006) points out, consumer choices do little, by themselves, to challenge the ability of large retailers to control the flow of goods since the refusal of individuals to buy a particular product does not necessarily result in the supply of a more desirable alternative. Translating the monetary resources of consumers into

genuine influence depends on the involvement of organisations capable of articulating a problem, identifying its causes, suggesting solutions, and issuing calls to action that are meaningful to both consumers and retailers (Holzer 2006). In the organic sector, private certification bodies, consumer cooperatives, local food coalitions, environmental NGOs and others have thus played a significant role in the articulation and mobilisation of 'consumer demand' by organising the organic market and providing the mechanisms through which people could use consumption choices to signal support for the political project of organic agriculture (see Barnett et al. 2005). There is a clear parallel here with the articulation and mobilisation of 'consumer demand' for fair trade by civil society organisations responsible for the establishment of alternative trading networks and certification schemes.

Conclusion

It is widely accepted both that the integration of fair trade products within mainstream trading networks has facilitated the expansion of fair trade sales and that the livelihoods of many Southern producers have improved as a result. The 'co-option thesis', as it has been outlined here, does not contest the benefits that have been associated with fair trade or with the use of product-based certification to secure a wider distribution and retail platform. Instead, the co-option thesis questions whether mainstreaming might serve, ultimately, to undermine the transformative potential of fair trade by legitimating the activities of multinational food companies and by blunting political opposition to these activities in the North. Catering to the consumption cultures of the global middle and upper classes, it argues, provides a shaky foundation for just and sustainable livelihoods. On that basis, the co-option thesis certainly deserves to be taken seriously. But is it inevitable? For those who see the fair trade vision of working 'in and against

the market' as inherently contradictory, the only logical answer is yes. Some producers may continue to benefit from fair trade but – in markets dominated by buyer oligopolies, economies of scale and strict quality requirements – these producers simply will become one more elite group from which most small southern farmers are excluded.

However, as powerful as this argument is, the potential for co-option remains dependent on a number of factors and not solely on the opportunities afforded to multinational firms by product-based certification. Of particular relevance here are those factors that, in some way or other, enhance the agency of putative fair trade producers and consumers. Perhaps most obvious among these are the alternative trading networks that continue to by-pass mainstream distribution channels and which continue to provide the fair trade movement with much of its social and political vitality by engaging people not solely as consumers but as volunteers, campaign activists, educators, and so on (Wilkinson 2006). Less obvious, but no less important, are the opportunities that are afforded to enhance producer and consumer agency through product-based certification and the mainstreaming of distribution and retailing. As argued above, mainstreaming has been as much a response to pressure from consumers and advocacy groups has it has an attempt to engage in niche marketing and corporate image building. In this respect, the activities of advocacy groups have been critical in articulating and communicating to potential consumers and retailers of fair trade products the problem (unfair trade) to which they are a solution. Further, it is likely that the emergence of a greater variety of retail channels has been critical in attracting and educating a larger number of potential fair trade consumer. While it may be argued that alternative trading networks better embody the values of fair trade, the familiarity and

convenience of mainstream retail channels are no doubt critical in reaching that majority of Northern consumers who are unlikely to break established shopping habits easily. The challenge is to take advantage of the opportunities multiple channels provide to enrol more people as fair trade consumers and to shift not only their ideas about food quality, but their ideas about what is familiar, what is convenient and, ultimately, for whom they are responsible when making consumption choices.

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