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BETWEEN MARKET AND MOVEMENT: THE FAIR TRADE COFFEE
'BOYCOTT' IN THE UNITED STATES AND NICARAGUA

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

BETWEEN MARKET AND MOVEMENT: THE FAIR TRADE COFFEE 'BOYCOTT' IN THE UNITED STATES AND NICARAGUA

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Over the past two decades, social movements transformed the retail marketplace in the United States into a dynamic site for protest and reform. Product certification has become a central means for negotiating and resolving conflicts between social movement and market actors. The Fair Trade movement has been pivotal in the evolution of market-oriented campaigns in the United States by pioneering product certification and ensuring market penetration through mobilization of NGO and grassroots activist support. Fair Trade Certified coffee is the flagship product of the Fair Trade movement in the United States. What has made the Fair Trade movement unique among market-oriented social movement campaigns is that it presents retailers and consumers with an alternative to traditional boycotts - the purchasing of third party certified Fair Trade labeled products. This dissertation explores the tension between the product marketing and social movement imperatives of the Fair Trade coffee boycott campaign through multi-sited ethnographic research conducted within the United States - the largest coffee consuming country in the world - and Nicaragua - site of the first Fair Trade coffee exchanges in Central America. Over the course of two years of field study (2005-2007), I observed

and interviewed U.S. activists who worked on the front-lines of boycott campaigns in the United States and Nicaraguan coffee farmers who labored in the fields that supply Fair Trade Certified coffee to U.S. retailers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Social movements pursuing social justice and environmental sustainability values no longer direct their demands exclusively to governments or against global corporations. Instead they focus increasingly on reshaping the parameters of economic activity itself to accommodate movement values. Business, in its turn, no longer dismisses these values as externalities to be ignored or relegated to the public sector. *The terrain of social movements has now become the terrain of competing market growth strategies.*

--Raynolds and Wilkinson, 2002, p. 42, emphasis added

I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, social movements transformed the retail marketplace in the United States into a dynamic site for protest and reform (Klein, 2000; Micheletti, 2003; Micheletti, et al., 2003; della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). At the forefront are a range of market-oriented campaigns that harness the buying power and moral compass of consumers in the global North to challenge individual corporations and entire industrial sectors to change how they source retail goods from the global South such as garments (Brooks, 2007), timber (Klooster, 2006; Viana, 1996), home decor (Seidman, 2007), precious gemstones (LeBillion, 2006; Schroeder, forthcoming) and agro-food products (Friedberg, 2004; Guthman, 2004; Mutersbaugh, 2002; Raynolds, et al., 2007; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). Today, no retailer is immune to ethical claims and political demands by consumers seeking greater transparency, accountability and retail choices (Klein, 2000). Product certification has become a central means for negotiating and resolving conflicts between social movement and market actors (Conroy, 2007; Mutersbaugh et al., 2005; Renard, 2003 and 2005; Seidman, 2007). As a growing trend, retailers actively

cultivate the image and practice of social responsibility through product certification to win the consent of an increasingly informed, anxious, reflexive and discriminating consumer public (Barnett et al., 2006; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Conroy, 2007; Friedberg, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Guthman, 2002).

The Fair Trade movement has been pivotal in the evolution of market-oriented campaigns in the United States by pioneering product certification and ensuring market penetration through mobilization of NGO and grassroots activist support (Conroy, 2007). The Fair Trade movement is one of the most geographically extensive product certification networks in the world and the most recognizable market-oriented campaigns in the United States (Bartley, 2003; Conroy, 2007; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Raynolds et al., 2007). Fair Trade certification ensures that products as diverse as bananas, flowers, cotton and coffee meet ethical sourcing standards that help small-scale farmers, farm workers and cooperative organizations compete internationally, earn a fair deal for their production, and foster sustainable development, particularly in Latin America and Africa (FLO, 2008; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Raynolds et. al, 2007). TransFair USA, the certifying agency in the United States has claimed:

Fair Trade is an innovative, market-based approach to sustainable development. Fair Trade helps family farmers in developing countries to gain direct access to international markets, as well as to develop the business capacity necessary to compete in the global marketplace. By learning how to market their own harvests, Fair Trade farmers are able to bootstrap their own businesses and receive a fair price for their products. This leads to higher living standards, thriving communities and more sustainable farming practices. Fair Trade empowers farming families to take care of themselves - without developing dependency on foreign aid. (TransFair USA, 2004)

Employing this general logic, grassroots activists and international NGOs have actively promoted Fair Trade Certified products in the retail marketplace and educated consumers about injustices perpetuated against disadvantaged commodity producers, effectively building a movement of consumers that demand an alternative to conventional retail products (Conroy, 2007; Goodman, 2004; Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Raynolds, 2000 and 2002; Raynolds et al., 2007).

What has made the Fair Trade movement unique among market-oriented social movement campaigns is that it presents retailers and consumers with an alternative to traditional boycotts - the purchasing of third party certified Fair Trade labeled products (Conroy, 2007; Raynolds, 2000 and 2002). Unlike contentious boycotts that threaten companies with negative media exposés, compromised brand image and reduced profits (Friedman, 1999; Klein, 2000; Brooks, 2007), the Fair Trade movement employed a model of social movement organizing that has been dubbed “buycotting” (see also Friedman, 1999; Fridell, 2007). Buycotting navigates a fine line between product marketing and movement building. By design it seeks to shape consumer choice and retail offerings and ultimately increase consumer demand for certified products. Through buycotting, activists and NGOs attempt to reform the negative consequences (social, economic, environmental) of retail capitalism by using its own market logic: to raise product awareness, make the product available and sell it to more and more consumers. By employing buycotting as a social movement tactic, the Fair Trade movement, paradoxically, operates both within and against the market (Jaffee, 2007; Fridell, 2007;

Guthman, 2007; Raynolds, 2000 and 2002; Raynolds et al., 2007; Renard, 2003; Taylor, 2004).

II. The Problem

Fair Trade Certified coffee is the flagship product of the Fair Trade movement in the United States (Barrientos et al., 2007; Conroy, 2007; Jaffee, 2007; TransFair USA, 2008). The Fair Trade Certified coffee label guarantees retail consumers that small-scale coffee farmers have received a “fair-deal” by guaranteeing higher prices and access to credit, as well as fostering democratic participation in cooperatives and long-term trade partnerships with importers. In the midst of an economic crisis that saw coffee prices drop to record lows from 2000-2004, the Fair Trade coffee boycott promised retail consumers that under Fair Trade standards farmers would receive premium prices at more than two times the world market price, providing farmers and cooperatives with a vital safety-net and empowering them with a powerful springboard toward sustainable development (Oxfam, 2002). In the United States, the boycott mobilized religious groups, student activists and international NGOs such as Oxfam America and Global Exchange to execute persuasive campaigns that increased the visibility of the plight of struggling farmers and moved Fair Trade Certified coffee from the margins into mainstream retailing. By many accounts, the Fair Trade coffee boycott was a tremendous success.

Over the past decade the market share for Fair Trade Certified coffee has grown by leaps and bounds. This growth has been facilitated in no small way by the leadership of TransFair USA, the owner-auditor of the Fair Trade Certified label. It has been

advanced by the influential boycott campaigns run by religious groups, student activists, and NGOs such as Oxfam America, Global Exchange and the United Students for Fair Trade (USFT). Volunteer labor and non-profit marketing dollars poured into the promotion of the Fair Trade Certified coffee label. In 2007, Fair Trade Certified coffee retail sales reached \$730 million and sales continue to grow at more than 40 percent a year (TransFair USA, 2007:15-16).¹ Meanwhile, the globalization of the Fair Trade certification network was nothing short of extraordinary, expanding its power to certify ethical spaces in coffee producing enclaves around the world (Mutersbaugh, 2005). In 2006, Fair Trade certification had reached 106 producer organizations in 21 countries representing some 170,330 small-scale coffee farming families world-wide.

When I began my preliminary research in the United States in 2004, a powerful and diverse coalition of NGOs, grassroots activists and coffee retailers were working collectively to push Fair Trade Certified coffee into retail coffee marketplace. As a movement, the Fair Trade coffee boycott was well organized. NGOs, TransFair USA, and grassroots activists groups had formed networks for communicating strategies and coalitions to apply pressure on large commercial retailers to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee in the United States. More than 350 college campuses had experienced, or were experiencing. Fair Trade coffee boycotts, and retailers such as Dunkin Donuts, Starbucks, Costco and others were all beginning to offer Fair Trade Certified coffee in their existing coffee product lines. Activists, in particular, were flocking to the Fair Trade

¹ Fair Trade Certified coffee is the fastest growing segment of the U.S. coffee market (TransFair USA, 2007). Twenty percent of all retail consumers recognize the Fair Trade Certified label and 54 percent of those consumers are converted to Fair Trade purchases (ibid: 18). Fair Trade Certified coffee currently constitutes 10 percent of the specialty coffee retail sales in the United States (ibid: 15).

boycott in the thousands, not just as consumers of Fair Trade Certified coffee, but joining up with local boycott campaigns to persuade coffee retailers, supermarket chains, food service providers and university administrators to adopt and promote Fair Trade Certified coffee.

While the boycott has been touted as a success by NGOs, retailers and consumers - because of the growth in market share for Fair Trade Certified coffee - many other voices have asserted that Fair Trade has failed to maintain its integrity as a social movement strategy in a “highly competitive and decidedly non-democratic” retail marketplace (Mutersbaugh, 2005). One of the primary reasons that Fair Trade’s success has been questioned is that, as Jaffee claims, the Fair Trade coffee boycott brought together “strange bedfellows.” Jaffee writes that in

...the United States (the boycott) encompasses large importers, mainstream roasters both transnational and regional (ranging from Starbucks to California's Java City), local and national movement oriented roasters (from Minneapolis' Peace Coffee to Equal Exchange), NGOs ranging from centrist to far Left, religious charities, campus based student organizations, trade policy activists, among many other participants. Such disparate players inevitably hold a wide range of views about the goals, strategies and tactics of fair trade. Yet, until recently, the movement has largely sidestepped these basic definitional questions both internally and in public. The differences appear to have been sublimated, intentionally or not, in service of the goal of expanding the fair trade market overall. Yet as that growth brings in new players who do not share the ideological commitments of these...groups, this unspoken consensus has reached its limit, and the schism has become public. (Jaffee, 2007: 31)

Starting in 2005, as TransFair USA created partnerships with large commercial retailers such as Nestle and Walmart to expand the reach of Fair Trade Certified coffee into conventional retail outlets, a range of actors within the market and movement networks for Fair Trade began to speak out against the dilution of standards, the laundering of

corporate image, and the loss of democratic control over what ethical trade and transnational solidarity means and who constitutes a partner in the movement and market for Fair Trade (Jaffee, 2007). Activist groups and NGOs claimed that particular boycott members “sold out” to “scale up” the retail market for Fair Trade Certified coffee by making what Jaffee has called “a deal with the devil” through lowering standards, watering down principles and mixing messages to win corporate approval (Conroy, 2007; Jaffee, 2007; Raynolds et al., 2007; Renard, 2005). Activists claimed that in the midst of a global coffee crisis companies could launder their image by appearing to support the Fair Trade coffee boycott without making significant long-term supply commitments that backed up those claims. In sum, as the Fair Trade coffee boycott reached further into mainstream retail outlets, its status as a social movement tactic was increasingly called into question by activists and scholars alike (Guthman, 2007; Jaffee, 2007; Mutersbaugh and Lyon, forthcoming, Raynolds et al., 2007).²

Conflicts I witnessed within the Fair Trade network starting with my field research in 2005 led me to begin my dissertation from the perspective that, under the surface text of Fair Trade Certified coffee, there is a frayed consensus over the logics, strategies, tactics and goals of the Fair Trade coffee boycott. NGOs and activists described little shared decision-making, a marginalization of critical dialogue, and growing

² Starting in 2003, smaller scale Fair Trade businesses began to criticize TransFair USA regarding its open door policy to build partnerships with large commercial retailers who sourced only a small percentage of certified coffee and tended to exaggerate their participation in the Fair Trade cause to win over consumers (MacQuarrie, 2003). Fair Trade pioneer Equal Exchange discontinued their fervent label promotion and campaigned for a 5 percent supply requirement of any licensed company on the Fair Trade registry in the United States. Four 100 percent Fair Trade Certified coffee companies discontinued using the label altogether. Cooperative Coffees, a cooperatively-owned importer of green coffee, established collective bargaining agreements with their suppliers and voluntarily negotiated up their contract floor prices to increase prices paid to cooperatives. Catholic Relief Services, a multi-million dollar non-profit, launched their own Fair Trade label noting the inadequacy of the current certification regime to meet the needs of the coffee producing communities they worked with in Central and South America.

fragmentation among movement and market actors at the very moment when the volume of Fair Trade coffees imported into the United States was growing rapidly. Furthermore, in producer countries, counter to the promises of sustainable development, farming communities that were believed to benefit from Fair Trade certification continued to struggle with poverty, hardship and indebtedness associated with the coffee crisis (Bacon, 2005; Bacon et al., 2008a, Bacon et al., 2008b; Chamorro, 2005; Jaffee, 2007; Oxfam, 2005; Wilson, forthcoming). Indeed, farmers and their representatives were largely excluded from the heated public discussions taking place in the United States over the future of Fair Trade.

III. Statement of Research Question

This dissertation explores the tension between the product marketing and social movement imperatives of the Fair Trade coffee boycott campaign through multi-sited ethnographic research conducted within the United States - the largest coffee consuming country in the world - and Nicaragua - site of the first Fair Trade coffee exchanges in Central America. Over the course of two years of field study (2005-2007), I observed and interviewed U.S. activists who worked on the front-lines of boycott campaigns in the United States and Nicaraguan coffee farmers who labored in the fields that supply Fair Trade Certified coffee to U.S. retailers. Findings from my fieldwork with these geographically disparate constituencies, who are engaged in very different ways with the market and movement for Fair Trade Certified coffee, provide an ethnographic window into the dynamics, disjunctures, and dreams of a social movement campaign struggling to find, make sense of, and maintain its identity within the marketplace.

In 2004, when I wrote the proposal for this dissertation, scholarly literature on the Fair Trade movement was just beginning to emerge, specifically in the fields of geography, sociology, anthropology and business studies. What I found striking in my early literature review was the frequent scholarly endorsement of Fair Trade coffee certification as an alternative development strategy that benefited small-scale farmers, indeed without significant empirical research to defend that claim (see Raynolds et al., 2003). The majority of the studies on Fair Trade in the 1990s and early 2000s were carried out by development practitioners or commissioned by agencies and foundations seeking to *promote* Fair Trade certification (Bartley, 2003; Renard, 1999). On the producer side of the equation, most empirical studies that were carried out in farmer communities tended to explore the “impacts” of Fair Trade certification on cooperative enterprises and farming communities, providing little long-term ethnographic detail and paying scant attention to the way that Fair Trade certification might be reinterpreted, contested or embraced by farming communities in complex and contradictory ways (Mutersbaugh, 2002). On the consumer side of the equation, scholars concerned with examining the rise of consumer politics and ethical consumerism were making strong claims to the ability of Fair Trade to “re-embed the economy” in shared values, demystify the commodity fetish by connecting consumers and producers, and provide an alternative to conventional coffee production, distribution and production (Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Renard, 1999; Raynolds, 2000 and 2002).

In my own preliminary contacts with Fair Trade farmers in Nicaragua (2003) and U.S. activists (2004) there seemed to be a disconnect between the discourse of the Fair

Trade coffee boycott and the practice of both campaign organizing and the distribution of benefits from Fair Trade. In short, following geographer Robert Rice (2001), I did not see the “noble goals” of Fair Trade translating in a clean and consistent way into the “challenging terrain” of the coffee marketplace. My dissertation, therefore, began with a cautious skepticism of Fair Trade claim-making, seeking to fill an empirical gap in the existing literature by examining how activists and farmers engaged with Fair Trade as a market and movement. To do so, I would need to conduct my study in multiple research sites. Whereas scholars had previously explored Fair Trade almost exclusively in terms of its effects in one site - the impacts on farming communities or its interpretation by consumer communities - my dissertation sought to ground an analysis of the Fair Trade phenomenon in the context of its formation as a transnational campaign in sites of consumption and sites of production by employing multi-sited ethnography (see also Jaffee, 2007). A multi-sited ethnographic focus on the Fair Trade coffee boycott, I believed, was critical for understanding how transnational campaigns, particularly in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, which had both market and movement objectives, actually worked across spaces and scales.

Multi-sited ethnography is an effort to empirically ground - or place - transnational processes that stretch across space by conducting research in the different locales where they materialize. Examples of multi-sited ethnographies include social, political and cultural research on fresh fruit and vegetable commodity chains (Friedberg, 2001), anti-sweatshop campaigns (Brooks, 2007), environmental activist campaigns (Brosius, 1999), international conservation projects (West, 2006) and commodity cultural circuits (Cook et

al., 2004). What distinguishes multi-sited ethnography from traditional ethnography is not the methods, *per se* (i.e. participant observation), but the treatment of “the field,” interpretation and knowledge production as spatially fraught in the context of globalization (Burawoy, 2000). Multi-sited, or global ethnography, destabilizes the borders of conventional field sites by treating them not as static or isolated social, cultural, political, economic, or environmental processes rooted in a discrete localities, but rather as linked spaces exceeding isolated analysis (Burawoy, 2000; Marcus, 1995). By taking on ethnographic fieldwork in multiple sites, a major goal of my research was to examine how the Fair Trade coffee boycott was ‘global,’ but also to complicate the very ‘global’ or ‘universal’ claims of the Fair Trade coffee boycott by examining their meaning and materiality in locally situated contexts. U.S. activists and Nicaraguan farmers offered nuanced insights into the histories, motivational frames, market strategies, movement tactics, and socio-economic consequences of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, each from their respective social and political locations within the boycott campaign. Moreover, through a multi-sited analysis of differently situated actors within the Fair Trade coffee boycott it was possible to explore how relations of transnational solidarity may be forged and/or undermined through the employment of boycott campaigns.

In my research I have considered the Fair Trade coffee boycott a particular kind of transnational campaign. “A focus on campaigns,” state Keck and Sikkink (1998: 8), “highlights relationships - how connections are established among network(ed) actors, and between their allies and their opponents.” Keck and Sikkink argue that campaigns

are “sets of strategically linked activities in which members of a diffuse principled network...develop explicit, visible ties and mutually recognized roles in pursuit of a common goal” (1998: 8). Campaigns are subsets of social movements and transnational advocacy networks that provide “a window on transnational relations as an arena of struggle in ways that a focus on networks themselves or the institutions they try to affect does not” (1998: 8). Transnational campaigns are a common convergence space (Routledge, 2004), network or arena (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), in which various actors relate to one another across scales. Moreover, campaigns tend to be episodic, in that their objectives are more or less time sensitive and the end game more articulated, thus making them more easily traced through time and space (Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

As a particular kind of transnational campaign, the Fair Trade coffee boycott, while representing an exceptional case, can be compared to other transnational campaigns. In addition, by seeing the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a campaign, it does not reduce the analysis of Fair Trade to only the institutional apparatus of Fair Trade certification, the retail market for Fair Trade Certified coffee, or any particular NGO, company, farmer organization, or activist group within a coalition of actors pushing Fair Trade Certified coffee into the retail marketplace. By portraying the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a campaign, I highlight the fact that boycotting Fair Trade Certified coffee is not the primary objective of any particular global social movement, even as it represents one tactic utilized by social movements working around the world. The boycott campaign, as such, enables this study to focus in on the logics, strategies, frames, and objectives of

individuals and institutions trying to push Fair Trade Certified coffee into the marketplace without reducing the boycott to either a market or a movement.

The use of boycotting as a social movement tactic reflects significant changes in both the political culture and political geography of U.S.-based activism to protect against abuses committed against peoples and environments through capitalist commodity production and consumption. By promoting boycotting as a social movement tactic - a tactic whose results would be measured by change within the retail marketplace - activist groups, NGOs, and multinational firms in the United States supplanted the direct, contentious politics of protest, disinvestment and boycotts of earlier cycles of political action associated with punitive campaigns against capitalist firms. Rather than penalizing firms through boycotts, activists could orchestrate boycotts that demanded the responsiveness of capitalist firms to their demands by offering products that adhered to third-party standards (i.e. not the standards of the firm itself). While punitive campaigns like boycotts and disinvestment could coerce capitalist firms to respond to the demands of laborers, consumers and NGOs by threatening capitalist profitability on the short and long-term, punitive campaigns were also limited because there were no mechanisms in place to hold firms accountable once campaigns ran their course. In place of punitive campaigns, boycotting activists could direct firms to “best practices” or ethical standards that fulfilled social movement demands. Boycotting, unlike punitive campaigns, encouraged continued profitability, on particular terms amenable to both the movement and the market.

IV. Justification of the Study in Geography

The Fair Trade coffee boycott offers an excellent case for analyzing the geography of collective action in the age of market-oriented social movement campaigns. Like other activists' campaigns and product certification schemes seeking justice in the global system, the Fair Trade coffee boycott relocates social movement organizing from spaces of commodity production to spaces of retail consumption. As Brooks describes regarding the new transnational politics of market-based protest, it is "the production of corporate image that activists now target, rather than production relations on the shop floor," or in the fields, mines, oceans and forests (Brooks, 2007: xvi). Paradoxically, campaigns like the Fair Trade coffee boycott call on consumers and corporate actors to act collectively in sites of consumption with the end goal of effecting lasting change in spaces of commodity production, the terrain where products are grown, extracted and manufactured.

The Fair Trade coffee boycott is one of many movements that has broken new ground by "jumping scales" (Smith, 1992) from domestic activism to transnational cross-border activism that addresses distant issues. Social movements are increasingly networking transnationally to circulate information, advance new causes, create spaces of convergence, and fill a strategic void where domestic groups can resolve conflicts in their localities by utilizing international political pressure. The most influential feature of the rise in transnational networking has been the creation of alternative sources of information and new venues for collective action through innovative campaigns (Alvarez, 1998; Basu, 2000; Keck and Sikkink, 1998).

Campaigns like the Fair Trade coffee boycott raise public awareness and guide collective action by wielding power over information and symbols about distant peoples and places (Friedberg, 2004; Goodman, 2004; Lebillion, 2006). Since producers (farmers, workers, etc.) are typically not the agents waging such campaigns, the effect is to build coalitions of activists who have not experienced the labor abuses, violence, ecological destruction, or unfair exchange of concern to the campaigns. Information about abuse or unfairness is generated in one place and circulated through cross-border networks to incite action elsewhere. Goodman (2004) has referred to this as producing a “spatial dynamics of concern” through which activists and consumers are called upon to extend their moral geographies from the near and dear to include “distant strangers.” As Keck and Sikkink (1998) describe in their work theorizing transnational advocacy networks, this model of social activism follows a “boomerang” pattern where activists in the global north are leveraged to assist communities in the global South who struggle to make their voices heard. Workers and farmers “provide the impetus, information and testimonies for U.S.-based activists who then carry out the politics within the boundaries of the United States” (Brooks, 2007). Workers and farmers are primary informants of labor and environmental abuses whose concrete experiences are documented and communicated to distant agents. They, in turn, “think and act” on that knowledge to incite protest against particular brands, hold corporations accountable or change their consumer behavior. The international division of labor and activism converge to reinforce the primacy of consumer subjectivity, thereby reducing the subjectivity of workers and growers to those who “depend on” or are “indebted to” the consumer agents who protest

in their name. In sum, in campaigns like the Fair Trade coffee boycott there is a spatial disjuncture between sites of action, the subjects who are acting, and the consequences of action.

Transnational activism has indeed redefined social movement organizing in an age of globalization. Scholars in geography and elsewhere indicate that scale jumping from the domestic to the transnational can meet with considerable “friction” as the extension of moral geographies from one place are applied to differentially positioned activists, consumers, retailers, farmers, and workers (Tsing, 2005). Friedberg (2004), whose work on the Ethical Trade Initiative in Great Britain has been ground-breaking, is particularly cogent on this front. Friedberg argues, through a multi-sited analysis of NGO campaigns for ethical trade in Europe and fresh vegetable production in Africa, that the political and ethical demands of consumers, as well intentioned as they may be, can produce unintended effects on the very farmers and workers they seek to help. The creation of new standards (ethical or industrial) in the retail marketplace tend to reflect the concerns of consumers and retailers located in one place, while those standards affect the producers of goods in other places in quite different ways (Friedberg, 2004). As Brooks (2007) has also argued, the spatial dislocation of protest, reform and action from sites of production where injustices are experienced to sites of consumption potentially reduces the power of people who experience injustices because they do not control the tactics or outcomes of the contentious struggles waged in their name.

The frictions and problems confronted by transnational campaigns as they attempt to mobilize activists to extend their moral geographies to include distant others relate

directly to the more general problem of what David Harvey calls, following Raymond Williams, the problem of “militant particularism” in social movements attempting to challenge global capitalism: “The thesis of militant particularism...holds that all politics (no matter of what sort and no matter whether it is local, urban, regional, national or global in focus) have their origins in the collective development of a particular political vision on the part of particular persons in particular places at particular times” (2002: 190). The supposed vision of Fair Trade is to overcome the particular concerns of disparate groups to form transnational solidarities. What Harvey’s argument about militant particularism reveals is that transnational campaigns like the Fair Trade coffee boycott may indeed reproduce their domestic priorities and the “public’s presumed moral codes” (Freidberg, 2004) to the detriment of creating transnational solidarities. In this dissertation, I explore how militant particularism - where a particular political vision originates and how a particular politics is enacted - shapes competing conceptions of the logics, tactics, values and purpose of the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States and Nicaragua.

V. Research Design

To explore how differently positioned actors within the Fair Trade coffee boycott engage with the market and movement imperatives of Fair Trade, I have designed my study to examine both Fair Trade farmers, the intended beneficiaries of Fair Trade certification, and U.S.-based activists, the supposed grassroots agents of the boycott campaign. My multi-sited ethnographic study progressed in two distinct phases.

A. Phase 1: Fair Trade Activists in the United States (2005-2006)

I began my research studying how activists engaged with Fair Trade as a market and movement in the United States. At first, studying activists seemed like a formidable task. How could I study a boycott campaign when it was taking place at the national scale, where the activists engaged were distributed all over the country? To carry out participant observation of the Fair Trade coffee boycott campaign, I attended seven Fair Trade conferences between 2005 and 2006, taking field notes on the conversations, meetings, presentations, and performances that took place during these events. To gain access to my informants, I embedded myself with the largest Fair Trade activist network in the United States, the United Students for Fair Trade (USFT). My research focused, primarily, on understanding how and why activists got involved in the Fair Trade coffee boycott and what they did as “activists” in the campaign.

To establish a baseline for my study, in February 2005, I conducted 5-10 minute semi-structured interviews with 55 randomly sampled attendees at the second annual “Empowering Alternatives” Fair Trade Conference hosted by USFT in Chicago (Chapter 3). Armed with this information and these observations, I then attended the “Fair Trade Forum” hosted by TransFair USA in Seattle (April, 2005), the Specialty Coffee Association of America annual conferences in Seattle (April, 2005) and Charlotte (April, 2006), the USFT Northwest Regional Activist training in Seattle (April, 2005), the “Fair Trade Futures Conference” hosted by the Fair Trade Resource Network and Fair Trade

Federation in Chicago (September, 2005), and the third annual Empowering Alternatives Fair Trade Conference hosted by USFT in Denver (February, 2006).

At these conferences I spent all of my time with USFT leaders. Most conferences lasted three to four days and in each case I arrived early to meet with USFT leaders and stayed after the conference to record perceptions. At the conferences, I participated in workshops, recorded speeches, observed strategic meetings, and shared meals and rooms with my informants (often in church basements and activist homes). This participant observation helped me cultivate relationships with my informants that afforded me access to perceptions of Fair Trade that were otherwise undocumented in previous research. Moreover, my time spent with activists helped me to understand and interpret the debates that were bubbling to the surface of the Fair Trade coffee boycott. My relationship with USFT leaders also gave me privileged access to high level meetings among NGOs such as TransFair USA, Fair Trade Resource Network, Fair Trade Federation, Oxfam America, USLEAP, Coop America, Catholic Relief Services and Lutheran World Relief, where I observed first hand the anger, frustration and differences of opinion regarding efforts to take Fair Trade Certified coffee into the retail mainstream.

To dig deeper into activist perceptions, I also scheduled and conducted longer open-ended interviews with 22 key informants affiliated with the United Students for Fair Trade who were working on boycott campaigns in the United States at the third Empowering Alternative Conference in Denver I recorded these interviews and analyzed them, along with my field notes, to understand the appeal of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, the tactical approaches taken and perceptions of the efficacy of Fair Trade to

create social change (Chapter 3). At the conclusion of my research with USFT, I also had the opportunity to observe a Fair Trade coffee boycott carried out at Rutgers University. Two students on Livingston campus, where the Department of Geography is located, learned about Fair Trade Certified coffee and designed a campaign to make it available in all Livingston campus retail locations. This first hand experience of watching a campus-based boycott unfold revealed how the boycott employs both social movement and product marketing imperatives with paradoxical effects.

B. Phase 2: Fair Trade Farmers in San Ramon, Nicaragua

The second phase of my multi-sited fieldwork (2006-2007) examined how peasant coffee farmers in Nicaragua engaged with Fair Trade as a market and movement. Nicaragua was the first site of Fair Trade coffee exchanges in Central America in the 1980s. Today, Nicaraguan Fair Trade cooperatives are the fourth largest producers of Fair Trade Certified coffee in the world following Peru, Mexico and Brazil. For my study I selected the largest Fair Trade cooperative organization in the Matagalpa region, and the second largest coffee cooperative in the country. I carried out fieldwork in the municipality of San Ramon which, as I describe below, was an area transformed by the Sandinista agrarian reform and the Nicaragua civil war, and ultimately became the “ground zero” of the global coffee crisis.

I first met my Nicaraguan contacts from San Ramon at the Empowering Alternatives Fair Trade Conference hosted by USFT in 2005 (Chapter 4). At that conference, I established contacts with the Fair Trade cooperative and roughly a year and

a half later I began my study. When I started my research, I conducted eight key informant interviews with the administrative leadership of the Fair Trade cooperative (at the regional scale) and they gave me approval to conduct my study (at the local scale). Fair Trade cooperative officials, like many who participate in the boycott campaign are often quite concerned about the image they present, therefore researchers tend to have limited access to their membership. I was afforded a great deal of latitude to conduct the study and found most cooperative officials and farmers open to speaking to me about their engagement with Fair Trade as a market and movement.

To establish contacts with individual farmers and local-scale producer cooperatives for my interviews I embedded myself in a municipal cooperative union called the UCA San Ramon, which is under the umbrella of the Fair Trade cooperative in Matagalpa. Over the course of 11 months, I observed daily and monthly cooperative meetings, visited farming households, participated in coffee labors, and collected historical data on the lived experiences of peasant coffee farmers in San Ramon. To explore how farmers engaged with Fair Trade as a market and movement, I conducted a total of 48 interviews with peasant farmers organized in nine different local level cooperatives located in the municipality of San Ramon. My interviews tended to last between one and two hours and were structured around the recording of oral narratives in which farmers described how they came to gain access to land, how they were affected by the Sandinista revolution and civil war, and how they built cooperative organizations and made international linkages with the Fair Trade movement. I recorded these interviews and transcribed them in Spanish to facilitate qualitative analysis of the interview text. At the

end of my year in Nicaragua, the UCA San Ramon shared with me a coffee farming household survey of 16 percent of their members (n=59). I analyzed this data to gain a basic understanding of the land tenure, household make-up and economic patterns among Fair Trade farmers.

My research with farmers and cooperative officials focused on answering three key questions with relation to their engagement with Fair Trade as a market and movement. The first was to understand, in a historical sense, how farmers and cooperatives gained access to their land and built their cooperative organizations (Chapter 4). This research led me to explore farmers' lived experiences of agrarian reform in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. By entering the research in this way, I was able to establish a basic relationship of trust with my informants that related directly to their own expressions of militant particularism rooted in agrarian struggle. The majority of my informants were beneficiaries of the agrarian reform in the mid-1980s and fought in the Nicaraguan civil war. Establishing the trust necessary to share these histories, my informants and I forged a dialogue about their lived experiences that profoundly shaped the rest of my research. The second and third questions that I pursued with my informants asked farmers in San Ramon to explain their relationship to their cooperatives and to analyze their relationship to Fair Trade. Because of the nature of our entry point - a discussion of histories of agrarian struggle - farmers tended to describe their cooperatives in the historical context and their relationship with Fair Trade as constituted through those struggles.

VI. Organization of the Chapters

The dissertation is organized into five further chapters beyond this introduction. In Chapter 2, “Between Market and Movement: Conceptualizing the Fair Trade Coffee Boycott,” I explore the background on Fair Trade and the literature relating to the Fair Trade coffee boycott in geography in greater detail. I begin with a brief overview of the history of Fair Trade Certified coffee. I then introduce the concept of boycotting as a social movement tactic. Following this, I review the literature on Fair Trade in terms of its market logics and its movement logics, seeking to establish some common ground regarding the ways in which my research subjects - activists and farmers - engage with Fair Trade.

In Chapter 3, “An Alternative to Protest as Usual: Activist Engagement with Fair Trade as a Market and Movement,” I explore how U.S.-based Fair Trade activists engage with Fair Trade as a market and a movement. In the chapter, I illustrate that Fair Trade activists did more than merely consume Fair Trade Certified products to increase their availability, but also educated consumers and pressured companies through a distinctive boycotting tactic. Drawing from interviews I conducted at the Empowering Alternatives Conference, I demonstrate that activists joined up with the cause for a range of different reasons, suggesting that campaign brokers had effectively created ideologically flexible motivational frames to win the support of large numbers of activists. These motivational frames included an emphasis on making global connections, defetishizing commodities and humanizing trade. Moreover, my research demonstrates that activists, even when there was little agreement over the ideological purpose of the Fair Trade coffee boycott,

found the tactical approach of boycotting appealing. Activists saw Fair Trade boycotting as a positive step that, as a tactical approach, had low entry barriers, was not radical, and was personally satisfying. To understand why activists perceived the boycott as a positive step, I turn to activist guides prepared by Global Exchange and Oxfam America. Through textual analysis I learn that the Fair Trade coffee boycott actively encouraged activists to employ non-coercive, persuasive tactics through step-by-step recipes. These tactical recipes produced easy initial victories for activists. Over time, however, many began to ‘lose faith’ in the tactical approach of the boycott. When large commercial retailers began to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee, paradoxically, many activists turned away from the movement, claiming that Fair Trade had sold out. As activists completed campaigns, they began to see themselves as volunteer labor for a cause within which they had little bargaining power. The political engagement of activists in the boycott campaign revealed both the potential and limits of Fair Trade as a movement as it reached further into the marketplace.

In Chapter 4, “In Defense of the Land: Peasant Coffee Farmers Engage with Fair Trade as a Movement,” I make the transition from an explicit focus on the Fair Trade coffee boycott campaign in the United States to my empirical research in Nicaragua. In this chapter I provide an alternative narrative of the development of Fair Trade that is rooted in the place-based stories of peasant coffee farmers. I begin by introducing the San Ramon municipality and surrounding Central Highlands region of Nicaragua, and describe the social, institutional and spatial history of peasant coffee farmers (and workers) who are the intended beneficiaries of Fair Trade. I provide a history of the

agrarian reform process affecting farmers in San Ramon, Nicaragua. The core finding in the chapter is that Fair Trade farmers in San Ramon engage with Fair Trade as a movement through their histories of agrarian struggle to gain access to land, build cooperative enterprises and commercialize their product. As a corollary, my research illustrates that farmers are not just beneficiaries of Fair Trade but critical movement actors in their own right.

In Chapter 5, “Fair Game? Peasant Coffee Farmers Engage with Fair Trade as a Market,” I explore a paradoxical question: if Fair Trade is supposed to guarantee peasant coffee farmers a better quality of life for delivering a high quality cup of coffee to coffee consumers, why do peasant Fair Trade farmers in Nicaragua consistently deny that the new trading system represents a fair alternative? The Fair Trade coffee boycott has been intimately connected with the expansion of the specialty coffee market in the United States. In this chapter, I explore how quality standards shape the way peasant coffee farmers in San Ramon engage with Fair Trade as a market. I demonstrate that farmers invest considerable time, energy and resources into producing high quality coffee, but with little pay off. Farmers enter into a contract farming scheme in their cooperatives, which causes them to sell their crop to the Fair Trade cooperative at a fraction of the Fair Trade price and premium standard. This enables the Fair Trade cooperative to compete in international markets, but places farmers in a perplexing situation of declining income, indebtedness and unsustainable production. In turn, farmers increase self and household exploitation to reduce costs. While Fair Trade certification has enabled them to receive higher prices for a percentage of their harvests, winning them greater exposure to

specialty coffee markets, most farmers described their situation deteriorating under rising production and consumption costs. This is putting a strain on the moral economy of the cooperatives which were formed through the agrarian reform process. In the chapter conclusion, I question how long the local solidarities of farmers in the cooperatives will last given the deepening concerns expressed by farmers.

Chapter 2

Between Market and Movement Conceptualizing the Fair Trade Coffee Buycott

I. Introduction

In recent years, social scientists have documented considerable growth in the number and scope of market-oriented social movements. Disenchanted with the unresponsiveness of politicians and the inertia of governments to protect labor and environment in an age of state retrenchment, market triumphalism, and the globalization of production, nimble social movements in the global North maneuvered into the retail marketplace to air grievances, protect against abuses and call for reform. As Reynolds and Wilkinson have argued, the “cost of the neoliberal dream of transforming market economies into market societies” has not only resulted in the restructuring of global commodity chains, but has also resulted in “an unimagined expansion of market responsibility and accountability” pursued by civil society groups and organizations (2007: 42).

Beginning in the 1980s, innovative transnational campaigns reached out to consumers to apply pressure on retail brands to create changes in their internal production and purchasing policies.³ Campaigns to protect dolphins from tuna fisherman, forest biodiversity from timber harvesters and children from exploitative garment work, carpet-making, and infant-formula advertising set off a groundswell of consumer activism in the retail marketplace. Characteristic of these market-oriented campaigns was the use of information networks and media exposés that would ‘name and shame’ retail brands.

³ U.S. scholars also describe the Delano Grape Boycott led by the United Farmworkers (UFW) in California as foundational in the organizational innovation of market-oriented campaigns (Reynolds and Wilkinson, 2007).

Media and boycott campaigns proved highly successful in raising the ire of consumers to challenge established brands for their business practices at home and abroad, however they provided little in the way of long-term accountability. Indeed, as scholars note, the use of boycotts and media smear tactics often had unintended consequences, particularly for working communities in the global South, as retail firms sought to clean up shop simply by changing production location (Friedberg, 2003).

As market-oriented campaigns ramped up in the global North in the 1980s and 1990s, so did a shadow-state of NGOs charged with creating accountability structures to certify and monitor compliance with the ethical standards of specific social movement campaigns (Bartley, 2003; Conroy, 2007; Mutersbaugh, 2005; O'Rourke, 2003).

Responding to the regulatory void vacated by the neoliberal state, the innovation of third-party product certification, codes of conduct, and voluntary labeling in the 1990s, NGOs effectively created what Mutersbaugh calls "a public sphere within the private economy" (2005, pg). Instead of solely protesting via boycott, negative advertising or disinvestment, that is by 'black listing' particular firms or commodities, activists and NGOs re-channeled resources into promoting firms and products that *did* meet their moral norms. This shift in movement tactics from boycotting to buycotting (Friedman, 1999) left an indelible mark on what Brooks calls, "the logic, origins, objectives and consequences of transnational campaigns" (2007: xiii). By promoting particular products or retailers that met the criteria of social movement actors, campaigns increasingly adopted the logics of the market they sought to transform.

Boycott campaigns “induce shoppers to buy the products or services of selected companies in order to reward them for behavior consistent with the goals of the activists” (Friedman, 1999: 201). Boycotting was an accepted practice through such causes as the Buy American Campaign, the creation of “green” businesses and alternative trade organizations (i.e. Body Shop or Equal Exchange), and the publication of consumer ‘green lists’ like the Coop America National Green Pages. However, boycotts took on new scope with the advent of third party product certification, codes of conduct and voluntary labeling like Fair Trade. With product certifications and labels, NGOs and grassroots activist groups could, as Reynolds and Wilkinson (2007) argue, enter the branding terrain traditionally controlled by retail firms by informing consumers about the ethical qualities of a particular product (sweat-free, smart wood, fair trade) and verifying that the enforcement of labor and environmental standards was carried out throughout the commodity chain.

The creation of the Fair Trade Certified coffee label in the late 1980s and its proliferation through Fair Trade coffee boycott campaigns at the turn of the century provides a pioneering example of how a social movement campaign employed the boycotting tactic as a means for bringing justice to the global, oligopolistic, and highly exploitative coffee trade (Mutersbaugh, 2002; Rice, 2002). Coffee is the most prolific Fair Trade Certified retail item (others include tea, sugar, chocolate, flowers, cotton, bananas) by revenue and volume. Fair Trade Certified coffee was first created in the Netherlands in 1988 and introduced in the United States in 1999. Sitting on the supermarket shelf among a range of retail coffee offerings, Fair Trade Certified coffee

claims to give a fair deal for farmers, provides a verification of social responsibility for retailers and compels consumers to make an ethical choice in the kind of coffee they buy. Ideally, by increasing the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee sold, activists believe disadvantaged coffee farmers would receive a greater share in the distribution of profits from the sale of retail coffee. This belief is guaranteed through the private voluntary labeling scheme overseen by TransFair USA and FLO, which ensure that ‘ethical’ trade standards such as higher prices, access to credit, democratic participation in farming organizations, and long-term trade relationships are complied with so that, as Paul Rice, CEO of TransFair USA claims, consumers can “help farmers help themselves to bootstrap their own economic development.” To achieve the widening of the farmer’s piece of the pie, the Fair Trade coffee boycott, led on the ground by NGOs and activists (see Chapter 3), pressured coffee retailers to supply Fair Trade Certified coffee and waged information campaigns to educate consumers about how coffee is traded, the conditions of coffee production, the vulnerability of peasant coffee farmers in the global economy and the difference between conventional and Fair Trade Certified coffee.

B. Organization of the Literature Review

In this chapter, I explore how scholars have interpreted Fair Trade as both a market and a movement. Geographers have been at the forefront of contemporary research on market-oriented campaigns through their research on alternative commodity chains, the formulation of voluntary standards, labeling and certification in agro-food networks, the rise of ethical consumption as political practice in the global North, and

‘ground-truthing’ the benefits of producing certified goods by farmer and worker communities in the global South. In geography, the study of Fair Trade can be more widely understood as rooted in the geographic analysis of “alternative economic spaces” (Hughes, 2005; Leyshon and Lee, 2003; McCarthy, 2006), which also includes an extensive literature on alternative food networks (Renting et al., 2004; Whatmore et al., 2003). In my review I hone in on the explicit tension between the way that Fair Trade is envisaged as a movement and how scholars’ conceptualization of Fair Trade has changed as Fair Trade Certified coffee makes greater inroads into conventional retail markets.

I begin the chapter by providing a historical background for the rise of Fair Trade Certified coffee. Second, I assess the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a social movement tactic. In this section, I draw upon the analytical framework on consumer boycotts developed by Friedman (1999) to discuss efforts to promote Fair Trade Certified coffee. Third, I explore the geographic literature that emphasizes the *movement* imperatives within Fair Trade, particularly normative claims about Fair Trade as an alternative to capitalist globalization and the production of new geographies of ethical consumption (Barnett et al., 2006; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Clarke et al., 2007; Clarke, 2008; Goodman, 2004; Guthman, 2002; Hartwick, 2000; Raynolds, 2002). Fourth, I explain how scholars have studied Fair Trade as an example of voluntary standards, certification and labeling schemes that are reshaping global agro-food networks in an age of neoliberalization (Conroy, 2007; Guthman, 2007; Guthman, 2009; Mutersbaugh, 2005; Mutersbaugh et al., 2005; Raynolds, 2004; Raynolds and Wilkinson, 2007). I conclude

that, despite a number of important shortcomings, Fair Trade nonetheless represents a new arena for the expression of political visions and economic alternatives.

II. Historical Background: The Rise of the Fair Trade Coffee Buycott

The Fair Trade movement originated as a solidarity initiative and alternative trade network led by NGOs and World Shops in Europe and North America (Nicholls and Opal, 2005: 142). In the United States, the discourse of fair trade can be traced back to the Mennonite Central Committee, which first began purchasing handicrafts from Puerto Rican artisans in the 1940s. In the UK, Oxfam played a similar role in selling handicrafts made by Chinese refugees in the 1950s (WFTO, 2009). Starting in the 1960s, a range of alternative trade organizations (ATOs) formed in Europe began selling products from third world artisans.⁴ Over the first few decades, alternative trade organizations sold exclusively handicrafts. Ideologically, most of these fair trade initiatives rallied around the idea of trade-not-aid - seeking to provide artisans (and later farmers and workers) a premium price for their goods. The first ‘fairly traded’ coffee produced by small scale farmers was imported to the Netherlands from Guatemala in 1973 (WFTO, 2009).

Fair Trade product certification and voluntary labeling, as distinct from ATO merchandising or the elaboration of fair trade principles in business, was first established by the Dutch NGO, Solidaridad, under the Max Havelaar label in 1988 (Renard, 1999;

⁴ One unique characteristic of these early fair trade buycott campaigns was the employment of consumers as volunteers to promote the ATOs and to sell the handicrafts to others. Many ATOs, such as Ten Thousand Villages continue to use unpaid volunteers to sell goods in their shops. Geographers Clarke et al. (2009) refer to this kind of action encouraged by ATOs as a form of ethical consumption through which “people are encouraged to recognize themselves as bearing certain types of global obligation by virtue of their privileged position as consumers: obligations which in turn they endeavor to discharge (...) through repertoires of consumerism” (Clarke et al., 2009: 234).

2005). The Max Havelaar label introduced the first standards, certification and labeling scheme for a fairly traded product that provided an audit trail back through the supply chain to the point of production (Renard, 1999). The Max Havelaar label was groundbreaking in at least four ways. First, the Max Havelaar label helped pioneer fair trading in the agro-food sector. Second, the product label made it possible to “scale up” fair trade sales through conventional retail outlets. The label was specifically designed to certify the symbolic fairness of the coffee itself and not the firm which sold it. Until then, fairly traded coffee was sold only inside of the ATO networks and therefore it was the entire enterprise that gave credence to the ethical claims. With the invention of a transferable fair trade label, coffee that was certified by one NGO could be sold in any conventional retail outlet that abided by the standards and agreed to be monitored for compliance. The use of product-specific certification and voluntary labeling as opposed to certifying the ethical business practices of an entire firm (i.e. an ATO), paved the way for fairly traded coffee to reach mainstream retail channels for the first time.

The third innovation in the Max Havelaar labeling initiative was its concern for paying fair-prices and the elaboration of a fair-price formula that theoretically reflected costs of production and living standards in coffee producing communities. While fair trade principles sought to improve compensation for disadvantaged artisans, farmers and workers through direct buying relationships, no fair trade initiative to date had attempted to define the parameters of a fair price. The rationale for the creation of a fair-price formula was logical. It responded directly to the failure of producer and consumer countries to negotiate an International Coffee Agreement (ICA) in 1987 and mounting

concerns that the disappearance of a quota system would lead to overproduction and declining prices.

For twenty-seven years the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) regulated coffee market prices under a series of treaties (1962, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1987) that set quotas on national production. The ICAs enabled developing countries to stabilize export earnings and consumer countries to secure a consistent supply of coffee. While the ICA was directed at regulating an imperfect coffee market, it was also designed to achieve geo-political ends, namely, to prop up peripherally dependent state governments and class hierarchies and to establish diplomatic ties between the U.S. and dominant classes for a strategic alliance against the threat of communist revolution and independence. In 1962, the Cuban revolution, nationalist decolonization in Africa, and growing unrest and rebellion in peripheral states led the United States and other core states into the ICA, and into international economic development programs more generally (Talbot, 2004; 73). Geopolitically, the maintenance of reasonably high coffee prices through the ICAs would facilitate price margins wide enough to incentivize higher rural wages, facilitate state-led capitalist rural development, and disincentivize rural uprisings (Pendergrast, 1999; Talbot, 2004). With the threat of communism waning toward the end of the 1980s, and the clarion call for trade liberalization among neoliberal policy-makers, the decades of coffee trade regulation came to a close. Coffee flooded onto the international market as producer countries failed to come to agreement over quotas for withholding their harvest stocks; and prices plummeted. Central to the Max Havelaar initiative, therefore, was the

creation of a formula for a price floor and premium that would provide farmers with above market compensation for their harvests.

The final innovation in the new system was that cooperatives of small-scale coffee producers became the focal point of fair trade coffee exchanges and fair price standards. Frans van der Hoff, who, along with Nico Roozen, invented the Max Havelaar label, was a missionary who helped form UCIRI (Union de Comunidades Indigenas de la Region del Istmo) in Oaxaca, Mexico, the first fair trade coffee producer cooperative in Latin America. Reflecting his work to organize small-scale peasant farmers as opposed to workers on plantations, the Max Havelaar standards favored farmers organized in cooperatives. As I describe further in Chapter 4 and 5, cooperatives could serve both as sites for social development initiatives as well as facilitate economies of scale necessary for exporting coffee under contracts with fair trade coffee buyers. The emphasis on small-scale farmers and cooperatives in the Max Havelaar standards would come to distinguish Fair Trade from other types of social and ecological labeling initiatives in the coffee trade such as Rainforest Alliance's Eco-OK label which certified plantations, USDA Organic which certified small- medium and large farms indiscriminately, or the Smithsonian Bird-Friendly label which certified the presence of biodiverse shade canopies on small, medium and large farms.

The goal of product labeling for Fair Trade, was to isolate and monitor adherence to specific normative principles by accrediting buyers and sellers, auditing transactions and certifying the chain of custody between qualified producer organizations and licensed importers, roasters and retailers. The labeling and certification approach (to meet overall

strategic goals of the Fair Trade movement) was designed to increase consumer confidence that normative principles were monitored by an objective third-party. Furthermore, voluntary labeling enabled the Fair Trade movement to extend beyond the network of small-scale retailers and world shops (ATOs) that pioneered the practice of using fair-trade principles in their supply chains. In other words, the Fair Trade movement obtained credibility for itself by creating a legitimate bureaucratic hierarchy that could ‘prove’ adherence to the normative standards of the movement. In marrying the Fair Trade movement to voluntary labeling and certification, these pioneers successfully increased market share and communicated the movement’s unique set of values to the public.

A. The Formation of Fair Labeling Organizations International

By the mid 1990s, the Max Havelaar label was being used throughout Europe in national labeling initiatives in Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, and Italy. In 1997, the national initiatives employing the Max Havelaar labeling approach formed Fair Labelling Organizations International (FLO) (FLO, 2008). The creation of FLO established one uniform agency that could handle the expansion of Fair Trade Certified coffee into mainstream retail outlets and the growing number of producer organizations selling Fair Trade Certified coffee around the world. The creation of FLO as the central governing body for the elaboration and certification of “Fair Trade” created a “global standard” for certifying coffee production and processing methods, and for measuring fairness in the

coffee supply chain. It also enabled the agency to begin branching out beyond coffee into other agro-food commodities such as chocolate, tea, bananas and sugar.

Under FLO's leadership, the Fair Trade standards became more codified. In an effort to systematize Fair Trade standards in the coffee trade, FLO identified four key criteria to qualify for the Fair Trade Certified coffee label. First, it ensured that importers of Fair Trade Certified coffee paid a minimum price and social premium that covered costs of production and costs of living. From 1997-2007, that price was fixed at US\$1.21 for conventional coffee with a US\$0.05 premium for investment in social development projects. Second, FLO ensured that importers of Fair Trade Certified coffee provided cooperatives access to pre-financing and encouraged the negotiation of long-term contracts to aid cooperatives to remain solvent and grow. Third, FLO ensured that farmers were members of democratically organized cooperatives through inspections of their organizations before admitting them to the FLO registry of accredited coffee suppliers. And finally, FLO standards called on farmers and their organizations to demonstrate a commitment to ecological conservation and reduced pesticide use by submitting regular environmental assessments. In a related move, FLO also promoted organic agriculture through a price premium (an additional US\$0.15) above the Fair Trade floor price.

Yet, the formation of FLO as an institution not only represented the formalization of standards-making. It also re-oriented the diverse national initiatives under one umbrella, identifying key campaign brokers around the world that would institutionalize Fair Trade auditing and oversee market growth in all of the major coffee retailing

countries. Organizationally, the restructuring of Fair Trade standards, certification and labeling under FLO therefore established a clear division of labor between FLO and what were then envisaged as national Fair Trade labeling initiatives. FLO oversaw ‘global’ standards-making and the auditing of democratically organized cooperatives through the publication of its international Fair Trade registry. The national Fair Trade labeling initiatives would oversee the development of the Fair Trade movement and market in their own countries. National Fair Trade labeling initiatives, under the FLO rubric, were empowered to grant licenses to firms for the use of the Fair Trade Certified label. In return for licenses, firms were to agree to have their contracts audited and pay a licensing fee for label use. Moreover, national labeling initiatives were charged with promoting the Fair Trade Certified label in their respective countries. In the United States, the national labeling initiative that formed was a non-profit called TransFair USA, which became the country’s sole certifier of Fair Trade Certified products and the owner-arbiter of the Fair Trade Certified label.

C. TransFair USA and the Fair Trade Coffee Buycott in the United States

In 1998, the Oakland, California based TransFair USA assumed the national labeling initiative role in the United States. At the time, Equal Exchange, a worker-owned coffee retailer in Boston, MA, had been the only ATO selling fairly traded coffee in the United States. TransFair USA assumed the leadership role in promoting Fair Trade Certified coffee through its control over the licensing process and its trademark of the Fair Trade label. In 1999, TransFair began to offer licensing agreements to companies to

use the Fair Trade Certified label. Over the next two years primarily small and medium sized specialty coffee roasters around the United States began sourcing and selling Fair Trade Certified coffee.

Barrientos et al. (2007: 54) argue that the growth of Fair Trade Certified coffee sales can be attributed to three factors. First was the organization of boycott campaigns by “NGOs designed to put pressure on companies to adopt lines of Fair Trade coffee and other products.” Second was “the adoption of Fair Trade products by a number of coffee roasters and retailers as a distinguishing characteristic for marketing purposes,” which led to increased visibility of the Fair Trade Certified coffee (2007: 54). And third, Barrientos et al. claim that TransFair USA created “a sophisticated business-oriented service structure...for Fair Trade licensees” (Barrientos, et al., 2007: 54). While my research (Chapter 3) supports these points, my historical review suggests that, especially with regards to the first factor, the orchestration of boycott campaigns, three other significant events created “political opportunities” between 1999 and 2001 that propelled the boycott and Fair Trade Certified coffee into the spotlight.

The first event was the anti-WTO protests in Seattle, which gave voice to concerns about global trade injustices that reverberated throughout progressive circles. Due to the history of the Fair Trade movement and its principles of trading with disadvantaged working communities in the global South, numerous religious groups, unions, student groups, and NGOs were favorably disposed to campaign for Fair Trade Certified coffee as an alternative to the rigged rules of the WTO and corporate globalization. Second, Global Exchange, a San Francisco-based NGO that participated

in the WTO protests, made campaigning for Fair Trade Certified coffee a key initiative. In 2000, Global Exchange ran the Roast Starbucks campaign that called on the national retailer to carry Fair Trade Certified coffee (see Chapter 3). To avert mass protests, Starbucks agreed to carry Fair Trade Certified coffee, and by the following year the giant retailer began selling it in over 2000 outlets nation-wide (Conroy, 2007). Starbucks was the first large commercial retailer to carry Fair Trade Certified coffee and set the stage for future adoption by competing firms (Conroy, 2007).

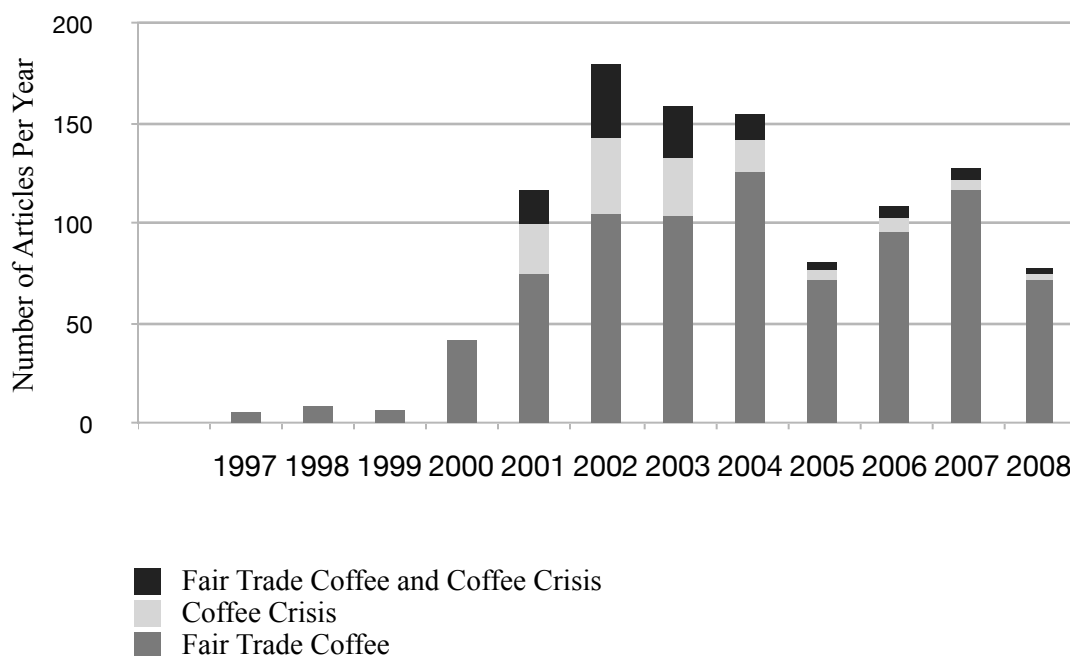
The third major event was the coffee price crisis from 2000-2005, during which coffee prices dropped to record lows of nearly US\$0.40 cents per pound in 2001. Fair Trade Certified coffee received a jolt of attention as news of major economic devastation, particularly in Central America and East Africa, began to make headlines (see Fig. 2.1). At the Specialty Coffee Association of America's Annual Conference in Miami in 2001, for example, founder and CEO of TransFair USA, Paul Rice, captured the concerns of the moment as he made his pitch for coffee retailers to adopt Fair Trade Certified coffee.

We are at a moment of crisis in the coffee industry. If you have been to a producing country recently, you know exactly what I mean. We're at one of the lowest points in the last eight years, in terms of the international market price. And in fact, if you adjust market price for inflation, it turns out that we are at the lowest price point in the coffee market in thirty years. I'm not referring to prices at the retail level. I'm not referring to the price that you and I pay for a cup of latte or cappuccino or what we pay at the grocery store. I'm referring to the price that the farmer gets. I've been visiting with farmers during this harvest in Central America and on average they are making around \$.30 US per pound for the coffee that they are producing. They make \$.30 a pound for the coffee that you and I pay \$8.00, \$10.00, or \$12.00 a pound for at retail. At \$.30 a pound an average coffee farming family cannot make ends meet. These families are struggling just to survive; they're struggling to put food on the table; they're struggling to keep their kids in school. (Paul Rice, April 22, 2001)

TransFair USA, NGOs, specialty coffee firms and activist groups all utilized the spotlight cast on the coffee crisis to communicate in stark terms the hypothesis that Fair Trade Certified coffee was the only alternative to improve the living standards and laboring conditions of small-scale farmers. Increasing sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee gave hope to coffee consumers, retailers and activist groups at a time of humanitarian disaster (Gresser and Tickell, 2002).

Activists, NGOs and retailers communicated to consumers that disadvantaged coffee farmers with access to Fair Trade markets were guaranteed a fair deal in their transactions with importers, roasters and retail firms in the global north. Fair Labelling Organizations International (FLO), oversaw and gave credibility to the label, ensuring, along with the national initiatives, that the coffee behind the label was authentic and adhered to strict ethical standards. It was claimed that if more and more farmers could get access to Fair Trade markets, and if they could increase exports of Fair Trade Certified coffee, then they would reap both higher prices for their coffee and premiums that their organizations could use to sponsor local development projects such as building infrastructure, health care, or improving coffee quality.

Figure 2.1. Print Media Coverage of Fair Trade Certified Coffee and Coffee Crisis

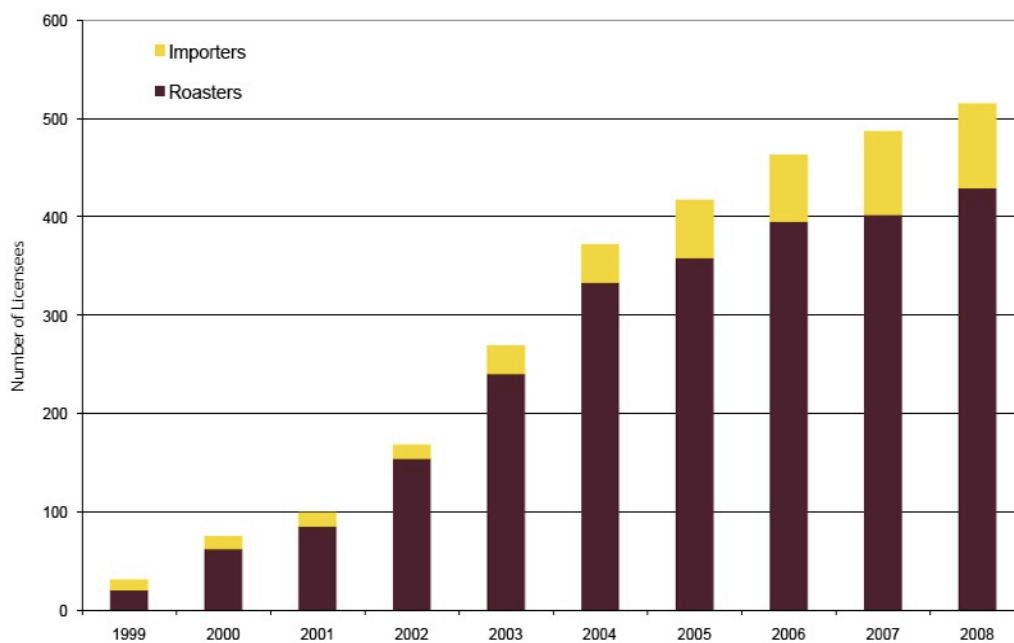


Source: Print media coverage as estimated from review of U.S. periodicals using the Access World News database for the period of 1997-2008. Search criteria included “Coffee Crisis,” “Fair Trade Coffee,” and “Fair Trade Coffee and Coffee Crisis.”

During the height of the coffee crisis 2000-2005, the number of Fair Trade licensees grew at an average of 68 percent a year with a total of 341 new importer and roaster licensees (see Fig. 2.2). In fact, 66 percent of all current Fair Trade licensees (importers and roasters) signed up with Fair Trade between 2000 and 2005, with 40 percent of all current licensees joining in 2003 and 2004 alone. Over this period, imports and sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee to the United States followed apace with the growth in licensees (see Figs. 2.3 and 2.4). Over the period of the coffee crisis, Fair Trade Certified coffee imports to the United States grew at a rate of 75 percent a year. In 2000, Fair Trade licensees imported 4,249,534 pounds of Fair Trade Certified coffee, and by 2005, imports had grown to 32,974,400 pounds. By 2009, Fair Trade Certified coffee imports stood at nearly 90 million pounds. TransFair USA claims that Fair Trade

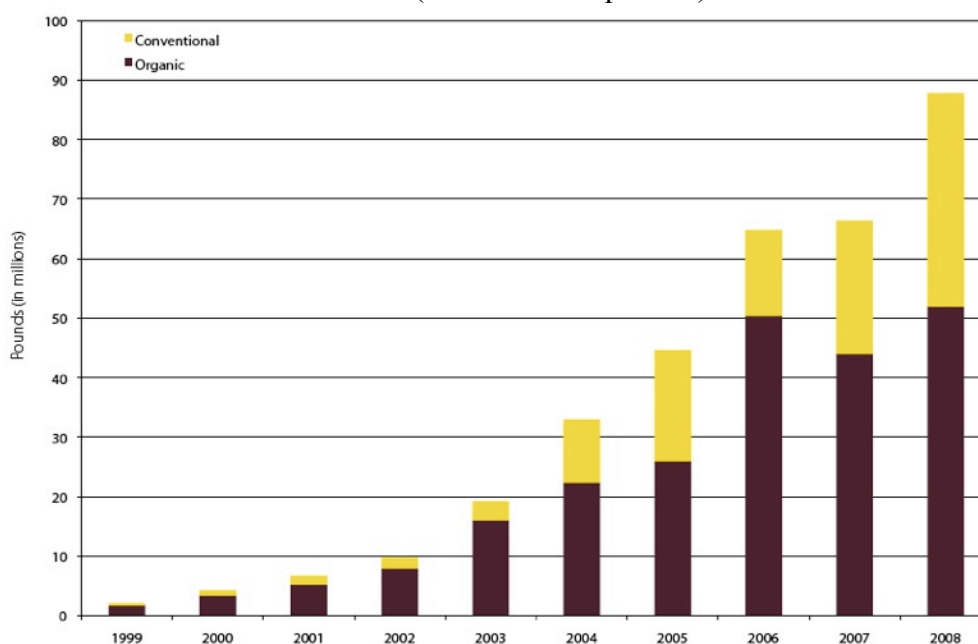
Certified coffee is the fastest growing segment of the specialty coffee market where it controls roughly 6 percent of the market share in the United States (ibid: 15). Moreover, according to TransFair USA, twenty-percent of retail coffee buyers recognize the Fair Trade Certified label and 54 percent of those consumers are converted to Fair Trade Certified coffee purchases (TransFair USA, 2007: 18).

Figure 2.2. Number of U.S. Fair Trade Certified Coffee Licensees, 1999-2008



Source: TransFair USA, Fair Trade Almanac 2008. p. 18

Figure 2.3. Imports of Fair Trade Certified coffee to the United States, 1999-2008
(in millions of pounds)



Source: TransFair USA, Fair Trade Almanac 2008. p. 10

Figure 2.4. Estimated Retail Value of Fair Trade Certified Coffee in the United States, 2000-2007

Year	Fair Trade Pounds Certified (in Millions)	Estimated Retail Value (Millions of U.S.\$)			Fair Trade Market Share ⁴	
		Est. Retail Value of Fair Trade sales (in Millions of U.S.\$) ¹	Specialty Coffee ²	All Coffee ³	Specialty Coffee	All Coffee
2000	4.3	\$48	\$7,760	\$21,600	0.60%	0.20%
2001	6.7	\$75	\$8,300	\$20,100	0.90%	0.40%
2002	9.8	\$110	\$8,400	\$20,300	1.30%	0.50%
2003	18.7	\$208	\$8,960	\$21,500	2.30%	1.00%
2004	32.8	\$369	\$9,620	\$22,000	3.80%	1.70%
2005	44.6	\$499	\$11,050	\$22,000	4.30%	2.20%
2006	64.8	\$730	\$12,270	\$22,000	5.90%	3.31%
2007 ⁵	66.3	\$837	\$13,625	\$22,000	6.10%	3.80%

¹ Retail value based on sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee within the U.S. market.

² Specialty coffee market: Assumes constant rate of growth 2005-2007.

³ Total Coffee market: Assumes constant rate of growth 2004-2007.

⁴ Increased Market Value relative to Pound Volumes reflects growth in revenue units as well as rising retail price.

⁵ Increased Market Value in 2007 relative to certified pound volumes reflects growth in revenue units as well as rising retail prices.

Sources: Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), International Coffee Organization (ICO), TransFair USA

Source: TransFair USA, Fair Trade Almanac, 2007 p. 19

III. Fair Trade Certified Coffee and Buycotting as a Social Movement Tactic

From the entry point of buycotting, the growth of Fair Trade Certified coffee sales in the United States can be examined as a pioneering example of a sea-change in political culture and political geography. At the turn of the 21st century, a new generation of activists and NGO initiatives evolved the form and function of market-oriented social movement against retail firms. Activists and non-governmental organizations that once organized punitive campaigns realized through trial and error that episodic bursts of contentious action against brands with large advertising budgets were difficult to sustain for one brand, let alone multiple brands, or an entire industry. Activists also found it difficult to hold retail firms accountable after campaigns, especially due to the mistrust between both parties. Even after boycott campaigns, a problem remained: how can social movements hold retail firms accountable once consumer discontent is mobilized?

With the globalization of agricultural and industrial production in full effect, the short-term and long-term enforcement of corporate accountability through labor or environmental monitoring at the global scale was not only costly for under-resourced activists, but it also required creating and legitimating shadow-state regulatory power at the transnational scale (Conroy, 2001; O'Rourke, 2003). To back up their campaigns, activists needed to develop global accountability regimes that were geographically extensive and capable of garnering greater "buy-in," in terms of both economic resources and legitimacy, from coalitions of consumers, NGOs and retail firms (Conroy, 2001). Moreover, they needed a way to communicate the existence, presence, and visibility of these accountability regimes (Barham, 2002). Voluntary product labeling filled the void

for greater buy-in, bridging the gap between both the demands of consumers to act on their conscience for “change,” and the demands of retailers to maintain their reputation and remain profitable in the face of mounting consumer opposition (Mutersbaugh, 2005). In other words, voluntary labeling was a means of institutionalizing longer-term accountability to social movements demanding social and environmental change.

But the rise of voluntary product labeling cannot be divorced from the social movements that spawned them. By promoting voluntary product labels, social movements shifted to the use of buycotting tactics, the results of which could be measured by increased sales of a particular product within the marketplace. Activists, NGOs, and retail firms in the United States replaced the direct, contentious politics of protest, disinvestment and boycotts of earlier cycles of political action. Rather than penalizing firms through boycott, advocates of voluntary product labeling orchestrated buycotts that demanded the responsiveness of retail firms to the demands of discriminate consumers. Whereas punitive campaigns coerced retail firms to respond to the demands of laborers and consumers by threatening their image and their profitability, buycott campaigns for goods carrying voluntary product labels rewarded retail firms for “volunteering” to accommodate the movement’s values. Voluntary product labeling and the certification systems that came with them, encouraged continued profitability *on particular terms amenable to both activist groups and firms*.

The only effort to conceptualize buycott campaigns which I have found in the literature on social movements is by Friedman (1999) in his text entitled *Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change Through the Marketplace and Media*. According to

Friedman (1999) buycotts are *public* calls to consumers and retailers made by activist groups or organizations to purchase particular goods to secure a social movements ends (1999: 202). Friedman is assertive about the difference between commercial advertising and buycotts, suggesting that the distinction lies in the “profit-making” status of the parties that stage the buycott. Buycotts, while pro-buying, generally promote change in the marketplace (i.e. lower prices or higher quality), but also other concerns such as “minority rights” (buying from LGBTQ friendly retailers), “environmental quality” (buying green), or “labor rights” (buying no sweat or fair trade goods) (1999: 202). Friedman makes three key distinctions in the formation of buycott campaigns. First, Friedman makes a distinction between calls for buycotts and actual buycotts. In calls for buycotts, activist groups either encourage the buycott of a particular product or service, or publish selective lists of companies and products to buy. Friedman highlights the latter, describing the publication of “green lists” and the proliferation of product labels or seals as an illustration of the prevalence and appeal of the buycott tactic. Actual buycotts, however, “go beyond such published lists and seals of approval to launch *organized campaigns* for the purpose of persuading consumers to purchase one or more items identified by the buycott” (1999: 203, emphasis added). Friedman goes on to question the effectiveness of passive calls for buycotts, particularly in transforming consumer behavior, suggesting instead that full-fledged campaigns are necessary “to make the message actionable” (1999: 203).

The second distinction that Friedman makes is the difference between beneficiary buycotts and conscience buycotts. Beneficiary buycotts are run by the groups that,

indirectly, will benefit from urging consumers to boycott particular goods, therefore the sponsoring group and beneficiaries are the same. Friedman uses the example of organized labor to promote the sale of “union-labeled” goods. In conscience boycotts, on the other hand, sponsors and beneficiaries are different constituencies. Conscience boycotts, therefore, mobilize the moral concerns of consumers on behalf of another social group (i.e. disadvantaged farmers), or even animals (i.e. dolphins) and environments (i.e. forests), which are not sponsors of the boycott itself.

The third distinction by Friedman is the difference between single-target and multi-target boycotts. In single-target boycotts, activists will focus on a single brand, one model of product, or a specific retailer. This kind of boycott campaign is less common, he claims, because “the consumer group may be reluctant to mount a campaign urging people to buy a single company’s products or services because such a campaign might raise questions of propriety about the consumer group and its relationship to the benefiting firm” (1999: 2007). Multi-target campaigns are less problematic, Friedman claims, because they represent “boycotts in disguise” (1999: 207). While focusing on the positive rather than the negative, multi-target boycotts such as the Buy American Campaign calling attention to the difference between products (and commodity chains), necessarily suggesting that other products are morally inferior, tainted or simply undesirable. The focus on the positive, Friedman argues, is the boycott’s distinctive characteristic, “reassuring” consumers that by taking part in the boycott they are fulfilling a certain “patriotic duty” (in the case of the Buy American), an “environmental duty” (in

the case of Buy Green), or more general “moral duties” (in the case of the Dolphin-Safe, or Fair Trade).

The Fair Trade coffee boycott is representative of a melding of several of these distinctions. First, the Fair Trade coffee boycott was a combination of passive calls for a boycott and an actual boycott campaign, since it both relied on publicizing a label and mobilizing NGOs and activist groups in direct actions to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee. Second, the Fair Trade coffee boycott was a conscience boycott in that asked consumers with disposable income to take indirect action on behalf of disadvantaged coffee farmers. Boycotting, as a social movement tactic therefore, produced a socially and spatially distanced politics that was led, not by laborers negatively impacted by capitalist exploitation, nor by communities experiencing the injustices of environmentally destructive modes of production, but by activists and consumers alien to the sites and subjects negotiating agricultural and industrial production in local spaces throughout the globe. Due to this social and spatial distancing, consumers and activists relied heavily on information generated, translated and transferred from sites of production to sites of consumption.

Third, the Fair Trade coffee boycott represented a hybrid between single-target and multi-target boycotts in that the boycott focused only on one product (coffee) and one product label (Fair Trade Certified), but sought to achieve those ends by targeting multiple retail firms. Finally, the Fair Trade coffee boycott, as I describe in Chapter 3, was positive. By adopting a positive position vis-à-vis the market and challenging retail firms

on their own terrain, the Fair Trade coffee boycott sought to navigate an increasingly fine line between product marketing and movement building.

IV. Between Market and Movement: Competing Conceptions of Fair Trade

...the growth of consumer awareness and demand for Fair Trade has been sparked in large part by all the great work that organizations like Oxfam and Coop America and United Students for Fair Trade and churches, environmental groups, that whole network of organizations throughout the country. (...) You know, at the end of the day, my opinion is that Fair Trade is both a market and a movement at the same time. I think, clearly it's a market, it's a set of products with a specific set of product attributes and you can think about it in those terms and develop marketing strategies and develop it that way. But the other side of it is that it is something that a lot of people feel very passionate about. And it speaks about the values upheld by a movement for social change. *I like to think of the market and the movement in Fair Trade as like two wheels of a bicycle.* You know, like two wheels of a vehicle that's moving forward. And the market won't develop as fast and won't develop the same kind of roots without the movement. The movement has to be there. I really see the the movement side being critical and strategic and absolutely necessary. (Paul Rice, April 14, 2005 emphasis added)

The boycott campaign for Fair Trade Certified coffee provides a window through which to observe the paradoxes that ensue when social movements move into the retail marketplace. Scholars often highlight the paradoxical relationship between the product marketing and movement building agenda of Fair Trade Certified coffee. Taylor (2005) describes the Fair Trade movement as “in the market but not of it,” emphasizing the philosophical roots of Fair Trade in a movement for trade justice that attempts to rework market mechanics. In a similar formulation, Raynolds (2002) and Fridell (2003) among others, have written that Fair Trade is both “in and against the market” suggesting that even though Fair Trade Certified coffee is a retail product, it also challenges the norms of conventional trade. Jaffee (2007) refers to Fair Trade as “a hybrid - simultaneously a

social movement and an alternative market structure” that seeks to “alter unjust terms of trade that hurt small farmers worldwide” while paradoxically it “utilizes the very markets that have generated those injustices.” For others, such as Guthman (2007), Fair Trade “keeps with the fetish of market mechanisms” through product certification and voluntary labeling, thereby forging an intimate relationship to “roll-out neoliberalism,” albeit through its kinder, gentler, softer side (Guthman, 2007: 465).

In the book *Brewing Justice*, Jaffee (2007) claims that within the Fair Trade movement there was never really a true consensus over the ideology of Fair Trade. Rather, he describes three “frames” through which different constituencies have understood the logic of Fair Trade. The first envisions the Fair Trade movement as a means for “righting the market’s historic inequalities” and “facilitating access for producers to the Northern markets from which they have been traditionally excluded” (2007: 27). In what could be called a *niche market access frame*, Fair Trade is defined as a means for helping disadvantaged producers get “access to lucrative consumer markets in the rich nations” (2007: 27). This perspective, often held by ATOs, national labeling initiatives (such as TransFair USA), producer organizations in the global South and some retailers, is rooted in what Jaffee calls a “realist perspective, often tied to...missions of community development and poverty reduction” where “the market should be used to achieve development and livelihood goals” (2007: 27).

The second frame posits the Fair Trade movement as “fixing” a broken and “structurally unfair” market system. In this *market reform frame*, “(e)xisting markets need to be changed to reallocate resources and to place value on fundamentally different

criteria in transactions" by "carving out spaces or 'zones of control' within existing capitalist rationality" (2007: 27). This movement logic, Jaffee claims, is most concerned with changing rules and standards, cutting out middlemen, encouraging direct trade, and using product certification and voluntary labels to engage with consumers. Adhered to by NGOs (such as Oxfam America), activists, and aggressive 100 percent Fair Trade retailers, this position sees Fair Trade as putting into practice new ways for markets to be "constructed and administered" and "how they deliver and apportion economic benefits to participants" (2007: 29)

According to the third position Jaffee identifies, a much smaller group of activist groups like United Students for Fair Trade and Global Exchange (see Chapter 3) tend to see in Fair Trade a "critique of an unjust world economic order" (2007: 28). In this approach activists see the product certification and voluntary labeling initiatives promoted in the market-reform frame as a means of challenging neoliberal policy-making, globalization, and "capitalist rationality" (2007: 28). Jaffee calls this the "market breaking" frame. In this frame, Fair Trade is "not an end in and of itself but rather one practical expression of a broader social movement that aims to place human needs and the environment above profit and corporate power" (2007: 28). Market breakers, Jaffee contends, while radical enough to envision a "postcapitalist" world, are pragmatic enough to "work simultaneously both on tangible fair trade initiatives and on efforts to reverse the process of corporate-led globalization" (2007: 28)

In the scholarly literature, Fair Trade is often portrayed much more uniformly as a kind of Polanyian "double movement" (1944) that protects society against the

dehumanizing impulses of capitalism, particularly the abstract formulation of “the market” and the self-interested and rationally calculative search for profit as an end unto itself (Fridell, 2007; Guthman, 2007; Jaffee, 2007; Raynolds, 2000). Barham (2002) summarizes Polanyi’s political and intellectual project in the following way:

Polanyi held concepts of the economy and the person that differed radically from (the) abstract neoclassical picture. Instead of an all encompassing market subsuming the environmental and the social, he saw *real* markets, made up of human beings interacting in particular ways, times, and places (i.e., accountable), and constrained by the limits of environmental and social sustainability. Countering the economist’s view of nature and the person as commodities manipulated by an unfeeling and unseeing impersonal market, Polanyi advocated a conscious, political engagement with the economy as a whole by society. Markets did not disappear – the fact that they were ever present in history demonstrated their importance, and they served certain distribution purposes very well – but like industry and science they were to be made to serve all of humankind by the creation of institutions capable of making decisions that could take both long range impacts and ethical imperatives into account. (2002: 352)

For several scholars, the Fair Trade movement, at least in concept, embodies this depiction of Polanyi’s work (cf. Jaffee, 2007). Drawing explicitly from Polanyi, Raynolds (2000) claims that the Fair Trade movement challenges the abstract capitalist relations “that fuel exploitation in the agro-food system.” Fair Trade is seen as fostering “the re-embedding of international commodity production and distribution in ‘equitable social relations’” (Raynolds, 2000: 297-298). Likewise, Jaffee et al. (2004) claim that the Fair Trade movement created linkages between consumers and producers that were “socially embedded” in what Renard (1999: 496) calls “values of solidarity and fairness” in place of “the values of the market” (Jaffee et al., 2004: 170).

Central to such claims of social embeddedness is the notion that Fair Trade shortens the conventional supply chain through direct trade with marginalized commodity

producers. In this sense, Fair Trade is believed to collapse social and spatial distances endemic to capitalist modernity (Bauman, 1989; Harvey, 1990). Employing actor-network theory to describe the thickening of socio-economic relationships, Whatmore and Thorne (1997), have claimed that Fair Trade generates “nourishing networks” that increase connectivity between Northern consumers and Southern producers. Scholars in geography also frequently reference the ability of Fair Trade to unveil the commodity fetish that conceals the labor that goes into the production of commodities (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Hudson and Hudson, 2003; Jackson, 2002). These conceptualizations of Fair Trade emphasize both the redemptive qualities of the geographic connection between consumers and producers of commodities as well as the protective qualities of Fair Trade as a form of social regulation that resists the otherwise self-regulating market (Guthman, 2007).

In a similar vein, scholars have also conceptualized the Fair Trade movement as productive of a moral economy (Barham, 2002; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Fridell, 2003; 2007). Drawing from E.P. Thompson’s work on the organized demands of the poor for just food prices in times of dearth, numerous scholars emphasize the Fair Trade movement’s resistance to profiteering through the market. Fridell (2003) claims that the Fair Trade movement produces an international moral economy that poses “a significant challenge to the logic of the market and the culture of capitalism” (2003: 3). Fridell elaborates,

The greatest virtue of fair trade lies in its attempt to take advantage of its market niche to construct a new moral economy, one which crosses national boundaries and re-asserts the notion of people’s right to live taking precedence over the flows of supply and demand. Whereas the old moral economy described by Thompson

asserted the rights of poor consumers to gain access to the means of life, the new moral economy of fair trade asserts the right of poor producers to get a fair price for what they sell on the market. The international moral economy of fair trade asserts principles that challenge the logic of the capitalist market. (2003: 4)

In many respects the notion of a moral economy in Fair Trade is confirmed by the “safety-nets” provided to farmers and cooperatives through the Fair Trade price and premium. Like Raynolds (2000) who claims that Fair Trade challenges the logic of “market competitiveness based solely on (the lowest) price,” Fridell highlights that among a range of different product certifications the Fair Trade movement is the only one that promotes the payment of a minimum price that ensures farmers can cover costs of production and costs of living and provides a social premium for non-profit-oriented investments in farming communities “such as roads, sewers, schools, parks, and hospitals...to promote the collective good and construct such much-needed infrastructure,” for which the conventional market provides no incentive (Fridell, 2007). Indeed, the emphasis on paying fair-prices and social premiums to aid farmers through trade was both the animating impulse of the Fair Trade movement, and its distinguishing ethical claim.

Geographer Michael Goodman (2004) similarly claims that the Fair Trade movement represents a “drive to envision and create a moral economy of alternative development,” however his analysis is especially attentive to claims people make about the normative values of Fair Trade.⁵ Highlighting the importance of symbols and

⁵ Even the material grounding of the international moral economy argument in “just prices” by Fridell (2003) does not attend to the fact that price determination within Fair Trade standards do not reflect place-based negotiations between buyers and sellers in producer communities, or where farmers can vindicate their right to a fair deal. Fair Trade prices are actually determined in advance through standards created and enforced by development experts and NGO bureaucrats, not by farmers.

narratives to the understanding of Fair Trade, Goodman writes that at “first blush...fair trade acts like a modern-day market-based ‘Robin Hood’ in the guise (most often) of a coffee bean and its associated premium...redistributing income from the consuming North to producers in the South” (2004: 897). Shifting attention away from the presumed material re-embedding of markets described in earlier literature, Goodman’s reference to the story of Robin Hood calls attention to the role of symbolic “framing” in Fair Trade. For Goodman (2004), while he sees Fair Trade as having material effects in farmer communities, he also demonstrates that our understanding of Fair Trade is produced through discursive formations which have less to do with actual ‘embedded’ social relations between consumers and producers and more to do with communicating the possibility of forming embedded moral economies. Goodman writes that

morally-charged links are...forged semiotically through the discursive and visual narratives that saturate (Fair Trade) foods with politicized and ethical meanings intended for extensive reading by consumers. Fair trade’s moral economy is written on the commodities trafficked from one part of the globe to another, connecting these places in a novel economy of semiology. (2004: 893)

Goodman’s work also explicitly introduces the “ethical consumer” into the equation of Fair Trade. Since the mid-1990s geographers have engaged in an effort to re-map geographies of consumption to attend to the agency and power of consumers to reshape commodity chains. The notion that Fair Trade, as a market and/or movement, is highly dependent on an ideal of ethical consumerism has not been lost on geographers (Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Hartwick, 1998; 2000; Barnett et al., 2005; Clarke et al., 2009). Indeed, geographers have sought to understand how consumers are mobilized to participate in causes such as Fair Trade and to explore how causes such as Fair Trade

produce and extend particular moral geographies of care and concern. Barnett et al. claim that ethical consumption “is one set of practices through which new networks of solidarity are currently being constituted” (2005: 41). Central to geographic research is the theorization of ethical consumption as a means for caring-at-a-distance, overcoming the notion that moral concerns are only rooted in place and demonstrating how, through conscious shopping and geographic knowledge, consumers are able to extend their world of concern to distant others (Barnett et al., 2005; Goodman, 2004). Critiquing the notion that commodify fetishism necessarily produces social and spatial distance between consumers and producers of commodities (Harvey, 1990), geographers have taken the explosion in ethical commodity initiatives and the circulation of new geographic knowledges through commodity narratives as signs that the veil is coming down (Cook, 2006; Goodman, 2004). Guthman (2002), Goodman (2004) and Hartwick (2000) are less sanguine about the possibilities that initiatives such as Fair Trade will invariably lead to defetishization, even if they present themselves as such to consumers. Indeed, Goodman (2004) concludes his analysis of “the moral economies of Fair Trade” by saying that reading the semiotic surfaces of Fair Trade goods may create new opportunities for people and places of production to be made visible. He argues that the circulation of images and narratives depicting farmers and environments may actually lead to a double fetish in which both product labels and the commodity itself (Fair Trade Certified and coffee) are commodified in the same material and semiotic process - thereby producing both material surpluses and ethical surpluses for retailers and consumers. This re-fetishization thesis is echoed in the work of Guthman (2002) and Friedberg (2003).

Goodman (2004) and Bryant and Goodman (2004), while critical of re-fetishization, suggest nonetheless that ‘getting with’ these new green and ethical fetishes may still yield new and effective forms of political intervention.

The attention to the fetishization of Fair Trade has likewise been reflected in the geographic literature in terms of the mechanisms of product certification and voluntary labeling in agro-food networks. Challenging earlier claims that the Fair Trade movement necessarily represented a social regulatory resistance to conventional market logics, scholars suggest that certification economies (Mutersbaugh, 2005), voluntary labels (Guthman, 2007), outsourced voluntary regulation (O’Rourke, 2003), and ethical quality conventions (Renard, 2005) reflect broader changes in agro-food networks in the context of neoliberal globalization that continue to marginalize small-scale producers and workers. The globalization of production facilitated through changing trade rules, shifts in production under post-Fordist regulatory regimes, as well as growing consumer anxiety as to where their goods come from and what is in them (i.e. particularly for food) have made product certification and voluntary labeling an important way for retail firms to maintain a green or ethical reputation (Mutersbaugh, 2005). Mutersbaugh states that, “in a general sense, firms share a dependence upon a ‘green’ reputation to sustain profit margins and, with respect to the mechanics of certification, a consequent desire to manage information about quality and avoid the emergence of information that might tarnish that reputation” (2005, page). Guthman (2007) theorizes voluntary labeling for Fair Trade as a sort of ‘nice neoliberalization’ of social, political and economic processes by devolving responsibilities for social protections from the state to civil society while

also enabling new forms of value creation that can be appropriated by capitalist firms (Guthman, 2007, see also 2004). Guthman (2004) and Mutersbaugh (2005) argue that product certifications and voluntary labels reflect patterns of capitalist accumulation by creating ‘rents’ via protective barriers to entry that are controlled, not by working communities, but commodity buyers and NGOs. By exploiting the value created by these barriers to entry (created by certifying spaces and communicated through labels) downstream retail firms can garner super-profits from the sale of both the material and semiotic values conveyed in the product (Guthman, 2004). McCarthy (2006) has referred to this as the conventionalization thesis, where the claim that the rents generated by marked “alternativeness” will lead “to some quite mainstream dynamics in aspirationally alternative networks” (McCarthy, 2006: 808). Fair Trade and other social or ecological labeling initiatives have increasingly taken on the aspect of quality certifications (Mutersbaugh, 2002; 2003; forthcoming, Raynolds, 2004; Raynolds and Wilkinson, 2007; Renard, 2005). In a sense, the articulation of Fair Trade as a quality may seem to say that the ethical principles of Fair Trade have arrived in the marketplace. Again, Goodman (2004) is cogent on this front, stating that although Fair Trade “has opened up important ‘spaces of inclusion’ for some of the most marginal small-scale producers...the subjective dictates of quality are important, in a sense acting as an exclusionary force at odds with a relational ethics. Those without sufficient product quality (i.e. bad tasting coffee), typically the poorest in resources and natural endowments, are often unable to participate in (Fair Trade) networks.” (Goodman, 2004)

V. Conclusion

In recent years, as Fair Trade Certified coffee has made greater inroads into the retail mainstream through conventional retailers such as Walmart, Nestle and McDonald's, the image of the Fair Trade movement as a an alternative to capitalist globalization has become increasingly untenable. Indeed, as Fair Trade Certified coffee "scales up," many scholars and activists have come to question whether the Fair Trade movement can maintain its status as a market alternative in the face of "selling out" to the market logic it intends to transform. For some, the efforts by the Fair Trade movement to court the major retail market players who hold the promise of dramatically increasing the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee - thereby benefiting small-scale farmers with higher exports - has inadvertently "diluted" its alternativeness as a social movement while also generating internal divisions among its supporters (Raynolds and Wilkinson, 2007: 43; cf. Fridell, 2007). In sum, as Fair Trade Certified coffee entered into mainstream retail markets, particularly in the United States, the idea that the Fair Trade movement could effectively protect consumers and producers of coffee against the dehumanizing impulse of capitalism began to wane and its alterity was called into question. Indeed, how could Fair Trade Certified coffee maintain its counter capitalist, game changing status as a market alternative while being retailed by the same commercial firms against whose self-interested and rationally calculative business practices the Fair Trade movement sought to distance itself?

In the course of just a few years in the late 1990s the Fair Trade coffee movement in the United States went from a disorganized group of trade partnerships developed between coffee marketing cooperatives and independent entrepreneurial initiatives like

Equal Exchange in Massachusetts and Thanksgiving Coffee in California, to an organized boycott campaign dependent on a product label overseen nationally and internationally by TransFair USA and FLO. NGOs hailed concerned consumers to the trademarked label in an effort to provide a channel to alleviate the extreme poverty and misery that characterized the coffee price crash. Harnessing the convincing message of fairness in trade cultivated over time by small and medium sized regional coffee roasters and retailers, multinationals jumped on board with consistent coaxing by groups such as TransFair USA,, Oxfam America, Coop America and Global Exchange. Coffee cooperatives within the Fair Trade regulatory complex were given increased opportunities to sell their harvests. The transformation resulted in a dramatic increase in the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee imports between 1998 and 2005, but this drew the pioneers and staunch advocates of the movement into an identity crisis.

The most notorious paradox facing the Fair Trade coffee boycott today is the conflict over label use by large commercial retailers such as Walmart, Costco, Procter & Gamble, Nestle's, and McDonald's, who can guarantee greater volumes of retail sales for coffees produced by farmers in the short-term, but remain ambivalent to trade justice writ large when it threatens their bottom-line. But how can the Fair Trade movement scale up fair trade exports and imports beyond a niche market without involving big industry players? The ideological debate regarding scaling up or selling out touches the nerve center of the Fair Trade movement today (Caldwell and Bacon, 2005). If the movement is to make a larger dent in the unethical practices of the global coffee trade, scaling-up volumes of coffees produced by disadvantaged farmers through large commercial

retailers may be a strategic direction. But selling out the core values to get there could undermine the moral legitimacy of the Fair Trade movement with its core constituency.

Boycotting a single voluntary product label as a tactic to fulfill the objectives of the Fair Trade movement has caused dissension among movement members highly concerned with the integrity of fair trade principles and the competition created when labeling proliferates in the local, regional and national consumer marketplace. Pioneers of the Fair Trade movement who claim to guarantee 100 percent adherence to the normative principles of fair trade through their own enterprise structures (even without a label) argue that third-party coffee labeling lowers the bar to any enterprise wishing to source fair trade beans, no matter the level of long-term commitment. Jaffee refers to the danger of scaling-up the market by integrating large commercial retailers as 'dancing with the devil' because as NGOs not directly engaged in trade court big players to participate in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, the movement itself may cede normative coherence and structural control. Pioneering members argue that the label can create a false sense of integrity, a "halo effect," that presents all trade conducted by a given enterprise under the positive light shed by fair-trade principles, even though the scale of their participation as a percentage of total trade is very low. Starbucks Coffee Company presents one example this kind of scale contradiction. As Starbucks became the largest importer of Fair Trade Certified coffee to the United States in 2005, sourcing some 10 million pounds, those coffees still made up less than 4 percent of their total imports.

According to Barrientos, et al. (2007) many pioneers of Fair Trade Certified coffee have taken issue with mainstreaming the Fair Trade Certified label because large

commercial retailers have given “Fair Trade entry into mass markets, but they are simultaneously profiting from a “social brand” built up through long years of activity by a core of Fair Trade supporters and consumers” (Barrientos et al., 2007: 58) Groups such as alternative trade organizations, smaller scale pioneering retailers, religious organizations, development organizations and solidarity networks made “major investments” and effectively “subsidized the growth and current vitality of Fair Trade” (2007: 59). These groups were dissatisfied that “the current entrants into Fair Trade (we)re profiting from investments made by others” (2007; 59). In short, the “core of Fair Trade supporters” saw large commercial retailers as “free-riding” - profiting from label use they had not invested in creating and leveraging the halo effect of fair trade principles that they did not more generally practice outside of their retailing of Fair Trade Certified coffee.

The resentment generated over the entrance of large commercial retailers into the Fair Trade boycott campaign cannot be underestimated. For more than 20 years, movement brokers, development experts and activists worked to establish an effective “frame” that reached consumers, raised consumer awareness through campaigns, and invested incalculable time, energy and money in producer communities to increase cooperative capacities, build infrastructure and establish marketing networks (Barrientos et al., 2007: 59). To them large commercial retailers literally embodied “the devils” who had made the Fair Trade movement necessary in the first place (Jaffee, 2007). And now these companies could exploit the rather minor entry barriers to using the Fair Trade label as means to describe their product sourcing practices as morally sound. As Jaffee argues,

not only were barriers to entry very low, but large commercial retailers were actively courted by FLO and the national initiatives such as TransFair USA by making certain compromises on standards such as volume-based licensing payments, the retro-active certification of existing suppliers, and the promise of future negotiations around lowering or abolishing the Fair Trade minimum price and premium, the signature standard that made Fair Trade unique compared to a range of other voluntary labels (Jaffee, 2007; Mutersbaugh and Lyons, 2010; Renard, 2005). In the end, this change in the Fair Trade price standards never came to pass. Instead Fair Trade prices and premiums were actually raised in 2007 and 2008 after political efforts by transnational organizations representing Fair Trade producers called on FLO to ensure that their standards covered farmer's costs of production and cost of living, which had risen dramatically in the 15 years since the pricing and premium mechanisms were designed. This was an important gain by the "movement oriented" wing of the Fair Trade network, but it remains to be seen how closer ties with powerful actors in the coffee industry will reshape the Fair Trade agenda in the future.

Chapter 3

An Alternative to Protest as Usual: Activist Engagement with Fair Trade as a Market and Movement

For me it's really gratifying to see the Fair Trade movement develop and mature and become more effective in strategies and tactics over the last few years. Because I think early on, the Fair Trade movement was somewhat more *strident* and *hardcore* and *activist-oriented* and *butt kicking-oriented* and we saw some companies join Fair Trade because they were forced to. And I think we've evolved. Collectively we've evolved beyond that. It's extremely gratifying to see that evolution and to see grassroots organizations and consumer-connected organizations that are understanding how powerful a *positive* message can be; and how powerful the market can be to *reward* companies for doing the right thing. As opposed to *kicking the butt* of companies when they are *not* doing the right thing.

-- Paul Rice, Fair Trade Forum, April 14, 2005 emphasis in original.

I. Introduction

Over the past decade, NGOs such as Global Exchange, TransFair USA, and Oxfam America enrolled tens of thousands of people to pressure large commercial retailers, food service providers, and institutional purchasers to adopt Fair Trade Certified coffee in the United States. Grassroots activists waged hundreds of boycott campaigns in towns, cities and universities across the country. "It was not easy" wrote Michael Conroy (2007: 109) "to convince major coffee importing, roasting and distributing companies to buy into the notion of Fair Trade." When Fair Trade Certified coffee was introduced to the United States from Europe in 1999, Conroy wrote, "most consumers were unaware of the exploitation of farmers in the normal business supply chain." According to Paul Rice, CEO of TransFair USA, activists played a vital role in "awakening the sleeping giant," by

calling upon U.S. consumers to open their eyes to the plight of peasant coffee farmers. Activists steered large companies to make tangible commitments to Fair Trade, praised them when they adopted Fair Trade Certified coffee and kept companies honest to those commitments over the long term. By pressuring companies and educating consumers, geographer Michael Goodman wrote, "(a)ctivist groups (were) the fundamental vanguard fostering fair trade markets" in the United States because they "directly politicize(d) consumers" and engaged in "direct forms of action" to expand the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee (2004: 900-901).

In this chapter I address a gap in the growing literature on ethical trade and product certification schemes by analyzing the perspectives of U.S.-based Fair Trade activists regarding *buycotting* as a social movement tactic. Although recent scholarship on ethical trade and product certification schemes has made reference to the Fair Trade activism in the United States (Fridell, 2007; Goodman, 2004; Jaffee, 2007), few studies have examined the role of grassroots activist groups expanding the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee (see Clark et al., 2007; Clarke, 2008; Goodman, 2004). Building on the work of geographers concerned primarily with interrogating the moral geographies of ethical consumption (Barnett et al., 2006; Bryant and Goodman, 2004; Goodman and Goodman, 2001; Goodman, 2004; Guthman, 2002; Hartwick, 1998 and 2000), my focus on activists entails a broader examination of collective action beyond Fair Trade Certified coffee consumption.

Unlike traditional boycotts which coerced companies into compliance with movement demands by mobilizing consumers not to purchase a given product, the Fair

Trade coffee boycott campaign called on activists and consumers to persuade retailers to source, serve and sell coffee that met third-party ethical standards; as well as implicitly encouraging them to drink Fair Trade Certified coffee. In his description of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, Fridell claimed that the role of activists was “to create a demand for fair trade products among consumers and then demonstrate to corporations that this demand exists and can be capitalised on” (Fridell, 2006: 146). In other words, the Fair Trade coffee boycott called upon activists to persuasively market the Fair Trade Certified label to consumers and retailers. As opposed to contentious boycotts which mobilized activists to coerce, threaten, shame, and penalize companies, the Fair Trade coffee boycott, as Rice’s comment indicates above, leveraged the power of a persuasive and positive message to reward companies that complied with movement demands.

My research illustrates that the motivational frames and tactical approach of the Fair Trade coffee boycott appealed to activists in the United States. What I found was that activists were principally motivated to join the Fair Trade coffee boycott because it offered motivational frames that were ideologically inclusive and “menu of action” that emphasized persuasive tactics over coercive tactics in the execution of campaigns. In many respects, the persuasive approach fulfilled what Jasper (1997) has called the “tactical tastes” of many activists in the United States. As the director of social responsibility at Green Mountain coffee has said, activists could “gently nudge” retailers toward carrying Fair Trade Certified coffee without the threat of public protest, boycotts, or negative advertising. NGO campaign brokers such as Oxfam America and Global

Exchange encouraged activists to adopt this approach through facilitation schemes such as action guides and activist training that emphasized non-coercive behavior.

Although activists at the front lines of boycott campaigns were highly successful in convincing retailers to adopt Fair Trade Certified coffee, they were not immune to the contradictions associated with persuading consumers and retailers to buy into Fair Trade Certified coffee. By persuading consumers and retailers to join the boycott they also indirectly endorsed suppliers and vendors of Fair Trade Certified coffee that had ambiguous goals. Due to their “employment” in promoting Fair Trade Certified coffee, activists came to seriously question the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a social movement tactic. Whereas activists could wield the Fair Trade Certified label as a means for claim-making, they nevertheless effectively supplied volunteer labor to companies leveraging Fair Trade Certified coffee as a new market niche and to fair wash their corporate image. In effect, activists who participated in Fair Trade coffee boycott campaigns often looked beyond the boycott for other means of creating social change both at home and abroad.

A. Organization of the Chapter

The chapter is organized into five sections. First, I introduce my research with the United Students for Fair Trade - the largest Fair Trade activist network in the United States. Second, I illustrate that activists are hailed to participate in the boycott, not only as “consumers” of products and information, but also as active proponents who have embraced, internalized and reiterated the positive message, the strategy and the tactics of boycotting through coordinated actions intended to sell more Fair Trade Certified coffee.

Unlike actors who identified solely as ethical consumers (and whose steady commitment to such causes have been called into question),⁶ my research subjects performed their commitment to the Fair Trade coffee boycott in ways that extended beyond commodity consumption. Activists I interviewed scaled up their activism from changes in personal consumer behavior to target social institutions and coffee companies using petitions and demonstrations, even calling for comprehensive buying restrictions that required institutional suppliers like universities to carry solely Fair Trade Certified coffee. Like guerrilla marketers, activists served as key brokers to expand the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee on the local and national scale in the United States.

In section three, my research reveals that the Fair Trade coffee boycott motivated activist participation in two key ways: (1) through the articulation of motivational frames that won activist sympathy; and (2) through morally acceptable strategies and tactics that set those sympathies into a field of action. The second of these findings, which I call tactical resonance, demonstrates that, even when activists interpreted the motivational frames of Fair Trade differently, or when their ideological views differed, the tactical approach of the Fair Trade boycott continued to appeal to large numbers of people. In other words, many activists took part in the Fair Trade coffee boycott due to the appeal of the tactics themselves. This finding led me to analyze more closely the tactical approach taken in the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States.

⁶ As several recent studies attest, people who self-identify as ethical consumers, cannot always be counted upon to act on behalf of social movement objectives through shopping (Freidberg, 2004; Miller, 2001). As Freidberg describes, paraphrasing the ethnographic research on ethical consumers in North London conducted by Daniel Miller (2001): “Even shoppers who discussed their concerns about the environment and social justice while pushing their carts through the aisles...almost never bought “green” or “ethical” goods, even if their budgets would permit them to. Or if they did, it was out of concern about their own and their families’ well-being.” (Freidberg, 2004: 515)

In section four, I use activist guides written and distributed by Oxfam America and Global Exchange to illustrate that NGO campaign brokers cultivated, and activists adopted, a tactical approach in the Fair Trade coffee boycott that emphasized persuasion over coercion. Through step-by-step facilitation techniques, NGOs provided activists a menu of action that was easy to use and provided a range of low to high intensity forms of individual and collective action. Activists in the Fair Trade coffee boycott ultimately had to persuade consumers and retailers to purchase Fair Trade Certified coffee from a particular vendor.

The final section of the paper explores the tactical dilemmas I observed when activists associated with the United Students for Fair Trade advanced the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States. The findings demonstrate that many Fair Trade activists, in their words, lost their innocence, lost faith, or began to question the positive effect of the boycott on industry and farmers. As the boycott campaign began to make greater inroads into mainstream retailing through the efforts of TransFair USA, activists and the NGOs that helped facilitate the Fair Trade coffee boycott, became increasingly conscious that they, in the end, had little bargaining power in deciding where and when to expand Fair Trade Certified coffee's market share into new national- and international-scale retail venues. In short, due to the rapid growth of Fair Trade Certified coffee into mainstream retail channels and the power of TransFair USA to make executive decisions about what companies could sign onto Fair Trade contracts, activists began to see the boycott as having been co-opted by large commercial retailers. This effectively allowed corporations with no prior commitment to Fair Trade to "fair-wash" their image at

minimal cost. This led activists to question their place in campaigns and subsequently to consider alternative approaches to Fair Trade activism. In short, they began to look beyond labeling as a means to achieve their social, environmental and economic justice goals.

II. Fair Trade Activists: Studying the United Students for Fair Trade

A. Description of USFT

The arguments in this chapter draw from field research conducted with the United Students for Fair Trade (USFT), the largest network of Fair Trade activists in the United States. USFT is a national network of over 120 university and community-based organizations that “promote Fair Trade principles, products and policies” (USFT, 2006). Arguably, no activist group has played a greater role in carrying out Fair Trade coffee boycotts in the United States than USFT. Between 2003 and 2005, activists affiliated with USFT ran an estimated 350 campaigns on their college campuses and in their communities (many of which are still on-going). Through pioneering campaigns run at American University, UC Davis, University of Washington, UCLA, Boston University, and Harvard University, campus-based activists also played a role in forcing the hand of food service providers such as Sodexo, Sara Lee and Aramark, large commercial retailers such as Starbucks, Bruegers Bagels and Java City, and even coffee importing behemoth, Procter and Gamble, to make commitments to sourcing and selling Fair Trade Certified coffee.

Campus conversion campaigns were central to the strategy for expanding the market for Fair Trade labeled coffee in the United States. As a USFT vision document states, “students provide an important grassroots component to the Fair Trade movement, making it the standard on campuses.” The university was both a lucrative retail location and one critical site where ethical consumers and advocates could be recruited for the cause. As a field of action, the campus was ripe both for marketing and movement building since consumers and activist recruits were in the same location. In the late 1990s, NGOs and activists began to experiment with and design approaches to “converting” university dining halls, food service contracts and coffee shops to Fair Trade labeled coffee. Equal Exchange, the Boston-based Fair Trade pioneer, had been working with activists in New England universities and church groups to promote their coffee since the early 1990s. By 2002, it was clear that universities had become the primary site for increasing awareness of Fair Trade, recruiting activists and educating a new ethical consumer market.

While activists affiliated with USFT have acted frequently, they have not acted alone. NGOs have played an influential role in shaping the field of action in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, particularly at universities. USFT materialized through campus-based activist networks facilitated by Oxfam America, Global Exchange, Fair Trade Resource Network, Coop America and TransFair USA. Global Exchange was the first to mobilize activists to collectively demand Fair Trade Certified coffee through the “Roast Starbucks” campaign. In what has been described as the “break through moment” for Fair Trade Certified coffee (Conroy, 2007), on April 5, 2000, San Francisco-based NGO

Global Exchange sent an open letter to Howard Schultz the CEO of Starbucks Coffee Company.

We, the undersigned organizations, represent a diverse group of environmental and economic justice organizations, churches, unions, consumer groups, and others who are concerned about the trade issues in general and the wages and living conditions of coffee farmers in particular. We are writing to strongly urge that you purchase coffee that is Fair Trade Certified.

Global Exchange's letter to Starbucks called the company to account for labor abuses and unfair wages paid to "all who make their products, whether or not they are directly employed by the company." Building on traditional coercive techniques utilized in previous cycles of protest to hold Nike accountable for sweatshop labor abuses, the labor rights work of the U.S. Labor Education in the America's Project (USLEAP), as well as a widely televised investigative exposé on child labor in the Guatemalan coffee fields by ABC-TV in San Francisco, the letter from Global Exchange served Starbucks an ultimatum. Buy Fair Trade Certified coffee or face the consequences.

Unlike future campaigns for Fair Trade which emphasized non-coercive tactics however, Global Exchange backed up their request to Starbucks with the threat of mass protest. In email communiques to its activist network, Global Exchange directed activists to carry out non-violent store-front protests in 29 cities starting April 13, 2000 if Starbucks would not comply. Moreover, Global Exchange coordinated a massive letter writing campaign using a link on their website so activists could send faxes to the Starbucks CEO (Conroy, 2007), and encouraged students across the United States to picket campus-based Starbucks stores and demand that purchasing agents cut contracts with Starbucks for coffee retailed in cafeterias and dining halls. "We are the attack dogs,

biting at their heels, grrrr,” said Kevin Danaher, co-founder of Global Exchange in an interview with NJ Star Ledger (Orr, 2000). “We use grassroots pressure. We did two demonstrations outside of Starbucks in Seattle (during the WTO protests in 1999).” Drawing Starbucks into public view, Danaher claimed, “Our goal was to get the snake out from under the rock...discuss if it is a poisonous snake or a non-poisonous snake, (and decide) should we kill it or reform it, or remove its fangs.” (Orr, 2000).⁷

In what Global Exchange called a “stunning concession to protesters,” four days after sending the letter to Starbucks, executives announced that the company signed a letter of intent with Paul Rice, founder and CEO of TransFair USA. to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee as a retail offering in more than 2,000 cafés and 500 colleges starting in October 2000. At the time, Starbucks would be the first and only large commercial retailer to adopt and promote Fair Trade Certified coffee.

In the wake of the successful “Roast Starbucks” campaign, Global Exchange turned their attention to building the base of the Fair Trade movement on college campuses, creating the first activist guide and campus-based strategy for promoting Fair Trade Certified coffee. Drawing from their existing base of anti-sweatshop and anti-

⁷ “But we weren’t the window smashers,” explained Danaher of Global Exchange’s role in the street protests. In 1999 during the Battle in Seattle, nine Starbucks retailers were vandalized during the street protests. Images of masked youth kicking through the front-windows of the coffee shops were broadcast around the country and the world, producing a powerful visual dramatization the contentious politics of the emergent anti-globalization and anti-corporate movement. Alternately, images also circulated of black clad riot police standing in front of Starbucks cafés while other police officers beat, arrested, tear-gassed and detained protesters. In April 2000, however, Global Exchange was directing consumer attention to a different image problem, Starbucks’ “sweatshops in the fields.” As Danaher explained: “What we said to Starbucks is simple: Would you let your kids go down there (i.e. coffee producing countries) and work barefoot in the fields for \$3 a day?” (Orr, 2000). At the Starbucks shareholder’s meeting in February 2000, Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Global Exchange asserted, over the jeers of the audience, that Starbucks was “becoming known as a purveyor of sweatshop coffee” (Gorlick, 2000).

globalization activists who were engaged in the Nike Campaign and WTO protest networks, Global Exchange fostered a number of campus-based Fair Trade boycott campaigns, particularly on the West Coast starting in 2000.

On the East Coast, a different NGO was joining the Fair Trade coffee boycott. Oxfam International, a proponent of trade-not-aid and world shops, also began to organize for the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States through their Oxfam America office in 2000. In 2001, Oxfam America received a grant from the Ford Foundation focused on “Promoting Ethical Consumer Choice in the United States,” and channeled many of those funds into training campus organizers to promote the Fair Trade coffee. In particular, Oxfam America trained activists through their CHANGE Initiative, a leadership program for first and second year college students (USFT, 2008).

Over three years, from 2001-2003, Oxfam America trained 269 students from 225 campuses to run successful campus-based Fair Trade coffee boycott campaigns. According to Stephanie and Lina, founders of the United Students for Fair Trade (USFT) I interviewed in 2005, Oxfam America provided a recipe for action and funding to carry out Fair Trade coffee boycotts on their campuses. Oxfam provided marketing materials, funds for hosting farmer tours and even financed the operating budgets of their campus-based organizations. In Summer 2002, 50 percent of the CHANGE participants committed to run campus-based Fair Trade coffee boycotts. The next year, 100 percent of the participants in the CHANGE initiative committed to Fair Trade coffee boycotts and a core group of activists began to network across the country, linking the West Coast college initiatives supported by San Francisco’s Global Exchange and the East Coast

college initiatives supported by Boston's Oxfam America. Activists formed a national USFT list-serv and began to document their campaigns for others to learn and share approaches to boycott Fair Trade Certified coffee.

In 2003, students launched United Students for Fair Trade as an independent organization from Global Exchange and Oxfam America, although they continued to rely on Oxfam America, in particular, for financial support. Building on Oxfam's advocacy for a resolution to the coffee crisis (Oxfam, 2001; 2002), USFT encouraged activists to employ Fair Trade coffee boycott campaigns on their campuses. In the years to follow, USFT affiliates around the country experimented with boycotting and diffused the tactical model as a basis for social movement organizing.⁸

B. Description of Research with USFT

The research I conducted with USFT progressed through three stages. I first met leaders from the USFT at the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia in 2004. USFT had only been in existence for one year, having formally launched as an organization at the SCAA meeting the year before. At the SCAA in 2004, I asked to formally begin research on the organization and over subsequent telephone calls and meetings received clearance to begin the study. In 2005, I participated in United Students for Fair Trade's (USFT) second annual international activist convergence in Chicago which brought together 350 activists from 33 colleges from across the United States. At the USFT National Convergence, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 55 attendees and collected participant observation field notes

⁸ While USFT affiliates would campaign for a range of Fair Trade Certified products, coffee campaigns remained the core of their work through 2009.

over the four day conference proceedings. The data from the interviews (discussed below) helped me to more accurately describe what constitutes Fair Trade activism and the motivations and concerns of activists regarding boycotting as a social movement tactic.

The second phase of the research began in April 2005, when I participated in the four day USFT Northwest Regional Convergence of 45 activists in Seattle. At this smaller and more intimate gathering, I carried out 14 semi-structured interviews with USFT affiliated activists and took field notes during the four day convergence proceedings. The USFT Northwest Regional Convergence also coincided with the Specialty Coffee Association of America Annual Conference in Seattle. Therefore I also attended the SCAA proceedings with USFT leaders, shadowing them as they participated in a strategic meeting with Starbucks executives, TransFair USA, and NGOs promoted their work on the large exhibit hall floor. Particularly important moments for USFT members (and for me) during the SCAA conference were participating as stakeholders in the Fair Trade Forum hosted by TransFair USA, and attending a subsequent NGO meeting that exploded in a fiery debate over the future of the Fair Trade Certified label. This impromptu meeting was called by TransFair USA to address concerns among “the movement” that TransFair executives were proceeding with corporate partnerships without the consent of the NGOs and activist networks. In the later sections of the chapter I describe in greater detail the dynamics of this event and its effects on how activists understood their role in the Fair Trade boycott.

In September 2005, I attended the Fair Trade Futures conference, which was a product of the growing fissures among the NGOs, pioneering Fair Trade businesses, and TransFair USA. At the Fair Trade Futures conference, I accompanied USFT leaders in the proceedings and recorded in field notes their perspectives regarding the debates over mainstreaming the Fair Trade Certified label. Following the Fair Trade Futures conference in winter of 2006, I conducted hour long telephone interviews with the entire elected body of USFT, which, at the time, included 12 coordinating committee members. After completing these interviews, I attended the 2006 USFT National Convergence in Denver, where I participated in workshops, conducted further semi-structured interviews, and followed up with the coordinating committee as to their efforts to reframe Fair Trade and create new tactical approaches that moved beyond campaigning for the Fair Trade Certified label.

C. Rationale for Studying USFT

I selected USFT as a case study of Fair Trade activism for three reasons. First, USFT affiliated activists carried out local, material actions to educate consumers and retailers to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee. USFT was neither engaged with setting Fair Trade standards, nor in designing the motivational frames, strategy, and tactics of the boycott. Rather, they put the boycott into practical action. USFT activists implemented campus or community-based campaigns to demonstrate consumer demand and persuaded reluctant suppliers and retailers to carry Fair Trade Certified coffee. In

terms of my study, this made USFT leaders and its affiliated groups knowledgeable informants who understood what it took to carry out boycotts.

The second reason I studied USFT was that affiliated activists took part in campaigns without the incentive of substantial financial gain.⁹ In other words, activists affiliated with USFT supplied unpaid, volunteer labor to the Fair Trade coffee boycott. Fair Trade activists affiliated with USFT were also unencumbered by issues such as profitability (i.e. for retailers) and membership revenue, which were especially pertinent for retailers and NGOs, respectively. USFT functioned as a volunteer organization, this gave the group significant financial autonomy, but left it subject to the limitations imposed by depending primarily on volunteers. As Haley, a member of the USFT coordinating committee put it,

We aren't afraid to take on anything...and I'll tell you...that we are really resourceful. We don't have graphic designers or public relations people like the NGOs. (Laughing) You know TransFair USA doesn't run anti-oppression workshops for Fair Trade organizers. But we know that these things are important for building a social justice movement and we just do it. We don't compromise. We don't have business interests that make us compromise. We're organic, raw and accessible because we're opening up to all kinds of things. This is probably our problem and our success. What makes us unique is that, here we are sitting around in a fucking cluttered apartment surrounded by bags of give away swag, stapling information to little coffee bags, and organizing the program for the (conference) participants. We aren't paid to do this. No one else (other NGOs in the movement) does this for free. You understand, we don't get paid. Its all volunteer work. (Haley - February 13, 2006)

⁹ As an organization, USFT did receive funding to aid in the promotion of Fair Trade. In fact, for their annual conference, their operating budget consistently topped US\$50,000 and sponsors of the event were usually companies and NGOs supporting the boycott. Oxfam America and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters supplied the lion's share of USFT's operating budget, including, in 2007, funds to hire of a national coordinator. However, even with these financial contributions to USFT as an organization, the coordination of campus-based actions and voluntary labor associated with carrying out boycott campaigns remained unpaid.

Haley's point about the voluntary nature of Fair Trade activism was a point reiterated by my informants throughout my research. The result of their positioning as volunteers was that USFT activists tended to see themselves as part of a social movement, albeit with a market-focused agenda. As Joe, a coordinating committee member and one of my key informants, often said, "The market is just the entry point. USFT is mobilizing a movement that draws people in through the market mechanism" (Joe - February 11, 2006).

As my research evolved, I found that USFT's peculiar positioning as a volunteer social movement organization provided me with critical perspective on the changes taking place in the a rapidly evolving market-focused agenda of the Fair Trade coffee boycott. What were the consequences for activists when the boycott was racking up victories by signing on large commercial retailers? Weren't companies such as McDonald's, Starbucks and Nestle the sworn enemies of activists who would be inclined to take up the Fair Trade cause? What I found was that the activists affiliated with USFT were some of the first to question the logic of boycotting "victories." Indeed, the Fair Trade movement meetings hosted by USFT, and USFT members' participation in Fair Trade conferences that I witnessed from 2005-2006, challenged NGOs and Fair Trade retailers to see the boycott as firmly rooted in a movement logic and as more than just a market phenomenon. The engagement of USFT in advocating for a greater social movement focus for the boycott led the organization to be seen by market actors in the Fair Trade coffee boycott (particularly companies like Starbucks) as both an ally and potential threat. Indeed, as the Director of Social Responsibility at Starbucks told me in

an interview in 2006, “We like it when (USFT) is interested in working with us and listening to our point of view. What we don’t like is when they are in a rock throwing mood.”

Although USFT leadership was consistently welcomed to participate in the coordinating meetings of the NGO coalition for the Fair Trade coffee boycott and remained a respected ally of TransFair USA, USFT was never fully embraced as an insider or decision-maker; nor did it hold bargaining power within the NGO coalition. This was the third reason that USFT served as an excellent research subject. USFT members afforded me perspectives from both inside and outside the organizational structure of the boycott. This fact, was not lost on NGO coalition members, who tended to see activists in contradictory ways as the all important “base” of the Fair Trade movement, as well as resistance for expanding the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee. USFT leaders and activists were the only group that actually represented (i.e. stood in for) the base of activists advancing the Fair Trade movement in the United States. For NGOs and Fair Trade retailers who were financially tied to expanding the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee, that base could be both revered and feared. As Joe explained to me, USFT “was the conscience” of the movement as Fair Trade certification expanded into the mainstream market. Joe described the the insider/outsider status of USFT activists in the following way.

I’m biased, but I believe we are the most powerful and the most organized sector of the Fair Trade movement in the United States. But not everyone sees us that way. We are sort of like the kids in the movement. We can be unpredictable. At times we are the poster children for Fair Trade. At other times, we are seen as a threat. The NGOs (Oxfam, Global Exchange, Coop America, Lutheran World

Relief and Catholic Relief Services) are our allies and they support us financially and spiritually. But they have giant budgets. TransFair USA is industry, as far as I'm concerned. Their only goal is really to sell the product. What USFT does is different. We are uniquely positioned to link different groups, especially through the (annual conference we host). We can bring the NGOs together and the mission-driven coffee roasters. We use a broader language of Fair Trade than the NGOs. We don't believe Fair Trade ideology is only manifest in the certifying apparatus. We are incorporating the language of labor justice, domestic worker spaces, solidarity across borders, and alliances with a range of movements here in the United States and abroad. USFT wants to listen to producer communities. We want to take our policy directions from producer communities. We can afford to be a bit more radical. Unlike the other stakeholders in the Fair Trade movement we don't have the financial risks. (Joe - April 13, 2005)

Through my research with USFT, I observed first hand how the Fair Trade coffee boycott blurred the boundary between market and movement, putting activists in a complicated relationship with the business interests that they sought to transform. As the Fair Trade coffee boycott became increasingly successful in the retail mainstream, activists affiliated with USFT also began to distance themselves from the boycott campaign and contest the partnerships formed with large commercial retailers who held the promise of increasing the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee. While increasing the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee had been one of the primary objectives of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, activists associated with USFT came to see boycotting, with its primary focus on selling Fair Trade Certified coffee, as contradicting their efforts to build a broader movement for social justice. In response to this tension USFT sought to redefine itself by looking beyond the boycott to other forms of action such as direct solidarity relationships, other issue-based campaigns and other domestic social movements for economic justice.

III. The Movement Imperative

A. Fair Trade Activism?

At the beginning of my project in the United States, I often wondered what constituted Fair Trade activism and indeed whether a boycott could be accurately described as a social movement tactic given its emphasis on product promotion and marketing. To explore these questions, I began my research by interviewing a group carrying out boycott campaigns. In February 2005, I conducted semi-structured interviews with a random sample of 15 percent (n=55) of the 350 attendees at the Empowering Alternatives Convergence hosted by USFT in Chicago. Given that the Empowering Alternatives Convergence in 2005 was touted as the largest activist conference for Fair Trade in the United States, I sought to understand what the attendees understood as “Fair Trade activism” and how they identified with Fair Trade activism. I sampled my informants over three days based on their representation within regional breakout sessions including the Northeast (n=14), Mid-Atlantic (n=4), Southeast (n=13), Midwest (n=5), Southwest (n=3), West (n=10), Northwest (n=4), and Outside of U.S. (n=3).

The first question I asked of each of my informants at the Empowering Alternatives Conference was “how they engaged in the Fair Trade movement.” They described their collective and individual actions in the Fair Trade coffee boycott as working one-on-one with consumers, institutional purchasing agents, and retailers to educate, promote, garner support, raise awareness, change behaviors, and increase availability of Fair Trade Certified products. One informant, Rory, summed up his

engagement in the following way: “We have three different goals – changing personal habits, educating consumers, and pushing for availability.” (Rory - 2.09.05) These three goals were echoed throughout my research with activists associated USFT.

The first goal, changing personal habits, reflected what many scholars have described as ethical consumption. An extensive and growing literature on geographies of consumption has sought to theorize ethical consumer behavior in the marketplace (Barnett et al., 2005; Clarke et al., 2009). The second goal of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, educating consumers can be conceptualized as a tactics of personal transformation that seeks to influence the hearts and minds of society at large (Turner and Killian, 1987). The third goal, increasing availability, could be conceptualized as tactics of societal manipulation to change social institutions such as the purchasing policies and sales practices of coffee retailers (Turner and Killian, 1987). Unlike changing personal habits (i.e. consumer behavior), the process of educating consumers and pushing for product availability is closely aligned with social movement tactics that seek to create change at the societal and institutional level; change rooted in sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee.

The second question I asked in each of my interviews was whether my informants identified as activists. Given the emphasis placed on ethical consumerism in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, my concern with this question was to see if my informants considered “what they did” in the campaign as different from consumerism. Eighty-three percent of those I surveyed at the Empowering Alternatives Convergence described their participation in the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a form of activism and described

themselves as activists. For instance, in an interview I conducted with Sarah, a 20 year old student and an at-large member of the coordinating committee of USFT, she took great pains to distinguish between consumers and activists explaining that Fair Trade activism is not a form of consumerism but an expression of work-in-solidarity. She emphasized time and work as distinguishing characteristics of Fair Trade campaigning. Indeed as she explained, promoting Fair Trade Certified products on her campus and in her community was “hard work,” and she had to find time to do it. Unlike the consumers at the cafeteria who grabbed a cup of coffee on their way to class, her actions as a Fair Trade activist went far beyond such mundane everyday activities. Distancing herself from more convenient consumerist behavior she explained, “Look, I don’t drink coffee, I don’t like the smell of it, or the taste of it. But I talk about it a lot.” She then went on to describe her take on Fair Trade activism.

You know, it would seem like on the surface that I am totally unaffected by coffee. But I see myself as a member of a global community. I am working in solidarity with coffee farmers who have demanded another system. I am working with people from other schools, linking up with other people for support. Fair Trade activism is about solidarity. (Sarah - February 9, 2006)

When I pursued the question further with Sarah, she explained the Fair Trade coffee boycott provided a means for reaching out to people in her community and raising consumer awareness of their impact on global society and the environment. She went on,

I see promoting Fair Trade products as being a catalyst for some greater sort of change because the way Northern consumers interact with the world is unsustainable. Through Fair Trade you can get people to answer the question, ‘What is my impact? Where does my food come from?’ So I guess it was the education aspect that attracted me to Fair Trade. (Sarah - February 9, 2006)

What I found particularly compelling about Sarah's explanation was that she consistently referenced "the work" of Fair Trade activism while also highlighting the nature of that work as motivated by, and embedded in, a sense of solidarity. In another interview I conducted, Shawn a graduating senior at Michigan State University, echoed Sarah's description of Fair Trade activism as work. After describing the campaign he ran to bring 100% Fair Trade coffee onto his campus, Shawn stated,

...for me its all about joining hands with farmers. I'm doing marketing for them. I'll do it alone if I have to. I grew up on a farm and I know how hard it is. The farmers who are involved in Fair Trade don't have a voice. I try to make my voice their voice. (Shawn - March 22, 2006)

In our interview, Shawn described himself as working on behalf of farmers. Through several trips to Rwanda and his work with USFT to bring farmer representatives to the United States on speaking tours, Shawn felt that the best way he could work-in-solidarity was marketing coffee for farmers from the global South who could not market it for themselves. Emphasizing voluntary work to represent, stand in for, the voice of farmers, Shawn insisted that marketing coffee for disadvantaged farmers was a form of activism.

Another distinguishing characteristic between what my informants described as activism and what they described as consumerism was time. When asked how much time they devoted to Fair Trade activism my informants claimed that they spent, on average, 5.5 hours a week on boycott organizing and usually carried out campaigns over a 4-6 month period. Sixteen percent of those interviewed claimed that during the height of a campaign they might spend more than 10-15 hours a week on organizing above and beyond the time spent in their jobs, school work or other commitments. Members of the USFT coordinating committee who later served as key informants for my study claimed

that they spent upwards of 15-20 hours a week organizing for Fair Trade coffee boycott campaigns on the local and national scale.

Most activists I interviewed had only recently learned about Fair Trade Certified coffee. Eighty-six percent of my informants had heard about and gotten involved in the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the past 3 years (no earlier than 2002) and roughly 40 percent of my informants had learned about Fair Trade Certified coffee within the past 12 months. Activists learned about the Fair Trade coffee boycott in four principle ways: (1) through a friend involved in the movement, (2) through a local coffee retailer that sold Fair Trade Certified coffee, (3) through a local boycott campaign that took place at their university, (4) through an NGO such as Oxfam America, Global Exchange, Coop America, Catholic Relief Services, and or Lutheran World Relief.

Fair Trade activists I interviewed were involved in more than just Fair Trade. The Fair Trade coffee boycott ran parallel to other issue-based campaigns on their university campuses or in their communities. While Fair Trade activists I interviewed described themselves as committed to Fair Trade boycotting, it was also clear that they also relied upon the support of other activist communities and that they reciprocated by participating in other allied campaigns. More than half of those who identified as Fair Trade activists in the survey were also involved in other campaigns including anti-war, anti-genocide, anti-sweatshop, church missions, local food, farm worker solidarity, LGBTQ rights, sensible drug policy, living wage, climate change, and more. Nine percent of my informants qualified their identification as “Fair Trade activists” by saying that they would only identify with Fair Trade activism if this designation included activism against

sweatshops, in solidarity with farm workers or more broadly in terms of challenging labor or trade injustices. This was a point driven home over the next year among the coordinating committee of USFT as they sought to define Fair Trade activism more broadly to include trade justice, farm workers rights, local food, land reform and even anti-oppression work. The Fair Trade coffee boycott was a particular tactic within a universe of potential ways to get involved in social movement organizing and to express solidarity. Haley a USFT coordinating committee member explained, “Fair Trade really isn't my biggest interest, it's just something that I've been committed to for the past three years.”

Not all of the informants I interviewed at the Empowering Alternatives Convergence in 2005 described themselves as Fair Trade activists, however. All of the informants that I interviewed did participate in the Fair Trade coffee boycott by fostering local campaigns, but three activists disputed that their actions in those campaigns were actually activist-oriented or effective. After running campaigns, three of the informants claimed that the boycott approach tended to compromise ideological positions to attract a broad coalition, thereby confusing the principles and objectives in the campaigns. Two of the informants who described themselves as labor organizers criticized the idea that the boycott was effective because they claimed that it “mimicked marketing,” showed “no signs of direct solidarity work with disadvantaged groups,” and entered into negotiation with notorious commercial retailers that were the sworn enemies of organized labor. Moreover, as they described it, the activists involved in the Fair Trade coffee boycott might not share the objectives of organized labor when it came to such issues as

challenging free trade agreements, fighting for labor rights domestically, or holding large commercial retailers accountable for non-Fair Trade products. The three labor activists' comments belied their own distaste for the tactical approach of the Fair Trade boycott and reflected disdain toward promoting products and consuming products as a form of political expression or social movement organizing. As I later learned, this became a central issue for debate among the USFT coordinating committee.

Jen, a member of the USFT coordinating committee captured the perspectives of dissonant voices within USFT in the following way.

Right now, this is a middle class white movement with white middle class concerns. If we want to be more inclusive then we need to reach out. There is an ignorance associated with privilege. You know, people create movements in their own image. The idea of "choosing products" as a means for social change is based on a privileged understanding of morals. Right now Fair Trade depends on having money. So, you aren't going to build an inclusive movement until people who aren't white and middle class are involved as full partners. Just think about it. What if someone says, "I'd love to support Fair Trade but the coffee is too expensive?" When you are privileged you don't notice how you think. Honestly, I don't want to put down my people but, specialty coffees aren't too big in Latino and Black communities. I didn't even know about "specialty coffee" until I got involved with Fair Trade. Its not like poor people don't want to help and participate. Its just that there is this moral distance that's been created in the Fair Trade movement. Who is thinking, 'We need to help poor farmers far away,' when there are problems we are facing right here? Where are the linkages between Fair Trade and labor rights here in the United States? (Jen - February 10, 2006)

Jen's description of some of the problems she perceived with the Fair Trade coffee boycott highlighted the race and class bias that emerges in defining what kinds of causes are pursued in social movements, what are considered morally appropriate issues and tactics, and which constituencies get involved in them. People who engaged in the Fair Trade coffee boycott - either as consumers or activists - generally had time, disposable

income, knowledge of specialty coffee, interest in problems “far away” as much or more than “at home,” and an education in a “moral system” that encouraged them to “choose” between products as a way of creating change. Indeed, her argument that the moral system of activists was taught, and that the tactical approach may not appeal to wider constituencies raised a number of questions about the appeal of the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a social movement tactic. What made boycotting as a social movement tactic so appealing? Given the range of opportunities to get involved in different activists campaigns, how did certain activists come to choose the Fair Trade coffee boycott?

B. Activist Rationales: Motivational Frames and Tactical Resonance

To be effective, transnational campaigns rely on the sympathies, interest and action of people in the global North to create social change for people in the global South. Therefore campaign brokers must find ways of appealing to the moral compass of those constituencies. Geographer, Susanne Friedberg, argues, “even the most internationalist NGOs, as political, fund-raising actors, cannot afford to ignore the localized concerns and sympathies of their domestic constituencies...NGOs' ethics of universal justice, once codified and implemented, have tended to reflect these constituencies rather less than universal moral priorities” (Friedberg, 2004: 528). The disjuncture, both socially and spatially, of constituencies involved in transnational campaigns produces uneven moral and ethical commitments to the cause. In reference to her research on the Ethical Trade Initiative in British supermarket chains, Friedberg wrote:

because the NGOs and the supermarkets market their brand images primarily to a domestic public, their standards of ethical working conditions, although based on internationally recognized human-rights conventions, have so far been implemented in accordance with that public's presumed moral codes, which are more openly partial. As Smith puts it, such codes are made up of "the ethics people actually discuss and practice" (1998; 17). They arise in particular historical and geographic circumstances, meaning not only in particular places but also in relationships with other peoples, both past (such as colonialism) and present. These relationships condition how those peoples "are understood, represented, and regarded as possible subjects of moral responsibility" (1998:17). (Freidberg, 2004: 522)

In this section, I explore the relationship between the kinds of motivational frames and tactical resonances that are critical to the appeal of the Fair Trade coffee boycott within what Friedberg calls "the public's presumed moral codes." I attempt to shift the conversation about motivations for Fair Trade activism from one focused solely on framing processes - how people are called upon to extend their world of concern to include the livelihood struggles of poor farmers and workers - to one centered on the appeal of particular tactical repertoires - the recipes through which people act on their feelings of responsibility within their domestic context.

My research reveals that the Fair Trade coffee boycott motivated activist participation in two key ways: (1) through the articulation of motivational frames that won activist sympathy and (2) through morally acceptable strategies and tactics that set those sympathies into a field of action. The second of these findings, what I call tactical resonance, makes a significant contribution to existing research on the Fair Trade coffee boycott because it demonstrates that, even when activists interpreted the motivational frames of the Fair Trade boycott differently, or when their ideological views differed, the tactical approach of the Fair Trade boycott continued to appeal to large numbers of

people. In other words, many activists took part in the Fair Trade coffee boycott due to the appeal of the tactics themselves. This finding led me to analyze more closely, the tactical approach taken in the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States.

1. Motivational Frames

Campaign brokers garnered support for the boycott through motivational frames that were flexible enough to resonate with a spectrum of ideologically positioned actors (Snow and Benson, 1988). Global Exchange, Oxfam America and TransFair USA, for instance, provide examples of three such divergent motivational frames.

Anti-Sweatshop Coffee. In their activist guide, Global Exchange hailed potential activists with the slogan: “Now you have a choice: Sweatshop coffee or Fair Trade.” Using language that was intended to create alignment between the Fair Trade coffee boycott and the anti-sweatshop movement, Global Exchange described the purpose of the campaign in terms of creating an alternative to “sweatshops in the field.” Drawing an implicit link between the Fair Trade boycott and previous cycles of labor rights protests in which Global Exchange was engaged throughout the 1990s (Nike, Starbucks, Folgers), the action guide explained that “Sweatshops exist in the fields as well as the factory. Don’t you deserve a Fair Trade alternative?” According to Global Exchange, promoting Fair Trade Certified coffee ensured that consumers could purchase coffee that was “sweat-free.” In this way, the Fair Trade coffee boycott called for consumers to support a market alternative to exploitative labor conditions. Although Fair Trade Certified coffee does not change the existing conditions for plantation workers, Global Exchange

leveraged the pre-existing image of the sweatshop and sympathies with exploited workers to claim that Fair Trade Certified coffee created an alternative to such exploitation.¹⁰

Global Exchange's message to potential activists was a clear one, the Fair Trade coffee boycott was designed to create a choice between supporting sweatshops in the coffee fields, or rewarding peasant farmers with fair prices.

Lifeline Coffee. Oxfam America described its purpose in supporting the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a response to the devastating impact of the coffee crisis. Leveraging the image of a lifeline or safety-net, the opening lines of the Oxfam action guide stated, "The time is now. Fair Trade is literally a lifeline for thousands of farmers during the coffee crisis, and campus activists play a critical role in building the Fair Trade movement." In this way, Oxfam America called for consumers to support a market alternative for small-scale farmers. Drawing upon Oxfam's previous development work as both a humanitarian organization and a trade-not-aid supporter for 20 years, the agency's action guide called on activists to support direct trade with the 25 million small-scale farming families who were devastated by the drop in coffee prices starting in 2000. For Oxfam America, the graphic image invoked was the sharp decline in coffee prices and the steady floor price provided by Fair Trade. Expanding the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee through the boycott was a means of propagating a model of development and reaching more small-scale farmers with direct access to coffee markets.

Fair Trade Quality Coffee. TransFair USA moved away from an explicit connection between Fair Trade's global justice and/or rural development logics and

¹⁰ In other words, the sweatshop (and the exploited coffee worker) supposedly serve as a "foil" to the alterity of the Fair Trade Certified coffee. In practice, however the Fair Trade coffee boycott only indirectly challenges the plantation model consistently identified with labor exploitation, if at all.

presented activists with a different approach for persuading consumers and retailers to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee. Challenging the image that Fair Trade was merely a “charity case,” TransFair USA used its marketing materials to encourage activists to make the “quality case”, especially when reaching out to consumers and retail decision-makers. In a tag line that read “Quality Coffee for You and Quality of Life for Farmers, Now That’s a Fair Trade,” TransFair USA emphasized the notion that within Fair Trade there was a mutual exchange of qualities between consumers and producers. In this way, TransFair USA called on consumers to enjoy a quality cup of coffee while ensuring improvements in peasant farmers’ quality of life. TransFair USA’s approach was product-centered and sought to garner the sympathies of consumers and activists who might not find the Global Exchange or the Oxfam America frames appealing. Indeed, their approach had a leveling effect. Whereas Global Exchange and Oxfam America called consumers to make changes in consumer behavior for ethical or political rationales, TransFair USA suggested that pleasure need not be sacrificed for ethical or political change.

What I detected in carrying out and analyzing the interviews with activists at the Empowering Alternatives Convergence was that, while aligned with activist perceptions of Fair Trade, these three frames presented by Global Exchange, Oxfam America and TransFair USA did not resonate as expected. What I found to resonate more strongly with activists was the desire to make global connections, defetishize commodities and humanize trade. Michael Goodman in his pioneering work to ‘read’ the discursive field of Fair Trade coffee has claimed that the textualization, narrativization, and

theatricalization of “poor farming communities” by both label texts and campaign discourses, brought “distant strangers” into the “world of concern (and pocketbooks) of Northern consumers” so that they could “‘see,’ ‘experience’ and ‘act’ on the livelihood struggles of coffee producers in Southern Mexico, Nicaragua and Tanzania” (Goodman, 2004: 893, 903).

Indeed, the activists I encountered in my own research read the discursive field of Fair Trade Certified coffee in precisely the way that Goodman suggests. Most sought to make the kind of global connections narrativized through Fair Trade label text and campaign materials. Many activists were motivated by the notion of connectivity between their actions and the improvement of farmer’s lives. As an example, nine percent of my informants identified with what social movement theorists call a broader “motivational frame.” Lenning a student from University of California Santa Barbara illustrated her enthusiasm with the Fair Trade coffee boycott saying, “What I’m really inspired about is creating local, direct, personal relationships and connections...” Emel, a student from University of California Santa Cruz reiterated a similar sentiment adding,

As I interpret Fair Trade, it is about having integrity and building really direct personal relationships with producers and defetishizing a commodity through interpersonal relationships. Once we realize where our commodities are coming from we are more emotionally engaged and personally involved with seeing the end results of those interactions being a lot more fair, and I think that has to happen through deepening relationships.

Reinforcing this notion of creating connections and relationships, according to several other informants, Fair Trade:

...gets people connected, especially the grower and the consumer.
...makes trade more personal.
...reduces anonymity.

- ...provides a human face to economic interactions.
- ...says we are on different ends of the supply chain but we have equal value.
- ...is a mutual exchange where we recognize human dignity.

Although these definitions of Fair Trade may not necessarily offer conclusive evidence of what motivates the activists to participate in the coffee boycott, the language used in these interviews demonstrates a great deal of continuity in how Fair Trade is interpreted and reiterated by activists involved in the boycott.

Rather than focusing on one exclusive frame for Fair Trade, according to my informants, one of the most important motivations for taking part in the Fair Trade coffee boycott was the inclusiveness of different moral and political perspectives under the bridging frame of Fair Trade. Fair Trade frames resonated because they brought together diverse groups such as labor rights organizers, religious groups, charitable volunteers, entrepreneurs, etc. “I think that we can all bring to the table our different interests,” said one informant. Describing the flexibility and inclusiveness of the Fair Trade ideals, another claimed that “what I like is that all the things I care about are all in there under the same umbrella.” These findings suggest that the motivational frames of Fair Trade were flexible enough to resonate with a spectrum of ideologically positioned actors who identified with the Fair Trade coffee boycott’s objectives. Several informants specifically described that they were motivated by the goal of alleviating poverty in the third world; two informants explained that Fair Trade aided them to live a Christian life; others suggested that Fair Trade posed a challenge to corporate control of the global economy; three described Fair Trade as fostering a sense of solidarity with farmers in coffee producing communities; one described Fair Trade as a means for organizing students on

their campus; and one described their participation in Fair Trade coffee boycott in more pragmatic terms as a means for completing a service-learning requirement at their university.

As this range of concerns suggests, the motivations of activists varied considerably. Fair Trade ideals were ideologically inclusive and leveraged flexible frames to garner interest and motivate participation. Theresa, a graduating senior at Brown University, said

I guess the most important thing, the thing that touches me most about Fair Trade is that it is something that can connect us in our daily lives to the global community. In this country when we're constantly ignoring or just not wanting to hear about the rest of the world, Fair Trade provides us a way to connect. And it is very practical, very understandable to people, even my 92 year old Nanna. It is about how our lives are all connected, even to people so far away, and that it is our global responsibility to care about everyone.

As illustrated by the notion that Fair Trade is “very understandable to people” like Theresa and her 92 year old grandmother, the motivational frames of Fair Trade engendered sympathy and interest among a range of political subjects. For instance, whereas Emel described herself as an anti-capitalist agro-food activist, Lenning claimed that she was pro-capitalist and believed that free trade benefited developing countries. The Fair Trade discourse tapped into resonated with, or appealed to, many different people regardless of their political commitments. As Jonathan, a Fair Trade activist and graduate from NYU, explained in an interview, “Fair Trade doesn't really question the basic principles of supply and demand, it just humanizes supply and demand. That appeals to a lot of people.”

2. Tactical Resonance

Tactics are rarely, if ever, neutral means about which protestors do not care. Tactics represent important routines, emotionally and morally salient in these peoples lives. Just as their ideologies do, their activities express protestors' political identities and moral visions. (Jasper, 1997: 237)

While not all activists were “touched” in by the same feelings of responsibility, sympathy or injustice, they all engaged with the boycott through a similar tactical approach. Even when the ethical motivations for participating in the boycott campaigns diverged the model of action itself, the “recipe” (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) for change also turned activists on to the boycott campaign. As two informants explained, Fair Trade was a “practical” and “concrete” way for people in the United States to challenge the abstract processes of economic globalization. Many informants saw the strategy of increasing sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee as a tangible and straightforward way to improve the lives of farmers. Mark, a student at University of Massachusetts and a regional coordinator for USFT explained that Fair Trade was unique precisely because it “promotes an alternative.” In our interview he said, “What I like about Fair Trade is that it isn’t just tearing something down but building something up. We are building a different kind of market.”

My research with activists revealed that the Fair Trade coffee boycott was successful in the United States precisely because it supplied the “ethical maxims” that resonated with activists and it provided a recipe for action that resonated with activists as well. Highlighting the importance of both motivation frames and appropriate tactics within the formation of transnational movements, Keck and Sikkink claim that an action that calls on a humanitarian sensibility, for instance,

requires not only the ethical maxims that make helping distant strangers the right thing to do but also a technique or recipe for intervening - a specific sequence of steps that we know we can take to alter the course of events, and which must be sufficiently routine to use easily. (1998: 43)

Reinforcing Keck and Sikkink's argument, Lyle Munro (2005) citing Charles Tilly claims that a social movement is "what it does as much as why it does it." By this measure, social movements not only cohere around what morally motivates activists to act collectively - for instance labor abuses, environmental degradation, or humanitarian disasters in spaces of commodity production - but the means by which they can and do act collectively - for instance boycotting, holding rallies, planting bombs or letter writing. While motivational frames such as "making global connections" or "humanizing trade" may resonate with potential movement actors, there is no certainty that they will act unless there are incentives and opportunities to do so. Social movements must create a means for activists to get involved in ways that suit their values.

Social movement theorists associated with the cultural and emotional turn in the field argue that the formation and adoption of particular tactics can reflect the class-based, gendered, cultural and biographical experiences of the actors who engage in collective action (Auyero, 2003; Jasper, 1997). Familiarity and comfort with a "menu of action" is very crucial to ensuring action in any given social movement (Taylor and Van Dyke, 2007: 271). As Jasper writes, "protesters must feel that the activity is good or tasteful as well as efficacious" (1997: 237). Moreover, activists may choose a particular tactic because that is "what they are good at," while in other cases, it may be what they find "pleasurable" or what will "help reinforce affective ties among protestors" (Jasper, 1997: 237). In short,

(c)ollective actors choose among repertoires of collective action...not simply on the basis of strategic decision-making. Rather activists chose options that conform to their ideological visions, are congruent with their collective identities, and embody the cultural schemas that provide meanings, motives and templates for action. (Taylor and Van Dyke, 2007: 277)

The kinds of tactics formulated or adopted by social movement actors can offer insights into the social movement experience of activists, their ideological tendencies, and the level of risk they are willing to take on in asserting a given claim.

Twenty-percent of my informants, when asked to explain why they got involved in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, described boycotting tactics as “a positive step.” I found this particular language significant since it was used repeatedly throughout the interviews and represented an almost unconscious reaction from my informants. Below, I provide an analysis of three different rationales for why the boycott was considered “positive.”

Lowering Barriers to Participation. Building on the idea of a “positive step,” activists explained that the Fair Trade coffee boycott did not require significant experience with social movement organizing and therefore, as one informant noted “lots of people could get involved.” “No matter who you are you can participate. You can get involved and affect global change,” said a student from Boston University. This was a mantra I heard over and over in the course of two years of research. Because the Fair Trade coffee boycott was not considered a long-term commitment, and the tactics were simple, activists could run their campaign and move on. It was a good first step for activists with little organizing experience. Keith, an activist from University of Alaska, explained that “the fair trade coffee movement is a wedge issue to larger things...its just a starting point.” In this way, activists believed the Fair Trade coffee boycott could lead

other people in their communities to start on a pathway of social activism that would lead them to other causes. The Fair Trade coffee boycott could, therefore, be considered a place where, Matt, a USFT coordinating committee member put it, “you can get your feet wet” before moving on to other organizing efforts.

A major reason why Fair Trade coffee boycotts had such low entry barriers was that it called upon activists to use their existing knowledge of marketing and consumerism to create social change. As consumers themselves, activists could understand how to mobilize others to demand Fair Trade Certified coffee and also represented an important audience for their intended targets, coffee retailers. As members of a demographic that was itself targeted by marketing campaigns, the activists I interviewed possessed a keen awareness of the rules of the marketing game and how to play it. The idea of using skills as marketers and consumers resonated with a broad base of young people who had little prior experience with social protest, but nevertheless wanted to ‘do good’ and to ‘take steps’ to ‘promote positive change.’ Fair Trade coffee boycotts made sense and they could generate results within a short time frame. On a university campus, activists might be able to get a purchasing agent or food service provider to switch brands of coffee over the course of just one academic term.

Not Radical. Another common response in the interviews as to why Fair Trade was a positive step, was precisely that the strategy of increasing sales and consumption of Fair Trade Certified coffee, did not require contentious tactics to achieve its goals. Respondents described the boycott campaigns as “not radical” and instead as “a positive way of creating social change.” Two of my informants who described themselves as

conservative, actually made a point to disavow the word activist when being interviewed, claiming that the term “activism” made them uncomfortable and represented a form of politicization they opposed. The word activist, as they saw it, implied a kind of radical behavior and contentious activity that they did not identify with Fair Trade. They did not like the tone of activist groups who employed more aggressive protest tactics. Fair Trade was much more positive, they explained. “It doesn’t force people to do something, but it makes them aware that there are problems and there are alternatives,” said one informant from University of Washington. As Deborah James, Director of Fair Trade for Global Exchange described in an interview with the Seattle Times, “A lot of (students) turn to the fair-trade coffee thing as something concrete that they can do that's not just anti-corporate, but it's also pro, a positive step that they can do (...) It's pro-fair-trade — it's not just beating up on somebody” (Batsell, 2002).

Joe, an activist at Northwestern University claimed that even though she believed Fair Trade should lead to more radical changes in the structure of the coffee trade, she felt that the non-radical tactics of the campaign helped create broader coalitions.

Activists tend to skew to the Left and don’t leverage faith-based groups or even fraternities and sororities. They rule them out because there is an assumption that they are conservative. But most of the students at a university are pretty conservative. Fair Trade appeals, even to conservative students.

As Woodrow, a regional coordinator of USFT described with regards to the positivity associated with Fair Trade activism, “I do not think everyone would define it even as activism, or describe themselves as being an activist as a title, but just that they see their actions are being responsible and contributing to a positive cause.” The notion that Fair Trade posed non-radical tactics, or set a non-radical tone raised significant questions with

regards to the way the boycott engaged in both movement building and product marketing. By presenting itself as non-radical, Fair Trade, opened doors for wider recruitment, but it also opened other doors for cooptation and dilution. In this vein Jaffee (2007: 31) claimed that

...the momentum in the fair trade movement (especially in the United States) seems to be away from even moderate critiques of market capitalism. In the effort to reach and enlist consumers, a deradicalization of at least the public face of fair trade...has taken place. For some consumers too, fair trade's appeal may lie in its embrace of relatively straightforward, non-confrontational tactics (unlike product boycotts or anti-sweatshop campaigns) - which may not necessarily provide a bridge to the deeper 'fair trade not free trade' demands of corporate critics.

My research demonstrates that Jaffee's concerns are indeed well founded. Yet, as the next section illustrates, the Fair Trade coffee boycott resonated tactically because activists 'felt' empowered through their participation. For many, the bridge to deeper social and political change was not an abiding concern. Rather, personal growth and new experiences were also a vital rationale for participation.

Personal Empowerment. Twenty-six percent of my informants described Fair Trade as appealing because the boycott provided them an outlet to help others while also empowering themselves in the process. Although the motivational frame of Fair Trade was directed toward "helping distant others," activists commonly spoke about how the Fair Trade coffee boycott enabled them to "act ethically" within the United States. "It's a great way for people to feel they can do something without necessarily having to restructure their lives and change their career," said Puget Sound economics professor Matt Warning in an interview with the Seattle Times (Batsell, 2002). In one interview an activist said that Fair Trade provided them "a framework for living life, in my daily

decisions, and has empowered me to be mindful of my impact.” Another informant, highlighting the practical nature of Fair Trade activism, said “Fair Trade has enabled me to take what I am learning and to apply it.” In a like-minded response, an activist said that Fair Trade “helped me to learn about the global economic system.” In two other cases, activists remarked how Fair Trade helped them to live out their existing values. One activist explained that Fair Trade was a means for “living a Christian life in America.” The second claimed that the entrepreneurship and business skills associated with Fair Trade activism resonated with his own career goals and outlook on life.

The notion that the Fair Trade coffee boycott was positive because it empowered activists in the United States highlights was an issue commonly addressed in the literature on transnational campaigns. In their work on green and ethical consumption, Bryant and Goodman (2004) describe the scenario in terms of “opt-in opt-out” politics, where activists embrace and abandon causes with little effect on their own well-being. Since the constituencies that wage boycott campaigns in the global North are not the same as those who experience the injustice, the rationales for participation and levels of commitment to the cause are often shaped by people who do not have an actual stake in the livelihood struggle the movement is trying to address (Brooks, 2007). The potential for success varies accordingly. Clearly, many of the statements by activists had very little to do with whether the Fair Trade coffee boycott even achieved its intended outcome for peasant coffee farmers in the global South or not.

Exploring activist perceptions of the tactical approach of the Fair Trade coffee boycott revealed that the Fair Trade coffee boycott appealed to activists because it was “a

positive step,” that lowered barriers to participation, empowered activists and was not radical. My findings from these interviews, however, still left unanswered questions about the tactical approach. Yes, the Fair Trade coffee boycott did appeal in various ways, but what was it about the tactical approach that made it have such low barriers to participation? Why did the boycott appear so positive to these activists? Why was it not seen as radical? Why did activists nonetheless feel that it was so empowering? What was it that activists were doing that could blur political boundaries in this way?

IV. The Fair Trade Coffee Boycott: A Tactical Approach

The most successful campaigns do two things simultaneously: build and demonstrate consumer demand for Fair Trade and help coffee buyers solve the practical problems that arise in meeting that demand.

Oxfam America, Fair Trade Resource and Action Guide, 2004, p.16

“Fair Trade,” according to the Oxfam America Resource and Action Guide, “achieves change not through boycotts or other forms of protest but by building respectful relationships among all players in the chain of production, distribution and consumption...” (2004: 16). Rather than using the power of coercion (i.e. through boycott), activists involved in the boycott were called upon to educate consumers and retailers through persuasive tactics. According to Turner and Killian persuasion, entails the use of “symbolic manipulation” to raise awareness about an issue and to appeal to the campaign target to change their behavior (1987). Nearly all social movements adopt some form of persuasive technique to increase awareness and appeal for change.

What makes Fair Trade boycotting unique among social movements is that “the ultimate goal was to sell as much Fair Trade Certified coffee as possible” (Oxfam

America, 2004). Emphasizing that all persuasive efforts must result in increased sales, in Oxfam America's Resource and Action Guide states: "While educating consumers is important, it doesn't help farmers unless it translates into sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee" (2004: 16). Increasing the sale of Fair Trade Certified coffee was a tangible marker of progress in the movement. Activists with no experience in social movement organizing could understand the basic logic of this approach. As sales increased, the movement advanced toward its objective. A campaign advisor from Oxfam America that I interviewed in 2006 explained that, "even though we hope activists would do more to organize for social justice, what makes Fair Trade activism different and important is selling the product."

A. Persuasion vs. Coercion

I think for this day and age the most productive and effective way to challenge a company is to hold up a stick of a boycott if necessary, but also to have those carrots and be able to cooperate with companies that want to do the right thing and want to address this growing demand (for Fair Trade Certified coffee).

Jonathan, Fair Trade activist, February 16, 2005

Since the "ultimate goal" was to sell coffee, the persuasive approach employed in the Fair Trade coffee boycott differed greatly from coercive approaches employed in other boycotts and in previous cycles of protest in the coffee sector (i.e. the Roast Starbucks Campaign). The Fair Trade coffee boycott cultivated an image of encouraging voluntary compliance with consumer demand for Fair Trade Certified coffee. Unlike

coercive tactics such as boycotts that posed the threat of harm, buying Fair Trade Certified coffee was presented as a win-win for consumers and retailers.¹¹

The difference between persuasive and coercive tactics in the Fair Trade coffee boycott expresses itself therefore in what Turner and Killian call positive and negative bargaining (1987: 298). In positive bargaining, or persuasion, the outcome is that “each party is identifiably better off than it would have been if the bargaining relationship had not commenced” (1987: 299). In negative bargaining, or coercion, the target party’s “best hope is that it will be no more worse off had the coercive relationship never commenced” (1987: 299). While persuasion assumes the target of a campaign is disposed to act on behalf of the movement’s goals and can provide a reward for being persuaded, coercion “offers nothing that will improve the target group’s position but (rather) threatens to worsen their condition unless compliance is granted” (1987: 299).

By emphasizing product marketing, the Fair Trade coffee boycott ushered in a new non-coercive tactical framework for social movement organizing. As the interviews above illustrated, the positive bargaining associated with boycotting appealed to activists. The boycott enabled activists to take steps to win the hearts and minds of consumers and retailers through the power of persuasion. Though their efforts may have been considered “non-confrontational” (Jaffee, 2007: 31) or “easy activism” the activists I interviewed found pleasure in the fact that they had learned the rules of persuasive marketing and could use it effectively to encourage retailers to change the way they do

¹¹ According to Turner and Killian, coercion is “punishment or the credible threat of punishment in the case that the target group does not support the movement’s goals” (1987: 298). The performance of actual harm, for instance through a boycott that reduced the retail profits of a company, demonstrates that “the movement truly can or will inflict harm” and illustrates “how much harm is possible” (1987: 299).

business. The tone of the campaign was especially critical. "Most campuses are won with more diplomacy than pressure," said Tony LoPresti in an interview with Fresh Cup Magazine. Coercive campaigns tended to turn off otherwise potentially sympathetic retailer decision-makers. "Very often it turns against the students." LoPresti provides a word of advice. "You walk into the office and drag your sledgehammer, don't walk into the office with your sledgehammer held high." At the University of New Mexico, for instance, an activist I interviewed described how they used what they called an "Anti-Starbucks pitch," but the university purchasing agent was locked into a long-term contract with a food service provider that sold Starbucks Coffee, was happy with the service, and showed no signs of willingness to change suppliers. "The buyer we met with just stopped us in our tracks. We got canned." (Melissa - February 16, 2005)

B. Persuading Consumers and Retailers

Popular tactics used to publicize Fair Trade Certified coffee on college campuses and to persuade consumers were teach-ins, op-ed articles, informational tabling, coffee tastings and the coordination of farmer testimonies facilitated through Fair Trade producer tours hosted by campaign brokers such as Oxfam America. Persuasive tactics entailed significant emphasis on selling the benefits of Fair Trade Certified coffee to consumers, appealing to their interests, and reassuring them about such issues as the integrity of the Fair Trade Certified label, the quality of the coffee, and, in certain cases, the ideological alignments of the movement. Persuading the public of the value of Fair Trade Certified coffee was described by my informants as the most enjoyable part of

boycotting. It was the opportunity to express one's commitment to the cause in a visible way and to explain why Fair Trade was so important that activists found so satisfying.

The effect of such persuasive efforts was to reach large populations of future Fair Trade consumers. As a USFT vision statement and growth strategy document explains:

Education and outreach are at the heart of any campaign. In most cases 25% of a student body must explicitly endorse Fair Trade to win the support of administration. As such most campaigns will gather between 1500 and 2500 petition signatures over the course of a given year, which means that this number of students are being engaged in discussions about what Fair Trade is and the role they have in making it work. There have been 50 new campaigns started each of the last three years in the U.S., which means that students chalk up between 75,000 and 125,000 petition signatures a year. Penetrating campus culture further, the typical campaign will also publish one to two articles in a school newspaper, make several presentations in classes, host speaking events, hand out reams of materials, form coalitions with community organizations, push professors to incorporate Fair Trade into curriculum, raise awareness amongst local restaurants and cafes and their clientele, and perhaps reach out to high schools and faith-based institutions in the region. (USFT, 2008)

Learning how to persuade decision-makers was a critical juncture in most boycott campaigns since retailers were often reluctant to make the switch to Fair Trade Certified coffee solely out of sympathy for the cause. Therefore activists had to find ways of working with retailers to move them closer to carrying Fair Trade Certified coffee. In most cases, this included making a traditional sales pitch that sold them on coffee quality, cost, market demand, and the ease of working with new or existing suppliers. To introduce the subject, initially most activists tended to use presentations or reports that explained the benefits of Fair Trade Certified coffee to the retailer and to the farmers. If the retail decision-maker was supportive, the campaign could conclude with an agreement that they would begin carrying Fair Trade Certified coffee. In a meeting with

one buyer described by Moses, a student at Arizona, he said, “We scheduled a meeting with the Head of Dining Services. At first he was reluctant. But when we explained that there was a great deal of demand for Fair Trade Certified coffee on campus and that he could work with his existing supplier, he agreed right there on the spot.” Activists sought ways to move their targets toward carrying Fair Trade Certified coffee by playing upon the self-image of the buyer and the university. As Al, a coffee marketer from a regional coffee roaster, explained in an activist training hosted by USFT in 2005:

...it is necessary to think about the economic interests of your campaigns targets. For instance, in the case of universities, the concern of the administration is to provide their student body with quality services, to build a sense of community, and to cultivate a good image. So you need to think about pitching Fair Trade coffee as bettering the university. It’s about image. Don’t be raging about the lack of Fair Trade options, be strategic. Go in and tell the purchasing agent or an administrator that “we want to work with you on bringing Fair Trade to campus.” Tell your campaign targets like food service providers that you “want them to be heroes.” Many campaigns have succeeded right off the bat just by building rapport with the purchasing agent, administrators, or food service providers.
(Activist Training - USFT Regional Conference - April 2006)

The focus on persuasion proved a successful way to educate consumers and retailers. However, the persuasive approach did not evolve from the activists themselves, but rather, was called for by NGOs (and some retailers) who played a key role in facilitating the boycott. Activists, while often operating in isolation, did not spontaneously or independently produce the strategy and tactics of the Fair Trade coffee boycott - even when they maintained a great degree of autonomy to shape the tactical approach that they employed on their campuses. NGOs such as Oxfam America, Global Exchange and TransFair USA created a tactical toolbox and provided activists with step-by-step guides

to running a local campaign (Figure 3.1). Tony LoPresti one of the founding members of USFT stated in an interview with Fresh Cup Magazine in 2004: "We say that Fair Trade coffee is a 'cookie cutter' campaign - you just have a shape and you stamp it and you end up with the same thing wherever it happens." In a very real sense, the strategic approach was "pre-packaged" by campaign brokers. Even with no prior experience in social movement organizing, activists could rely upon the menu of action provided by NGOs such as Global Exchange and Oxfam America to get started.

C. Guided Action: Step-by-Step on College Campuses

Action guides created by Global Exchange, Fair Trade Resource Network, USFT and Oxfam America provide a comprehensive menu to assist activists in running their campaigns. The Oxfam America and Global Exchange action guides emphasize the individual preparation of the activist. Both guides encourage activists to "inform" themselves about why Fair Trade certification matters to farming communities so that they can translate the concerns of the movement to their peers (i.e. consumers) and to the intended targets (i.e. retailers and institutional purchasing agents). Moreover, both activist guides provide historical background on the coffee industry, descriptions of the difference between the conventional coffee trade (free trade) and the alternative coffee trade (fair trade), testimonials from farmers and cooperative officials, as well as descriptions of the benefits farmers derive from Fair Trade standards, certification and labeling. Activist guides also provide activists with rationales for participation and

identified key motivational frames which could be used to persuade consumers and retailers to join the boycott (see Motivational Frames above).

NGOs created step-by-step programs with different levels of commitment from which activists could choose. Taylor and Van Dyke (2007) argue that effective social movements must provide actors tactical choices that they feel comfortable making.

One of the major tasks of any movement is to create opportunities and incentives for participation...A movement's repertoire of tactics typically supplies a range of levels of participation varying from low risk and low effort actions such as donating money, writing a letter, signing a petition, participating in a peaceful demonstration, or constructing a quilt to..."high risk" and high effort actions such as bombing a building..." (Taylor and Van Dyke, 2007; 270)

As a case in point, the guides from Global Exchange and Oxfam America guides do not take this tenet of social movement organizing for granted. According to the guides activists could choose from three campaign strategies on college campuses: (1) Full Monty - converting campus to 100% Fair Trade Certified coffee; (2) Best-Seller - converting the best selling coffees to Fair Trade Certified label; (3) The Option - making Fair Trade Certified coffee one option on campus. Each of these strategies represents a different kind of impact and a different level of commitment from activists. These tactical choices give activists the ability to choose between levels of commitment to campaigning, but it also provide them with a range of ways to encourage decision-makers to make some commitment. As the Oxfam guide makes clear, the "most successful campaigns" were those that were effective in demonstrating demand and aid retailers to link with Fair Trade Certified coffee suppliers who could fulfill that demand. Success, therefore, depended not just upon raising awareness, but also upon helping retailers to find adequate vendors and marketing the coffee once they made the switch.

Full Monty. Converting all retail offerings on campus to 100% Fair Trade Certified coffee through a Full Monty campaign was considered the most radical objective of campus buycotts. It called on the most persuasive execution of the campaign and may even employ the threat of protest to succeed. In the Full Monty there was little compromise. This approach attempted to make Fair Trade the default on campus via a comprehensive purchasing restriction passed either through university or student government. Full Monty represents the highest level of activist engagement and the greatest demonstration of power in relation to decision-makers. Full Monty campaigns tend to have a deep level of commitment from a core group of activists (3-6) among whom Fair Trade ideals were vigorously upheld. A successful Full Monty campaigns also commonly require a broad coalition, including student government, student organizations, faculty and supportive administrators.

While Full Monty campaigns could present the most dramatic increase in Fair Trade Certified coffee sales and demonstrate the greatest commitment to principle on the part of activists, they have also had the least amount of success in meeting their objectives: only six campuses out of 350 with active campaigns claimed to have achieved 100% Fair Trade status in 2006 according USFT leadership. Beyond persuading university administrators and retailers of the value of Fair Trade, the greatest impediment to succeeding with Full Monty campaigns was the issue of suppliers. Could activists find suppliers that could fulfill a 100% Fair Trade coffee service contract with a large or even small university cafeteria, offices, and other retail establishments? Food service providers (FSPs) such as Aramark, Sodexo and Compass Group, which controlled an

estimated 70 percent of the university contracts in the United States, were not as keen on making the shift. USFT leadership described this barrier in their activist handbook.

In the US alone, (Aramark, Sodexo and Compass Group) distribute tens of millions of dollars worth of coffee each year. Yet Fair Trade coffee is still only marginally available through the official channels of these three food service providers. The student Fair Trade movement is contending with the one-blend bottle neck—when an FSP approved vendor offers only one Fair Trade blend. In order for Fair Trade to be successful on campuses, we need to have a complete line of options of each product available. Approved vendors are companies with which FSPs have official business relationships. Often, dining service managers will simply say, “If it’s not an approved vendor, I can’t do it.” That isn’t quite the case, because if it comes down to losing a contract, there’s always a loophole to get the consumer what they want. But, because dining service operators are under tremendous pressure from corporate management to buy only from approved vendor partners, FSPs act as gatekeepers. Insisting that FSPs work with vendors that offer a full line of Fair Trade would break down a major barrier for student activists across the nation. It is time for FSPs and students to take a bold step towards making Fair Trade the standard in campus communities. (USFT, 2008)

Carrying out a Full Monty campaign was not only about demonstrating demand and persuading consumers and retailers to buy into the Fair Trade ideal. Full Monty activists had to take on these large commercial buyers to make Fair Trade Certified coffee available to their clients (i.e. universities) and to offer enough product types so that there were a range of coffee blends, decaffeinated coffee and seasonal offers so that the Full Monty provided consumers a retail experience that was comparable with existing coffee lines. For activists, this meant that they not only needed to persuade a manager at a university dining hall, or a university procurement officer, but they may actually have to persuade Aramark to begin offering coffees from vendors licensed to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee by TransFair USA. In other words, activists had to convince Aramark to approve a vendor such as Equal Exchange, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Starbucks

or Pura Vida Coffee (vastly different coffee roasters with varying degrees of engagement in Fair Trade) to achieve their goal.

The Global Exchange guide calls on activists to “(s)urvey who supplies your campus or community (and) figure out who on your campus makes the coffee purchasing decisions.” This preparation is crucial since it could help the campaign navigate through what is commonly a bureaucratic labyrinth of decision-makers, food service providers and coffee vendors to find out who has the power to make the final decision in converting coffee to 100% Fair Trade. With this information, the core group could set out a plan of action based on whether the existing supplier can supply Fair Trade labeled coffee on campus (i.e. whether the existing supplier is licensed by TransFair USA) or if they will need to advocate for switching suppliers. The Global Exchange guide elaborates:

If your coffee supplier already offers Fair Trade, all you have to do is get them to offer it to your campus. If your supplier is NOT on the TransFair list of companies offering Fair Trade, you want to pressure them to start offering Fair Trade coffee. If they won't, then you would want your school to switch companies to one that does. The first option will be much more attractive to your administration, the second will require much more work. (Global Exchange, 2002)

As the guide describes, the research conducted by activists is crucial to determining how to proceed in a campaign. In defining the approach it is critical to understand where the coffee is being supplied, what retail locations are most heavily trafficked, and how feasible it is to make a switch, to a new supplier if necessary. This will help the campaign isolate the targets they intend to convert based on the impact and convenience in doing so. Indeed, as Global Exchange explains, it is “much more work” to try and change an existing supplier and less “attractive” to university officials concerned with

maintaining favorable relationships with suppliers. But campaigns that started out from the Full Monty approach, as the Oxfam guide attests, have been effective at times in changing the practices of existing suppliers. The example of the UCLA Full Monty campaign in 2002 is illustrative.

In 2002, UCLA's Environmental Coalition, with a core group of five activists, ran the first successful campaign that forced a major food service provider, Sara Lee - the university's existing supplier - to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee in high traffic retail locations on the main UCLA campus. The campaign originally targeted four retail locations under the same management (Oxfam, 2004: 21). Since the supplier to these retailers was Sara Lee, the result was an effort to get that company to meet student demands. Realizing that they could not force Sara Lee's hand without help, UCLA students worked with Villanova university students to demonstrate demand and raise the threat of kicking Sara Lee off both campuses. According to Deborah James of Global Exchange who spoke on the subject at University of Washington's Center for Communication and Civic Engagement following the UCLA victory.

...Sara Lee had a choice: they could either get off the campus, or they adopt Fair Trade principles and start buying Fair Trade coffee. They made the later choice. The result was that Sara Lee now has to buy quite a bit of Fair Trade coffee. (...) If you go to a Borders Books now-their coffee is supplied by Sara Lee-you will see Fair Trade coffee there, at two hundred and fifty cafes across the country because of what five UCLA students did over a semester. That is global impact from local action.

Yet, the Full Monty campaigns like the one at UCLA are the exception to and not the rule when it comes to the Fair Trade coffee boycott. The vast majority of campaigns run by

Fair Trade activists focused on the other two strategies for increasing sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee, the Best-Seller and the Option.

Best-Seller. According to Oxfam America, converting the best-selling coffee offerings in campus retail locations to Fair Trade Certified coffee is the best approach because it enables small groups of activists to negotiate and compromise with decision-makers while presenting a feasible change to their current coffee offerings. The Best-Seller strategy was moderate in its approach and tended to require a much smaller coalition. In short, the Best-Seller was a challenge to the university community to make Fair Trade a priority. Activists bargained with decision-makers over the retail offering by requesting that the highest volume products, like the House Blend, be converted to Fair Trade. This approach still required activists to persuade decision-makers in ways that were common in the Full Monty approach, but tended to call for diplomacy. The Best-Seller could be more appealing to university administrators as it tended not to require a switch from their existing supplier (should that supplier offer Fair Trade Certified coffee). Moreover, it appealed to activists because it provided a feasible pressure point with the greatest potential for increasing sales, usually in a very short amount of time such as a single semester.

The Option. The third approach - making Fair Trade Certified coffee an “Option” on campus - requires the lowest level of persuasion to achieve the campaign goal given that many retailers are willing to make a small concession to their customers to win short-term approval. If “the Option” is the primary approach, it generally does not require

activists to do much more than meet with the decision-maker who purchases and retails coffee on campus - whether that be a coffee shop owner, cafeteria manager, or a buyer from the purchasing department - and ask them to include Fair Trade Certified coffee as one of their product offerings. The Option does not require a coalition to achieve the objective. Yet, the Option could also be a good fall back should the Best-Seller or Full Monty fail. In the context of negotiations, the option could give decision-makers a release valve that diminished campaign pressure.

In hundreds of cases across the country, Fair Trade activists were able to convince retailers to carry Fair Trade Certified coffee either as a Best-Seller or as an Option. The major barrier experienced in both the Best-Seller and the Option approach, was that decision-makers often accepted Fair Trade Certified coffee as a pilot retail program in which the campaign organizers were called upon to help market the product, and sustain demand over time. In other words, retailers tended to maintain total control over their product offerings and in many cases, if the Fair Trade Certified coffee either did not sell, or the campaign did not keep up pressure, the Best-Seller or Option was discontinued after a period of just a few months. This was frequently described by Fair Trade activists I interviewed as the most debilitating aspect of organizing boycotts as it reflected the ephemeral nature of the marketplace as well as the inability of activists to maintain bargaining power over the long term. Moreover, under pilot programs, activists were clearly employed as a marketing arm of the retailer to encourage sales of coffee. This often led activists to question the tactical approach of boycotting. Who were they really working for?

V. Why Tactics Matter in the Fair Trade Coffee Buycott

Their mission: to tip the balance of power in international trade in favor of small-scale coffee farmers impoverished by four years of depressed worldwide coffee prices. While there's concern among some of (USFT's) supporters that students risk becoming cheerleaders for corporations not fully invested in fair trade, no one denies that it is swiftly chalking up victories. (Obourn, 2004)

I began to seriously think about the importance of tactics in the Fair Trade coffee buycott in the Spring of 2006 when I observed the organization and execution of a buycott at Rutgers University. Two undergraduate students, whom I will call Steve and Josh, decided that they wanted to bring Fair Trade coffee to Rutgers. Steve and Josh were not self-defined activists and had never engaged in social justice advocacy for any cause, but they were incensed by the injustice in the conventional coffee trade and felt that Fair Trade provided farmers with a viable alternative. Most importantly, however, they believed that the intervention promoted by Fair Trade was simple, a positive way that consumers could make a difference. "Drinking Fair Trade coffee is a small change in our daily lives that can have a big impact on the lives of the less fortunate," Steve said when I asked him why he was compelled to run a Fair Trade coffee campaign.

In March 2006, after a month of research on how to run a Fair Trade coffee buycott and the food service providers at Rutgers, the Rutgers Fair Trade Project launched the first university-wide Fair Trade campaign. Following the advice of "step-by-step" campaign guides created by Oxfam America and Global Exchange, Steve and Josh designed a strategy that would call for a 100 % Fair Trade coffee conversion in the Livingston Dining Hall, and then attempt to replicate that success at every cafeteria on the seven Rutgers campuses in New Brunswick. In less than two months, Steve and Josh

assembled a coalition of student organizations and were able to get four campus-based resolutions passed through student government calling on university administrators to carry solely Fair Trade Certified coffee on campus. In late April, Livingston Campus Dining Hall began serving Fair Trade Certified coffee as its house coffee (i.e the Best-Seller option). Steve and Josh, with the help of an allied organization, Culture Jam, also designed a brochure for the Fair Trade Certified coffee on Livingston Campus to publicize its availability.

In studying their campaign, I was captivated by the fact that they had no prior experience in coffee producing communities and little knowledge about the coffee crisis that prompted Fair Trade in the first place. Yet they were able to rally many of their peers to the cause. Watching the campaign unfold, I was struck by the ease with which Steve and Josh, who had such little experience with social activism, built their coalition, developed their strategy for the Rutgers campus and executed the campaign. As Steve said, reflecting on the campaign in May, “it was a simple success.” Steve and Josh found pleasure in the fact that they had applied the rules of marketing to a social justice cause. They saw themselves as using “the master’s marketing tools to transform the master’s market.” The campaign required only a small but committed group of actors, presented few ideological barriers to gaining broad support, and promised a significant change in the livelihood conditions of coffee farmers suffering in the global South.

Yet, the direct consequences of adopting the repertoire of collective action in the Fair Trade coffee boycott was that Steve and Josh not only fulfilled their own personal desires to act, but they also supplied volunteer labor to large commercial retailers to

market their coffee brand. To begin the campaign Steve and Josh invited students and members of allied campus organizations to an evening teach-in and coffee tasting to build a coalition at the university to demand 100% Fair Trade Certified coffee. Before a crowd of 30 undergraduate students Steve and Josh gave a thirty-five minute presentation that included a description of the global coffee crisis starting in 2000, an introduction of the benefits of Fair Trade for farming communities, a film on Fair Trade Activism from Oxfam America and a 'blind taste test' between the Yuban coffee blend then offered in the Livingston Dining Hall and a Fair Trade Certified coffee blend from Green Mountain Coffee Roasters.¹²

The taste test was intended to reassure students that they would get high quality and ethically sourced coffee if they supported the campaign. Wielding the motivation frame presented by TransFair USA, they argued that it was a win-win scenario: better coffee for students at Rutgers and better lives for farmers in the third world who grew Fair Trade coffee. This was the mantra that Steve and Josh used everywhere they went to promote Fair Trade, from negotiations with the dining hall director to their hearing with student government. As I learned during my research with activists associated with the United Students for Fair Trade, they commonly used quality claims in their campaigns to diffuse any doubts that switching to Fair Trade Certified coffee would mean sacrificing flavor for fairness (a common retort from resistant retailers and consumers - see Chapter 5).

¹² Green Mountain Coffee Roasters (GMCR: NYSE) is a publicly traded company which claims to supply more than twenty-percent of its coffee sales Fair Trade Certified and has branded its company with an image of environmental consciousness and social responsibility.

After the taste test, Steve and Josh opened the floor for questions. Most of the students were clearly were sold on the idea. For the next twenty minutes, conversation revolved around the next steps necessary to achieve the goal of getting 100% Fair Trade Certified coffee on campus. The students were enthusiastic about the campaign and more than one-third of them agreed to petition the next day during dining hall hours (the effect of which was 700 signatures demanding Fair Trade Certified coffee at Livingston Campus). But one audience member, Jenna wasn't so easily swayed.

As the conversation about the petition died down, she raised her hand. "You were a little heavy handed promoting the Fair Trade coffee from Green Mountain don't you think?" she remarked. "I felt like you were marketers," she said with contempt, "like you were marketing to us. Don't you think that's kind of weird?" The hosts Steve and Josh were caught off guard by the directness of her comment and they both began to shuffle their feet. Jenna was perturbed that the Rutgers Fair Trade Project would support "such a big brand" instead of just educating students about Fair Trade issues. Was it necessary in promoting Fair Trade to promote Green Mountain Coffee Roasters too? Why not another company? What did they know about Green Mountain? Were there other approaches to getting Fair Trade coffee on campus without promoting a particular brand? Her questions began to stack up upon one another and reflected an unease with the blurred boundary between product marketing and movement organizing that many activists engaged in Fair Trade coffee boycott struggled to reconcile as they persuaded consumers and retailers to buy into Fair Trade Certified coffee.

"Yes, you are probably right," Steve responded. "Sometimes when we are promoting Fair Trade and trying to bring certified coffee onto campus we inevitably support certain companies who can supply Fair Trade Certified coffee to the university. But it is not the companies that are important to our campaign, it's the farmers." Steve hesitated because he knew was walking a thin line. Indeed there was a reason that Green Mountain was showcased for the kickoff Fair Trade event. As an existing Sodexo supplier, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters would make it much more appealing to the purchasing department at Rutgers University to increase the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee sold. As the cafeteria manager at Livingston Campus Dining Hall explained to Steve and Josh, since Green Mountain coffee was already a product offering, using that company's offerings would be the most feasible for making a switch. Moreover, the week before they launched the Rutgers Fair Trade campaign, Steven and Josh received a package from the public relations department at Green Mountain Coffee Roasters. After sending out queries to such 100% Fair Trade companies as Equal Exchange and Pura Vida Coffee, Green Mountain was the most responsive to supporting their campaign. Green Mountain sent their campaign a 3' x 3' cardboard box of marketing materials filled to the brim with more than 10 pounds of coffee, t-shirts, stickers, table-top cards, and brochures so that they could provide samples to their university purchasing agent and mount their campaign.¹³

Instead of explaining these details in the teach-in, Steve redirected attention away from Green Mountain coffee by invoking the farmers, trying to maintain the interest of

¹³ Oxfam America and TransFair USA also each sent a small box of materials for their campaign at Rutgers - providing brochures, posters, films and reports.

the audience by emphasizing that the supplier was merely a conduit for the Fair Trade Certified coffee which “provided farmers with fair prices.” Touching briefly on the rationale for aligning the campaign with Green Mountain, Josh explained that if the goal was 100% Fair Trade Certified coffee on campus, working with a larger supplier like Green Mountain which already had contracts with the purchasing department would “make the transition to 100% Fair Trade coffee at Rutgers much smoother.” After making this point, he again invoked the farmers that the campaign intended to help. “Remember Fair Trade Certified coffee benefits the farmers at the other end of the supply chain.”

What I realized in observing the teach-in was that by adopting the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a tactical approach, Steve and Josh not only fulfilled their own personal desires to act, but they also supplied volunteer labor to companies to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee for profit. By adopting the boycott campaign, and the Fair Trade Certified label itself as a tool, the activists’ work speaking about, promoting, and organizing local campaigns - especially at universities - was not only fulfilling their own objectives, but it was also supporting the goals of product marketing, often for large commercial retailers who were ambivalent toward or at the very least profiting from their activist work. To achieve what Oxfam America called a “successful” campaign, activists had to ally or align themselves with coffee vendors who could meet the logistical needs of their university cafeterias, dining facilities and retail locations.

By 2005, numerous U.S. companies were beginning to take notice of the work activists were doing to increase awareness of Fair Trade Certified coffee and create new

retail channels for supplying coffee. Beyond even the NGOs that were supporting the Fair Trade coffee boycott, companies such as Equal Exchange, Pura Vida Coffee, Starbucks Coffee Company and Green Mountain Coffee Roasters began to invest more heavily in outreach to college campuses. Pura Vida Coffee, a 100% Fair Trade and non-profit retailer from Seattle specifically targeted campuses and utilized student activists as a means for drumming up support. Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, one of the largest coffee suppliers to campuses on the east coast and nationally, realized the importance of courting activist groups to help facilitate the growth of their Fair Trade Certified coffee sales. As a large institutional supplier, Green Mountain already had contracts with food service providers and was an approved vendor at many universities. So when activists pursued the Option or Best-Seller approach, Green Mountain was already poised to benefit from such strategies. Starbucks also worked to court USFT affiliated activists, meeting with USFT leadership to regularly update them about future plans and to get feedback on their upcoming product offerings and programs.

VI. Looking Beyond the Boycott

Although highly successful in persuading consumers and retailers to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee, many of my informants, like Steve and Josh, in their words, “lost faith” that the campaign was achieving the ambitious goals it claimed to meet for poor farmers in the third world. Indeed, from the perspective of activists, it seemed that the actual beneficiaries of Fair Trade Certified coffee were the companies for whom they were promoting and marketing the product (i.e. Green Mountain Coffee

Roasters). Sometimes in the course of just a few months activists would be, as several said, “set on fire” by the idea of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, only to see that excitement dampened once they reached the point of actually getting Fair Trade Certified coffee offered on campus. After successfully running campaigns, many activists reacted ambivalently to straddling the product marketing and movement building imperatives of the boycott. Many claimed that they had “lost their innocence” once their campaigns had run their course, highlighting their lack of control over the marketplace, their feelings of naivete and about their complicit role in advertising for companies whose engagement in Fair Trade was ambiguous if not wholly opportunistic.

Over time however, many activists lost faith that the “noble goals” and appealing tactics of the campaign could indeed transform the “challenging terrain” of the marketplace (Rice, 2001). While initially novel, empowering and seemingly innocent, as the boycott campaign made greater inroads into mainstream retailing, their subject positioning as a voluntary labor force became increasingly contradictory for activists. As the boycott converted more and more universities to Fair Trade Certified coffee and even reached mainstream retailers such as McDonald’s, Walmart and Nestle’s, activists became conscious that NGOs, regional coffee roasters and even large commercial retailers had “employed” them to help expand into new retail venues. Activists began to see the boycott, and indeed themselves, as having been co-opted by large commercial retailers to create market niches with little commitment to Fair Trade as a movement. For many activists it revealed that the “positive steps” they had taken as part of the boycott added up to complicity with big companies that were free-riding on the wave of interest in Fair

Trade. In fact, as a member of the USFT leadership explained to me at their summit in Denver in February 2006, the overarching emphasis on boycott campaigns and increasing sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee on college campuses had actually eroded the power of the movement side of Fair Trade by “making Fair Trade solely about selling products and not about building solidarity, challenging oppression, and making linkages between Fair Trade and other aligned movements.”

By carrying out local and national campaigns promoting Fair Trade Certified coffee activists supplied labor to the marketing cause, but in movement terms, they effectively passed on the power of bargaining to TransFair USA, owner of the Fair Trade Certified label. Activists did the “hard work” or “affective labor” (Hardt, 1999) of persuading (i.e. educating consumers and increasing availability) and yet they had little control over how, when, who and what campaign targets are permitted to use the Fair Trade Certified label to describe their business practices. Since TransFair USA is the private owner of the Fair Trade Certified label, it is the final arbiter and its representatives have the power to negotiate the use of the license with whomever they want and to bypass grassroots activists and NGOs that many large commercial retailers saw as a potential threat. In this sense, TransFair USA was positioning itself as the key broker between market and movement, leading activists in USFT to describe the labeling agency as selling out the movement to scale up the market. This led to discontent among activists associated with USFT (as well as many pioneering retailers and NGOs) who felt that they had been taken advantage of to persuade and facilitate the growth of the Fair

Trade coffee movement without a voice in how, and with whom, TransFair USA would bargain.

Another source of frustration about Fair Trade was the relationship between activist groups and farmer organizations in coffee producing communities. As I describe further in Chapter 4, farmers that supply coffee to the Fair Trade coffee market rarely came into contact with the activists that ran campaigns and as I describe further in Chapter 5, Fair Trade certification did not, from the perspective of farmers, necessarily live up to many of its promises to facilitate sustainable economic development in farming communities. Traditionally in the Fair Trade coffee buycott, the relationship between activists, who worked on the front-lines of the buycott in the United States, and farmers, who worked in the fields to produce Fair Trade Certified coffee, was socially and spatially disarticulated. The result was a lack of communication and little basis for actual relationships of solidarity between activists and the farmers they claimed to represent. However, through new forms of direct solidarity relationships created during farmer tours in the United States, particularly at Fair Trade conferences like the Empowering Alternatives Convergence (see Chapter 4), farmers revealed that Fair Trade Certified coffee might not be so fair after all. When activists and farmers met either in coffee producing communities or at conferences, many farmers unapologetically challenged the Fair Trade coffee buycott to live up to its word. In combination, the revelation that Fair Trade Certified coffee may not represent what it claims to (i.e. improving farmers lives) and the expansion of Fair Trade Certified coffee into mainstream retail markets produced paradoxes for activists that were simply too frustrating to bear.

Activist discontent came to a head in Spring of 2005 resulting in a fissure in the movement between activists, NGOs and TransFair USA; a fissure which remains today. Realizing that TransFair USA was unwilling to forfeit its right to bargain with large corporate retailers its own terms and remain in sole control of the Fair Trade Certified label, activists began to join other movements and to directly challenge TransFair USA's legitimacy with regards to defining the meaning of Fair Trade and the strategy of boycotting. As Sara, an activist from Santa Cruz said, "I am beginning to think of Fair Trade more in terms of little f, and little t." In an effort to find a more authentic Fair Trade and to gain more control over their own activist labor, USFT began to affiliate more closely with 100% Fair Trade companies, selectively supporting their bids in Fair Trade coffee contracts on campus, they also sought to establish stronger and more direct links with Fair Trade producer organizations in the global South. USFT also began to formalize relationships with other student organizations and movements such as Students for Trade Justice, which worked on challenging bi-lateral and multi-lateral trade policy, and Student Farmworker Alliance, which worked on farmer worker's rights in the United States.

One of the major changes I observed in USFT before I concluded my research in 2006, was activists' willingness to look beyond the Fair Trade Certified label as the symbol of the movement and to look beyond the boycott as the principal tactical framework. Since TransFair USA was not believed to be working with USFT in earnest, USFT activists walked out of meetings with the labeling agency and refused to explicitly promote the Fair Trade Certified label. This decision to move away from the Fair Trade

Certified label was reinforced in every area of USFT's organizing. In an effort to distance the work of USFT from label promotion, USFT organizer guides described Fair Trade as both "an idea and a movement," and themselves as "not just cheerleaders" for the Fair Trade Certified label.

USFT leaders and activists also began to change the way that they promoted the boycott. Sarah, a USFT coordinating committee member told me, "I try to talk about the big picture rather than legitimizing the label or specifically advocating for TransFair USA" (Sarah - February 9, 2006). Isaac, another coordinating committee member explained that he felt activists needed to start learning how to "communicate greater complexity." Joe, one of my key informants consistently challenged the notion that Fair Trade was only defined by the Fair Trade Certified label.

Fair Trade is more than a consumer's option; its a powerful movement. It is about working in solidarity with producer communities, listening deeply to their experiences, and moving forward collaboratively to build an alternative economic structure based on dignity and sustainability. (Joe - October 15, 2005)

Rory, another leader and key informant with USFT explained:

We're not just a consumer movement. You know, just increasing the volume of certified products sold. Our goal is also that of a social justice movement even though we may come at it from a market angle. We are trying to create solidarity and empowerment – Fair Trade is about creating communities. And there are more ways of making that a reality than just through certification and the market. We can do lots of things to promote that understanding of equal value such as trips to origin (production spaces), farmer tours in the United States, producer dialogues, conference exchanges, and lots of other solidarity initiatives. (Rory - February 9, 2006)

While my interviews with USFT activists trended toward questioning the efficacy of boycotting as a social movement tactic there was little consensus as to the future of the Fair Trade coffee boycott. Activists with little experience in other kinds of social

movement campaigns, or those who identified most with the ideals of personal responsibility, ethical consumerism, and a non-adversarial approach to creating social change tended to remain loyal to the overall strategy of the boycott. Activists with greater experience with other kinds of social movement campaigns, or who had identified more closely with challenging corporate control and/or with building solidarity tended to move on to other campaigns associated with farm worker rights or trade justice.

The core activists in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, however, particularly the leadership of USFT, tentatively embraced their paradoxical position. They did not give up on boycotting altogether, but attempted to reframe the tactic by promoting specific companies such as Equal Exchange, Pura Vida Coffee or Cooperative Coffees which all offered 100% Fair Trade coffee. USFT also began to adopt alternate recipes for creating social change treating the boycott campaigns as a wedge issue or a door to other activist pathways rather than as ends unto themselves. Core activists with USFT began redefining the meaning of “fair trade” to include deeper commitments to cooperativism, alternative economies and transnational solidarity.

V. Conclusion

Grassroots activists played a vital role in advancing the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States. At first, when the boycott campaigns took off, there seemed to be no harm in activists supplying voluntary labor to advance the cause. Ideologically, the motivational frames of Fair Trade were not exclusive, but rather, engendered sympathy from a range of political subjects. Activists who were engaged in a range of different

social justice campaigns joined up to support the Fair Trade coffee boycott because the motivational frames were inclusive and emphasized making global connections, humanizing trade and defetishizing commodities. Tactically, as I learned, the boycott appealed to would be activists because the persuasive approach was deemed morally and politically appropriate, “a positive step.” Activists saw the boycott as offering low barriers to entry and enabling people with little experience in social movement organizing to take part and make a difference. The tactics of the boycott were also appealing because they maintained a non-radical tone. Even people who identified as politically conservative saw Fair Trade as a way to create effective social change. The Fair Trade coffee boycott was also seen as being personally empowering, enabling activists to live ethically through their work in the boycott. In sum, the boycott proved an enticing framework.

Yet, overtime as activists who partook in campaigns came to question their role in the Fair Trade coffee boycott as large commercial retailers began to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee. Many of my informants claimed that they had lost faith in the boycott as a social movement tactic, claiming that their “voluntary work” was being exploited by large commercial retailers in their effort to fair wash their image. After successfully completing campaigns, many realized that they had bought into a model of social movement organizing in which they had little bargaining power beyond persuading their local targets, particularly on college campuses. TransFair USA, on the other hand, could use their bargaining power as owners of the Fair Trade Certified label to go over the heads of boycott campaign constituents and cut deals with large commercial retailers, a

practice which has caused pioneering ATOs, NGOs and activist groups to distance themselves from the labeling agency. In response, activists began to search elsewhere for other movements to join and especially to attempt to create closer ties to the coffee farming communities that they claim to represent and benefit by boycotting Fair Trade Certified coffee. In particular, as I describe in Chapter 4, they sought to develop relationships with Nicaraguan peasant coffee farmers and cooperatives.

Chapter 4

In Defense of the Land: Peasant Coffee Farmers Engage with Fair Trade as a Movement

...if transnational activist campaigns are to promote greater equity and economic justice, it is essential for them to be conscious of the ways that global capitalist development structures the choices of workers and others in poor countries. They must also incorporate knowledge about *local* organizing initiatives and about the likely impacts of the solutions they propose on these initiatives and on the people the campaigns seek to help.

--Ethel Brooks, 2005 p.138, emphasis added

I. Introduction

On September 30, 2005, I attended the first Fair Trade Futures Conference, "How to Live a Fair Trade Life" in the Holiday Inn at the Chicago Merchant Mart Plaza.

Dubbed "the first public conference on the future of Fair Trade" in the United States, conference planners designed the agenda to address their concerns associated with taking the Fair Trade Certified label to mainstream commercial retailers. In the Spring of 2005, pioneering retailers of Fair Trade Certified coffee such as Equal Exchange and Cooperative Coffees, and NGOs such as the Fair Trade Federations, Oxfam America, Fair Trade Resource Network, and Lutheran World Relief directly challenged TransFair USA's strategy of striking bargains with large commercial retailers such as Walmart and Nestle without the consent of other boycott leaders. The conference organizers intended to re-center the movement around the true meaning of a movement for fair and ethical trade that benefited third world farmers, workers and artisans, something they believed had been lost in the rush to increase the market share of the Fair Trade Certified label.

The opening plenary session for the three-day conference was entitled, *What It Means to Live a Fair Trade Life*. Seated before some 700 plus audience members were three presenters from North America and one from Central America. The three North American presenters received invitations in advance and arrived with polished power point presentations in English. They offered their perspectives on Fair Trade as religious congregants, businesspeople, academics, and NGO representatives trying to make a difference in the lives of third world producers. They made passionate claims that the meaning of Fair Trade was not just about labels and market share, but more importantly about long-term, committed and ethical relationships that helped poor farmers, workers and artisans get a fair price or wage for the products of their labor. They argued that the Fair Trade movement should not be contaminated by partnerships with large commercial retailers that were ambivalent toward the wider goals of trade justice espoused by the Fair Trade movement.

The Central American participant, in contrast, was a farmer representative named Nelson Guerra from Honduras, speaking through an unpaid amateur translator affiliated with USFT. Guerra was asked by the conference organizers a few hours before to fill a panel vacancy created when the original invited guest from Nicaragua - a leader of the Fair Trade cooperative in San Ramon and one of my future key informants - was unable to attend due to complications with his visa. Guerra was introduced as novel and authentic, "a Fair Trade producer." Since Guerra was not a Fair Trade consumer, his presence on the panel registered differently with the audience.

The opening to his speech called attention to the tension between market and movement. “They told me that *everyone* has ten minutes to speak,” he said to the crowd. “But since I speak *Spanish* (and need a translator) I have only five.” He looked around the ballroom room as he awaited the translator to catch up. “I believe that *those* are the rules of the market,” he said. The slightest murmur of laughter escaped from the crowd as his words were translated from Spanish to English. The audience shifted in their seats, uncomfortable that he called attention to the inequality between himself and his co-panelists and the unfairness with how he was fit into the conference agenda. He shrugged away a benevolent retort from one of the conference organizers in the front row who said, “Take your time” as he began his presentation.

Guerra made the best of the framework provided to him. He executed the five-minute commentary with great speed, first describing the Honduran rural economy and its dependence on coffee and then introducing the marketing cooperative he represented which included seventy-five local level cooperatives, only six of which currently sell coffee under Fair Trade certification. He talked about the impact of the coffee crisis in Honduras, the widespread hunger throughout the region from 2001-2004, and the debts farmers still carry from that period. He described the national campaign his organizations designed to hold the Honduran state responsible for assisting coffee growers and workers with relief during the crisis. Guerra finished by saying that the farmers in his cooperative are not seeking charity or paternalism, but new markets to export high quality coffee at a fair price. He concluded in five minutes, no more.

Contained within a brief moment during a three day conference on the Future of Fair Trade, the exhibition of Guerra, the lone producer in a panel with three consumer activists was designed to present him as an economic beneficiary of Fair Trade. However, the time afforded him at the conference also revealed the very limited opportunities that farmer representatives - let alone the farmers themselves - have to express their visions of Fair Trade. In addition to “reality tours” and “trips to origin” hosted by NGOs such as Global Exchange, conferences are one of the only spaces where Fair Trade activists come into contact with farmers and the people who represent them. Following his presentation an audience member sitting near me leaned over and remarked that his speech “was more valuable” than any other panelist that spoke during the plenary session. She considered Guerra’s life to be the most authentic because he represented the common producer voice from the Third World / Global South that she longed, very much, to hear.

Guerra's sentiments regarding lack of equal access to speak and be heard were not uncommon in the six conferences I attended as a participant observer from 2005-2006. As activists, retailers and NGOs struggled over a road map to the future, peasant coffee farmers were finding it hard to make their voices heard, let alone get to the negotiating table and have an impact on Fair Trade standards and policy-making.

This chapter addresses a gap in a growing literature on Fair Trade coffee initiatives in producer communities by analyzing the perspectives of Nicaragua-based Fair Trade farmers regarding coffee boycotting as a social movement tactic. Although there have been a number of studies that examine how peasant coffee farmers and cooperatives

engage Fair Trade as a market, few studies have examined the role of farmers and cooperative officials in, or their perspective on, the strategy of boycotting Fair Trade Certified coffee. In Nicaragua, farmers have leveraged relationships of transnational solidarity in the Fair Trade movement and market to supplement their livelihoods and benefit their cooperative movement for more than twenty years. I argue that peasant coffee farmers are not only “beneficiaries,” of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, but are critical movement actors in their own right.

Peasant coffee farmers from the global South are commonly represented in Fair Trade marketing and movement narratives as the economic beneficiaries of Fair Trade. Farmers are rarely seen in the global North as agents of the Fair Trade movement. In this chapter I draw on 12 months of fieldwork in Nicaragua to explore how farmers have acted collectively to advance the Fair Trade movement. In Contrast to activists in the United States, I argue that peasant coffee farmers in Nicaragua have engaged with Fair Trade through decades of collective action for agrarian change. Their engagement, grounded in spaces of production, generate a very different perspective on the meaning and efficacy of the Fair Trade coffee boycott carried out in the United States. Viewed through the lens of their collective struggles, Fair Trade Certified coffee cannot be reduced to a commodity sold on the retail market, rather, farmer engagement with the Fair Trade market and movement in Nicaragua must be understood as the product of tremendous social sacrifices in pursuit of agrarian change.

A. How do Peasant Coffee Farmers Engage with the Fair Trade Coffee Buycott?

The research in this chapter builds on the work I conducted on the Fair Trade coffee buycott in the United States. U.S. Fair Trade activists were not the only people I met and conversed with in the six conferences I attended between 2005 and 2006. I also met farmers who supplied coffee to the Fair Trade market and the cooperative officials that represented them. Through these conversations, I learned that farmers, like activists, also felt the tension between the movement and market logics of the Fair Trade coffee buycott. Farmers depended on the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee as one means of making a livelihood, but they were also acutely aware of the promises and pitfalls of Fair Trade certification in farming communities (see Chapter 5).

Farmers wanted to weigh in on the debate over the efficacy of the Fair Trade coffee buycott that was brewing in the United States. But, as the introduction to this chapter illustrates, they often found it difficult to do so. I argue that one of the primary reasons they were excluded from critical movement debates was that they were not perceived as agents of the Fair Trade movement.

First, since farmers were not “coffee consumers” and were not living in consumer countries, the tactical approaches of the buycott in the United States (Chapter 3) were neither politically appropriate nor designed to be employed by farmers to meet their political objectives. As a tactical framework, the Fair Trade coffee buycott was designed to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee through retail outlets in the United States, not to address issues of production, cooperative organizing or resource access in coffee producing communities. Based on my observations, farmers’ only

engagement with the tactical repertoire of the North American Fair Trade coffee boycott was as invited guests on speaking tours through the United States. In this sense, farmers were asked to testify to the benefits of Fair Trade and to aid campaign brokers to persuade consumers and recruit activists to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee. As members of speaking tours, farmers and their representatives did not run boycotting campaigns but participated in them as a means to persuade more consumers and companies to buy Fair Trade Certified coffee.

Second, at the time of research, farmers and their representatives did not have a place at the negotiating table as policy-makers, campaign brokers or activists within the Fair Trade coffee boycott. At an institutional level, there were no farmers in leadership positions in either the Fair Trade boycott campaign or in the standards-making and certification apparatus of FLO. It was not until 2007, that representatives of the regional coffee producer blocs (Latin America, Africa, Asia) in the Fair Trade registry gained formal voting status as members of the standards-making committee of FLO International. Today there are 2 voting members on a committee of 9 members. Moreover, farmers and their representatives still remain largely outside of the decision-making of the national boycott initiatives. In 2006, only one producer representative served on the 12 member board of directors at TransFair USA.

Third, farmers and their representatives generally have a different approach to increase the volume of coffee that they sell. While activists tended to target consumers, retailers and institutional buyers to increase the volume of Fair Trade Certified coffee sold, farmers and cooperatives organized collectively to gain, maintain and control access

to resources, to create institutions that represented their interests, and to work within their own regions challenging their own states to create conditions for successful competition in coffee markets. Commercialization of coffee is a means to an end, but not the only concern of farmers. Fair Trade certification, as well as other certification schemes, provided farmers with a way to gain greater control over the coffee marketing process, but Fair Trade was not the only means for achieving their objectives. Unlike Fair Trade activists, farmers and their cooperatives were not principally interested in persuading or coercing any particular coffee buyer to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee. As I describe further below, farmers' political objectives both included and exceeded that of the Fair Trade coffee boycott. In particular, the state remained central to many of their efforts to gain and maintain access to land and to garner resources for coffee production and organizing.

Finally, the persuasive pitch of the Fair Trade boycott relied on a particular *scaled narrative* that treated the agency of farmers as less critical to the success of the Fair Trade coffee boycott than activists, NGOs and retailers. Farmers were not commonly seen as agents in the Fair Trade movement because the motivational frames of the Fair Trade coffee boycott dis-embedded the local agrarian struggles of farmers in the global South from the global strategy and narrative of Fair Trade. Rooted in local communities, farmers were commonly represented, at best as people who need to be empowered and at worst as victims in need of help. The representation of third world subjects as victims in need to garner sympathy is well documented, particularly by feminist scholars (Brooks, 2007; Kaplan, 1995; Spivak, 1990). Since farmers neither have control over the networks

of information nor design the strategies that catalyze action on their behalf, campaign brokers tend to spotlight the lack of agency held by people who have experienced injustice so as to garner the greatest sympathy (Brooks, 2007).

In Contrast to the representation of farmers as victims in need, Goodman argues that Fair Trade coffee's appeal to activists and consumers lies precisely in enabling them to make a "material and discursive 'scale jump'" that "stitches" them "to the very places and livelihood struggles of production" (Goodman, 2004: 902-903). As I described in Chapter 3, U.S.-based activists were empowered by the sense that they could scale jump by creating "connections with producers" or "humanize trade" through the promotion of Fair Trade Certified coffee. These scale jumps were not made through the shared experience of the livelihood struggles farmers confront, but rather through their vicarious and virtual consumption of labor abuses, ecological degradation or trade inequities in the global South that are transmitted through what Goodman calls "translation devices" such as labels, images, films, and other marketing materials (Goodman, 2004: 902). In the Fair Trade coffee boycott translation devices most commonly represent farmers as objects of concern who require "managed altruism" from an outside force (Kaplan, 1995), rather than representing them as agents of change in their own right.

In an interview I conducted with Jonathan Rosenthal,¹⁴ co-founder of Equal Exchange and currently the CEO of Oke Bananas, he expressed concerns about what he called the 'myths' propagated by the brokers of the Fair Trade coffee boycott (Rosenthal -

¹⁴ Rosenthal helped negotiate the first imports of Fair Trade coffee to the United States in the 1980s, and claimed that he did so in solidarity with the cooperatives formed through the Sandinista Revolution and its socialist agenda. As he explained, the first efforts to bring Fair Trade to the United States were directly linked with aiding the cooperative movement that formed in the 1980s in Nicaragua and by helping them sell coffee in the midst of the Sandinista/Contra civil war.

May 16, 2005). He claimed that, in the efforts to expand the Fair Trade market in the 1990s, campaigners resorted to attracting supporters through a discourse of benevolence, charity and *noblesse oblige*. This in turn perpetuated an exaggerated sense of consumer and activist agency that contradicted and undermined the actual relationships of transnational solidarity upon which the Fair Trade movement was originally built. These myths, Rosenthal argued, reinforced the sense that U.S. and European campaign brokers were the “saviors” of poor farmers and as such that they reserved the right to define the strategy of the boycott, set the standards and oversee certification. In short, campaign brokers could decide what was fair. He argued that the original motive of building solidarity between farmers and activists was being erased as the Fair Trade coffee boycott moved further into mainstream retail. The movement was “losing its soul” (Interview, May 16, 2005).

The notion that the Fair Trade movement was “losing its soul” was not an uncommon sentiment among activists in 2005. As Jaffee (2007) has cogently argued, the brokers of the Fair Trade coffee boycott were making a “deal with the devil” by creating partnerships with large commercial retailers to expand the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee. Equating the loss of soul with allowing large commercial retailers such as Walmart, Nestle and McDonalds to fair wash their image with Fair Trade Certified coffee was indeed grievous for many activist and Fair Trade pioneers. Activists were beginning to feel that they, too, had lost their soul as they realized that their volunteer labor had been used to promote a certified product increasingly sold by large commercial retailers.

But, Rosenthal's claim that the movement was losing its soul was different. His statements implicitly defined the problem as losing perspective on the scale of the movement. He argued that "the soul" of the Fair Trade movement resided in local-to-local relationships of solidarity with farming communities in the global South. As the Fair Trade coffee buycott focused more and more on market penetration by attracting large commercial retailers, NGOs and activists were neglecting the true purpose of Fair Trade: creating relationships of solidarity and alternative economic networks that assist rural communities achieve sustainable development.

Following from Rosenthal's comments, this chapter explores the constitution of the Fair Trade coffee buycott from a different angle. Drawing on ethnographic research at the Empowering Alternatives Fair Trade conference in the United States described in the Chapter 3, I first illustrate that peasant farmers and their representatives from Nicaragua engage with the Fair Trade coffee buycott in ways that exceed their role as mere "beneficiaries" of Fair Trade. Farmers see themselves as agents of the Fair Trade movement, even as campaign narratives suggest otherwise. However, unlike U.S.-based activists, peasant farmers in San Ramon, Nicaragua see Fair Trade as part of their struggle for agrarian reform. From their perspective, Fair Trade is a direct extension of the changing structural conditions through which farmers gain, maintain and control access to land, organize cooperatives, procure credit and participate in international coffee markets. Gaining access to land, as a precursor to engagement with Fair Trade as a market, came with great struggle and sacrifice. Unlike the low entry barriers enjoyed

by U.S. activists, many farmers and workers in Nicaragua sacrificed their lives to get access to land and markets for coffee production and commercialization.

II. The Movement Imperative: Lost in Translation?

There is a difference between one who lives in comfort and one who lives under weighty conditions. There is a difference between one raised in the world of convenience and one raised to endure hunger. (S.M. October 16, 2007)

It is 4:30 p.m. and I am observing the final session of the Empowering Alternative Convergence in February 2005. Everyone is tired. It has been four full days of activist training, inspiring speeches, planning meetings and regional organizing sessions designed to aid activists to run Fair Trade coffee boycotts in their communities and on their campuses. To conclude the four day event, USFT organizers facilitated an “open-space” where activists could spontaneously start their own breakout sessions and address a topic that concerned them. The open space time was intended to radically de-center the official program of the conference, democratizing conversations and encouraging dialogue between people sharing similar concerns. Activists could propose a topic, get a room assignment and begin their discussion. I chose the topic proposed by an invited delegation of six farmers and two cooperative representatives from San Ramon, Nicaragua, entitled, *Perspectivas por Productores de Comercio Justo* (Producer Perspectives on Fair Trade). As I saw it, if the “open-space” logic held true as advertised, this was a rare opportunity to listen, unscripted and more intimately, to farmers’ interpretations of Fair Trade as a movement.

At the end of a long and winding corridor, in an unnumbered classroom that was nearly impossible to find, I joined a group of 15 activists from the United States. The

activists sat in school desks on one side of the room and the Nicaraguan delegation stood near the blackboard, ready to begin the session. Conversations among the activists and the farmers created a low hum, but there was no exchange across the language barrier. In my years of observing the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States, I learned that farmers and activists rarely spoke to one another. As mentioned earlier, one of the few convergence spaces (Routledge, 2004) where farmers and activists actually met was either in international conferences when farmers and their representatives are invited to testify to the benefits of Fair Trade, or in “trips to origin” where brigades of consumers, activists and retailers travel to observe and learn about farming communities. Both of these convergence spaces tend to be highly structured learning experiences designed to stoke the passions of activists and consumers to rededicate themselves to the Fair Trade boycott. Yet, as I would also learn, convergence spaces present opportunities disrupt and challenge the motivational frames and official stories of an activist campaign.

After a 10 minute wait, the Spanish / English translator scheduled to mediate the discussion between the farmers and the activists arrived with a cardboard box full of headsets. As the translator handed them out, the activists, looking confused by these alien contraptions, uncoiled the wiring, turned the radios on and put the earphones in place. The Nicaraguan delegation looked content at watching their counterparts fumble with the little devices that they had been forced to use during the entire convergence proceedings. As the translator sat down, one of the farmers leaned forward, gazing around the room as he began. He immediately grabbed the attention of the audience. “It’s a shame not to see more people here in our session,” he said. “Honestly, I must say, it is a

huge culture shock to come here to Chicago and we feel pretty lonely here...we wish more people had come.” Unlike the image of farmers that activists usually saw, he appeared unhappy. He continued to address the group.

We wanted to invite you here to consider *our* ideas on Fair Trade. Fair Trade is about relationships that cannot be represented by money. It is not just about coffee or other products. We want to bring forth an idea that is much broader about Fair Trade. It is a bigger story that you may not know or have not yet heard.

These opening comments would set the tone for the next half hour. Before a very small audience of impressionable young Fair Trade activists, the delegates wrested the dominant story-line of Fair Trade from its Euro-American moorings, giving voice to different visions, logics, objectives and histories than those represented through the more common “visual narratives that saturate” Fair Trade coffee labels (Goodman, 2004; 893). Unlike texts, labels, advertisements, and advocacy guides for Fair Trade, the presentation by the Nicaraguan delegation asserted, rather nakedly and directly, the agency of farmers and their representatives to redefine Fair Trade on their own terms. Comparing their political situation in Nicaragua to the comfort of activists in the United States, one delegate claimed:

Our history of Fair Trade is much longer than 20 years. The history and politics we want to tell about may be new and different to you. We are not *only* involved in this movement that you are here to talk about. The Fair Trade movement as you understand it does not exist in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguan history and situation is very different politically. We don’t sit around and make a list of the struggles that we want to get involved in in Nicaragua. We wake up and fight everyday. We fight to put food on people’s tables and to get people an education. We have fought for justice side by side with people from all over the world. The people of Nicaragua aren’t only thinking of themselves. We are also concerned about the struggles of people in other countries - people in Asia and Africa. We keep up with the news.

Distorting the docile image of a thankful farmer living in a static rural community who testifies to the benefits of Fair Trade, an image which is scripted within “the performing theatre of narratives” that are exhibited for Northern consumers and advocates (Goodman, 2004: 898), the delegation entered the stage in a different guise, this time speaking with their own script. As the delegate stated above, they were not only “thinking of themselves” insofar as their poverty had not reduced their struggle to the bounds of their own households or communities. They “keep up with the news.” Citing their struggle as one among many around the world, the delegates asserted themselves, like the Fair Trade activists, as global actors in their own right.

As the session progressed, the delegates described their frustration with the trendy nature of how U.S.-based activism and directly challenged the activists for not taking responsibility for educating themselves and others more about Fair Trade. Moving to directly question the tactical outcomes of U.S. activism, they asked, “Why don’t more people know about the principles of Fair Trade?” Having the delegates questioning the effectiveness of their engagement in the boycott, the activists in the room were riveted. Not only were farmers speaking to many of these activists for the first time, but the delegation was critical of what they perceived to be the weak impact of the persuasive tactics employed by the U.S. activists to teach about Fair Trade.

As I described in Chapter 3, persuasive tactics were employed in the boycott to educate consumers and increase the availability of Fair Trade Certified coffee. Whereas U.S. activists I interviewed adopted persuasive tactics because they found them a more positive way to create social change than more coercive alternatives, the Nicaraguan

delegates questioned the effectiveness of persuasion and in particular, how well the U.S. activists were carrying out the persuasive tactics adopted. “One thing that was crazy for us is that there are people at this conference, and people we met in Chicago, who have no idea what Fair Trade is,” explained a delegate. His statement was a challenge to the U.S. activists in the session to get out there and educate the public. He also claimed that the activists may not be taking Fair Trade seriously enough because they could not relate to the struggles that they face in coffee producing communities. “For farmers, this movement is critical,” he explained. Emphasizing their lack of knowledge about how Fair Trade relates to their political objectives, he went on: “You need to understand the role of Fair Trade within the much longer struggle for land.”

At this point of the presentation, Inez, the leader of the delegation and the executive director of the municipal cooperative union in San Ramon, sensed that the young activists in the room were lost. As I described in Chapter 3, many activists had gotten involved in the Fair Trade movement because they saw it as a simple and straightforward way to “humanize trade,” “defetishize commodities” and make “global connections” with farmers. However, here at the Empowering Alternatives Convergence, farmers were complicating the idea that these ideals were simple or straightforward at all.

Having participated in numerous international conferences on Fair Trade, Inez thanked the audience members for their support, but then began to elaborate what she and the delegation perceived as “the broader politics of Fair Trade.” Her approach was different than the previous delegates. Drawing upon her personal history, she described Fair Trade as rooted in the peasant struggle for land, the defense of that land, and the

need to make the land productive through gaining access to credit and favorable markets.

In short, she expressed her agency through what Brooks has called “living proof,” a testimony to the broader struggles engaged in by farmers and workers in spaces of production (Brooks, 2007: 138). Living proof is characterized by "the offering of life stories, subjectivities, bodily materialities and practices...as acts of courage and political claim-staking" (2007: 138) by subaltern men and women. These acts are "both a product of and productive of affect" (2007: 141). Inez resumed her narrative:

In my whole life I can remember picking coffee and doing the coffee labors. But there was a difference from when I was a child and now that I am an adult. When I was young, the profits from coffee were not mine nor my family's. The profits went to someone that only wanted us for our labor. This meant that we didn't go to school and we had very little to eat. We were children of 6, 7, 8 years old and we had to work. Not for fun, but with the obligation to help our families. And like other youth, women and men, we left the house early every morning to look for work in the coffee labors. And that's how it was...(i.e. before the Sandinista Revolution of 1979.)

In the 1980s, the panorama of our lives was turned around 180 degrees. It changed for women, youth, for the workers and the peasants. I became a member of the cooperative movement in the 1980s and we believed we had a right to the land; where peasants and workers should be able to gain access to a little piece of land to survive and to maintain our families. So what occurred was we struggled for an agrarian reform. I am a beneficiary of agrarian reform. More than 90 percent of the small farmers, peasants, that are members in our cooperatives, are beneficiaries of the agrarian reform. In the 1980s when we received the land, we also received technical assistance, credit, and inputs for production (from the state) and so this helped awaken us as farmers. It awakened us to many things that we didn't know about simply as workers on the haciendas.

But in 1990 everything changed again and we were turned around 180 degrees in reverse. The counter-agrarian reform happened. Once again we had to fight for our land. Thousands of peasants lost their land because they abandoned the well-springs or were forced to. For one, they left because they had little power against the demands of the ex-property owners. Second, because government policy provided no attention to the peasants. There was no credit for production, no seeds, no technical assistance. So we started an organized struggle to integrate the reform beneficiaries so that we could defend ourselves against a system established to make us disappear. So we decided to join farmers and

cooperatives together and provide support to defend the land. First we had to conserve the land because this was the principal means to support the family. We had to conserve the land and fight for it so that we didn't have to return to the way we lived in the 1970s; so our children didn't have to live like we did.

In 1994, we incorporated several cooperatives into Fair Trade. We only sell a percentage of our coffee as Fair Trade, but it has permitted us to conserve the land, to send our children to school, and to have access, at the very least, to the necessities of life. It has helped us to diversify production. It has helped us to take care of our farms and our environments. It has helped us to know where our coffee goes. And it has helped us to put a great emphasis on the quality of our coffee.

Inez's testimony re-scaled the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States from an effort to increase market share for Fair Trade Certified coffee that started in 1999 to a struggle for agrarian change in Nicaragua that started in the 1970s (or even earlier).

Narratives like these have commonly been subordinated in the efforts to take Fair Trade Certified coffee to mainstream retail outlets. Indeed, it is the suppression of these local narratives of agrarian struggle that has facilitated the appeal of the Fair Trade coffee boycott to people across an ideological spectrum in the global North.

Demonstrating a stubborn insistence on a differently scaled narrative, Inez argued that the Fair Trade movement was not only about selling products. She continued,

Remember, this isn't just about coffee. The way I see it is the idea of Fair Trade is about fair exchange. We know about this kind of exchange not from this movement but from *our* history, through the revolutionary process, through our work in the cooperative movement and through our struggle against imperialism. We connect with this history and it motivates us to organize. But no one here at this conference has talked about these histories. If we have a Fair Trade movement today, why do we lose this history?

Highlighting the limitation of seeing Fair Trade merely as a product marketing strategy,

Inez reframed the logic of the Fair Trade coffee boycott by placing it in a historical

context of agrarian struggle. Reclaiming authority to define Fair Trade in her own terms, she challenged the scale at which narratives of Fair Trade are produced and reproduced.

As I left the session, I caught up with the translator to ask her a few questions about how she translated a few of the terms. After we shared some excitement about the opportunity to talk with the delegates I asked, "so what do you think about the idea of raising the consciousness of activists and consumers by educating ourselves more about the histories of struggle these farmers have lived through?" Without hesitation she responded, "I know it would be good, but activists don't have time for that. For the majority of the activists, I think, learning history is not their primary concern."

Although they seemed a bit off-beat to me at the time, her sentiments were not far from the mark in describing the activist community (see Chapter 3). My interviews with the broader population of Fair Trade activists indicated that one of the appeals of the Fair Trade coffee boycott as precisely that activists neither had to have experience in past struggles nor spend extensive time preparing. In other words, activists enjoyed low entry barriers to participating. To be involved in the Fair Trade coffee boycott, activists did not need to learn about, let alone experience, the histories of the people they intended to help. Learning such histories and conveying them to others could use time and energy perhaps best spent in executing persuasive campaigns that employ existing narratives produced by campaign brokers. Moreover, stories like those told by Inez did not seem to resonate with activists in the same way as those that garner sympathy by representing farmers as victims. Testimonies, like that expressed by Inez, represent volatile and complex issues, what Brooks (2007) describes as moments of "rupture" that reveal

feelings, ideas and affective experiences that can be ideologically incommensurate with those of the broad coalition of Fair Trade activists; let alone the large commercial retailers who held the promise of expanding the Fair Trade market. Indeed, the very notion that Fair Trade Certified coffee's pioneering farmers might be ex-guerrillas, land reform beneficiaries, or Sandinistas challenges the non-radical image that the Fair Trade coffee boycott sought to maintain. What would it mean to the movement if the Fair Trade coffee boycott would trace its roots to revolutionary Nicaragua? How might those stories complicate image of Fair Trade cultivated by campaign brokers seeking to take Fair Trade into the mainstream retail marketplace?

III. The Fair Trade From a Different Scale: The Case of San Ramon, Nicaragua

In this section of the chapter, I present findings from secondary literature analysis and oral history interviews with 48 farmers and cooperative officials in San Ramon, Nicaragua. In particular, my interviews surrounded the celebration of the 15th Anniversary of their municipal cooperative union, where I observed and listened as farmers dug through sedimented history regarding their relationship to the land, their cooperatives and Fair Trade. These processes of digging up the past to interpret the present produced varied responses to questions that I later posed about the efficacy of Fair Trade to improve their standard of living (see Chapter 5). Through textual analysis of these interviews I examine how farmers and cooperative organizers described the role of Fair Trade in their lives. Opening up the channels of conversation to include testimonies of their past revealed that farmers see their engagement with the Fair Trade

movement as a means of consolidating gains made through the agrarian reform, a source of solidarity during the civil war against the Contra, and a way to create a livelihood out of the ashes of the past.

San Ramon is a municipality in the province of Matagalpa, on what is described by Nicaraguan historians as "the old agricultural frontier." San Ramon was an economic enclave formed in the 19th century when the liberal state annexed indigenous lands and transferred property rights to German, Italian and American immigrants, who mined for gold and created the first coffee plantations in Northern Nicaragua. In 1881, the indigenous communities of Yucul and El Horno in San Ramon rebelled against the local government which was employing them through forced labor on road projects and coffee plantations. In a violent battle, the central government in Managua sent troops to put down the rebellion, which historian Jeffery Gould (1998) describes as one of the last of the indigenous uprising against the ladino elite in Nicaragua. For more than a century since, San Ramon has remained a rebellious place.

Over the course of the 20th century, the land in San Ramon became increasingly concentrated in the hands of 14 families with extensive coffee and cattle estates. Once the heartland of the indigenous community of Central Nicaragua, historians described San Ramon as the granary of Central America due to the high yields of corn, wild rice and red beans. The expansion of coffee haciendas and cattle ranches, however, pushed these traditional forms of agriculture into the periphery of the latifundios and led to both the marginalization and semi-proletarianization of the indigenous communities (Williams, 1986). According to historians of the Sandinista Revolution, the land

concentration in the hands of coffee and cattle latifundios led to a powerful peasant consciousness of their exploitation at the hands of the land-owners. In the 1960s, the rebellious villages of El Horno and Yucul in the municipality of San Ramon produced the first recruits into the Sandinista cause led by Carlos Fonseca Amador (founder of the FSLN). It was his efforts to organize a peasant revolutionary column that led to the guerrilla war against the Somoza dictatorship in the mountains of Pancasan in 1967. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, San Ramon served as a source of support, a recruiting ground and a battleground of the Sandinista's prolonged guerrilla war that resulted in the toppling of the Somoza regime and the institution of a revolutionary socialist government in 1979. The decade of war in the 1970s, the revolutionary insurrection in 1979, and the decade of agrarian reform and civil war in the 1980s left an indelible mark on the consciousness and composition of peasant organizations in the region. Indeed, as I demonstrate with an analysis of the post-1979 agrarian reform process, these social and spatial struggles created the conditions within which farmers engage with Fair Trade as a movement.

A. Stages of Agrarian Reform in Nicaragua

Nicaraguan agrarian reform has been the subject of numerous studies, many of which focus on the extensive post-revolutionary land reforms and rural development programs carried out by the FSLN between 1979-1990. Agrarian reform is customarily described by social scientists as a bundle of state policies and legal reforms that restructure land tenure and property rights to increase agricultural productivity and/or to

redistribute resources to benefit landless or land-poor social classes. The agrarian reform in Nicaragua progressed in three stages.

1. Stage 1: Revolution and the Formation of State-Run Farms

The first phase of the agrarian reform took place immediately following the July 19, 1979, insurrection that toppled the Somoza dictatorship. Ideologically, the FSLN-led agrarian reform sought to eradicate the remaining vestiges of the Somoza legacy by reclaiming lands concentrated in the hands of the Somoza family, the National Guard and their allied enterprises. In the third decree of the revolutionary state, the FSLN leadership ordered the confiscation of 2,000 modern agro-export properties owned directly or indirectly by the Somoza dynasty (primarily cotton, sugar cane estates on the Pacific Coast) while assuring private property-owners throughout the country that the integrity of their property claims would be respected under the new government. The state transferred roughly 525,000 hectares of state-run cotton, cattle and coffee haciendas as well as roughly 1.2 million hectares to tenant farmers who spontaneously occupied lands held by the Somoza family following the popular insurrection.

The agrarian reform transformed the coffee sector dramatically. Before the revolution, an estimated 15 different private coffee export houses existed in Nicaragua with five major exporters controlling two-thirds of the market (Kaimowitz, 1980; cited in Enriquez, 1991: 62). After the reforms the coffee sector was restructured around a single marketing board called the Empresa Nicaraguense de Cafe S.A., or ENCAFE. With the formation of ENCAFE, the state began to oversee the organization of production, financing and marketing of coffee in the reformed sector. Under ENCAFE the total area

of peasant coffee production grew more than two fold from 1978 to 1988 from 12,036 hectares to 29,215 hectares. In many respects, ENCAFE was the precursor to the current Fair Trade cooperatives in Nicaragua.

The original design of the FSLN's agricultural development policy did not include restructuring of property relations in favor of small-scale peasant agriculture. This was partly due to concern about radically changing the economic environment in the midst of a post-insurrectionary economic crisis, but also because of the long-term ambitions of FSLN leadership to modernize agriculture in the agro-export model. Committed to the notion that the modern agro-export production was central to the development of the revolutionary state, and given the centrality of coffee exports and tremendous growth in cotton exports over the 1960s and 1970s, the government turned these agro-industries into state-run farms to generate revenue for state programs of reconstruction. They named the state farms the *Area Propiedad del Pueblo* (APP) - the Peoples Property Area - symbolizing the public character of the sector and its role in revolutionizing the country. This early FSLN agricultural development strategy emphasized the modernization of agriculture rooted in technological improvements and improved labor conditions. However, the formation of state farms also enabled, for the first time, the formation of freely elected agricultural unions. The popular organization, the Association of Rural Workers (ATC), was formed in 1978, prior to the revolution, to represent farm workers and part-time farm workers. With their support, the APP would serve as a crucial site for programs to improve the conditions of permanent and seasonal farm workers.

In San Ramon, the state formed seven state-run farms on 21 large properties employing some 2,000 permanent and 1,250 seasonal workers. Eighteen of the properties were coffee estates. The key reasons for the heavy emphasis on state-run farms in San Ramon was that there were numerous Somoza supporters that owned property in the municipality, including Anastasio Somoza's cousin, Jose Somoza, who owned the hacienda San Antonio de Upa, a 2000 hectare coffee estate. The high concentration of coffee estates in the municipality, their ownership by only 14 elite families, and their geographic proximity to major roads made San Ramon a key site for experimentation with the state-run farms. By 1990, sixty-two percent of the farm lands redistributed in San Ramon were administrated by the state as Area Propiedad del Pueblo (APP). Permanent and seasonal coffee workers in the municipality of San Ramon in 1990 made up roughly 90 percent of the active work force in the coffee sector. By maintaining the plantation model of coffee production, the FSLN's policies of creating the APP exploited the existing class landscape of permanent and seasonal rural labor to control production. That is to say that even as pathways were opened to peasant coffee farming in the municipality to gain access to Fair Trade markets, the number of peasant coffee farmers and cooperatives that produced coffee in San Ramon paled in comparison with the sheer number of *landless* workers then and today.

2. Stage 2: The Formation of the Cooperative Movement

The second stage of the agrarian reform (1981-1990), led to the formation of the peasant-led cooperative movement. Even after the appropriation of the Somoza dynasty properties and the formation of state-run farms (APP), less than 2 percent of the

Nicaraguan population still controlled 47 percent of the arable land in the country in 1981. Furthermore a great deal of the land reform expropriations took place on the Pacific Coast, leaving the land-tenure structure of the Central and Northern Mountainous regions of Matagalpa and Jinotega largely unchanged. Immediately after the insurrection, peasant farmers who had fought for years in the mountains to break the landholding structure of the latifundio system began to organize and apply pressure against the FSLN to deliver on its promises of “putting lands in the hands of those who work it.”

In 1981, small-scale peasants as well as medium sized farmers organized the Union Nacional de Agricultores y Ganadores (UNAG) - the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers - to lobby the revolutionary state for a broader agrarian reform policy. The UNAG filled a critical place in the mass organizational structure of the FSLN. Until 1981, small and medium sized producers had no formal representation within the FSLN. The UNAG served to mobilize the rural classes to demand land, access to affordable credit, fair prices, and technical assistance in both crop production and marketing. In the 1990s, the UNAG continued to provide this critical support as they helped to organize the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee.

With the formation of the UNAG, the power of the peasant classes came to bear on the revolutionary state.¹⁵ In response to growing pressure for land, the second phase of

¹⁵ Small and medium sized producers were originally left out of the FSLN's post-revolutionary equation. As Daniel Nunez, the president of the UNAG explained in an interview in 1991: “There were contradictions in the party's relationship with the peasants, not because this was policy but because many middle-level cadre, regional and municipal officials, didn't understand their reality, idiosyncrasies and cultural roots. They underestimated them, often seeing them as not receptive to the revolution. Peasants were called “bourgeois” or “petty bourgeois” because they had a piece of land and defended their own interests. Sandino left us a beautiful experience of building an alliance with the peasants. His Army for the Defense of National Sovereignty was made up of peasants and they were the ones who accompanied him in his struggles against US intervention. Beyond this, the Nicaraguan peasantry actively participated in all the struggles for our country's independence. FSLN functionaries ignored all this.” (Envio, 1991)

the agrarian reform began in 1981. That year, the governing junta passed an agrarian reform law that called for the expropriation of abandoned or idle lands larger than 350 hectares on the Pacific Coast (where cotton and sugar cane predominated) and 700 hectares elsewhere in the country, largely to the benefit of peasant farmers. Through this law, the state began to distribute land to: (1) tenant farmers and cooperatives spontaneously occupying and working lands in the years prior to the law's passage; (2) peasant farmers with insufficient lands, who agreed to organize into cooperatives; (3) individual farmers and their extended families, particularly heroes and martyrs in the war of liberation; and (4) new state-run farms (APP) elsewhere in the country.

One critical aspect of this agrarian reform law was the emphasis it placed on the formation of agricultural cooperatives. In response to the new law the state and cooperative movement evolved three models of cooperatives: (1) agricultural collectives; (2) credit and service cooperatives; and (3) shared-tenancy cooperatives, referred to as *surco muerto* or "dead furrow" cooperatives. The agricultural collectives organized workers and peasants without sufficient land and organized labor, land and capital in one organization. According to the general strategy for agricultural cooperatives in 1982, collectives were seen as the principle means for creating equality in the countryside and increasing productivity. The credit and service cooperatives organized individual farmers with private properties so that they would have access to credit, technical assistance and markets facilitated through the state. By 1989, these credit and service cooperatives would predominate in Nicaragua. The third, shared-tenancy model would organize

workers and peasants in collectively owned properties but would enable areas for shared production and areas for individual production divided by a “dead furrow.”

The revolutionary agrarian reform and the formation of cooperatives to benefit peasant farmers in Nicaragua proceeded slowly following the popular insurrection in 1979. In part, scholars have argued that this inertia could be attributed to reluctance among the FLSN leadership to transfer lands to peasants who might be ambivalent toward their long-term political goals. The urgency to move the agrarian reform forward came from an unlikely source: counterrevolutionaries funded by the United States government, known as the “Contra.” Contra attacks were increasing, particularly in the Central and Northern regions of the country where agrarian reform had not yet achieved the transformative effect experienced in the Pacific region. Contra harassment and targeted attacks in the coffee producing regions of Matagalpa and Jinotega terrorized the local population. As the war escalated and disaffected peasant recruits swelled the ranks of the Contra, the demands by pro-Sandinista rural workers and peasants for land became too critical to ignore. Starting in 1983, the Nicaraguan state devised a strategy to strengthen the support of peasant farmers against the Contra by forming cooperatives and providing legal titles to individual farmers. In most cases, gaining access to land after 1984 came with commitments by reform beneficiaries to join the military reserves in the mountains against the growing Contra forces, or form civil defense units to protect their communities against attack.¹⁶ The Contra war proved most violent and destructive in the Northern and Central regions of Nicaragua where coffee production was prevalent. In

¹⁶ This contingency, in short, pitted agrarian reform beneficiaries against the peasantry organized by the Contra and established as a subtext of Sandinista-Contra civil war in the mountains a fight over access to land.

1984, the government registered 300 auto-defense cooperatives in the war zone with more than 8,000 peasants filling their ranks. In return for land, reform beneficiaries also had to fight in the army reserves. Over the next seven years (1983-1990), the revolutionary state transferred land from state-run farms (APP) to agricultural cooperatives made up of workers and peasant farmers.

By 1990, the revolutionary state had redistributed 437,552 hectares of land to 37,077 families organized into cooperatives, and 466,408 hectares of land to 21,738 individual farmers. Over this period, landholdings held by the elite were reduced from 36% to 6.4% of the total arable land in the country. In total, during the period of 1981-1990, it is estimated that the revolutionary state redistributed a total of nearly 2.5 million hectares of arable land to 120,000 peasant farmers and worker families when calculating for both land transfers to cooperatives and the titling of spontaneously occupied tenant lands (CIERA, 1989).

In San Ramon, the second stage of agrarian reform transformed the agrarian landscape from one dominated by large latifundios owned by the elite to a mixture of state-run farms and cooperatives. Between 1981 and 1990, the state redistributed 38 percent of the arable land in the municipality to farm workers and formed 28 agricultural cooperatives made up of 3,000 farming families on roughly 8,000 hectares of land. The vast majority of land reform beneficiaries in San Ramon were workers on the coffee and cattle farms in the municipality. Another contingent was comprised of resettled communities from the war torn regions in the North. For many of my informants, the agrarian reform was the first time that they or anyone in their family had gained access to

land. Telling a story I often heard echoed by other coffee farmers in San Ramon, a 61 year old man explained:

All of us were hacienda workers, we worked for a rich man. I remember that in the hacienda we were seven or eight *patilleros* (mill workers) working to wash 150,000 pounds of coffee. With Chago (another coop member) we'd grab a tortilla in the morning and just get to it. The (hacienda owner) would watch you where you were working, with one hand eating and the other washing coffee until three in the afternoon and it still wouldn't be finished. It's sad to work for a rich man. A hacienda owner. We have been working this land on our own for 22 years. Twenty-two years not working for a rich man. (M.D. - April 6, 2007)

A younger member from the same cooperative described the hacienda owner as "stealing buckets of sweat" from him, his father and mother as they pruned the coffee, and hauled coffee and fertilizer on their backs, among many other tasks (R.D. April, 3, 2007).

Another informant, describing his experience as a member of another coffee producing cooperative explained that "before there was a *patron* (landowner) and we worked as salaried employees. We were like slaves. In the time of Somoza, we weren't seen the way we are today as members of the cooperative. We worked like we had a yoke around our necks." (S.S. - March, 26, 2007) In the words of a coffee farmer and community leader in San Ramon, "The agrarian reform broke our chains and gave us this little piece of land" (S.B. - April 3, 2007). For reform beneficiaries in San Ramon, gaining and maintaining access to land meant more than a future livelihood. It also represented a break from past experiences of exploitation and struggle as landless farm workers. Therefore the struggle over land in San Ramon, was critical because it triggered a shift in the consciousness of farm workers who became owners of the means of production. "We organized ourselves to work collectively, and achieved what today we will call a cooperative" (S.S. - March 26, 2007).

According to my informants the first land reform cooperative in San Ramon was created in 1979 in Yucul. This cooperative, made up of 25 members, was named after the journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro and occupied 125 hectares of land spontaneously following the insurrection and title was granted two years latter. In interviews with members of this cooperative, they explained that they provided critical assistance to guerrilla fighters throughout the late 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, one informant claimed that, even in the time of Somoza, he and 20 other farmers had worked lands in common and clandestinely considered themselves a cooperative since the early 1960s. The second land transfer took place in 1981 and benefited another group of historic collaborators of the Sandinista Revolution from El Horno. Named after the fallen youth, Silvio Mayorga, who died fighting with Carlos Fonseca in Pancasan in 1967, this cooperative solicited lands from the government following the insurrection. Benefiting 30 families, the state transferred 420 hectares of land from the cattle and coffee hacienda, La Algobia, in the east of the municipality. The third land transfer occurred in the north of the municipality in 1983, to a cooperative, Augusto Cesar Sandino, benefiting more than 80 families in a 700 hectare property.

Land transfers in the municipality were not simply “hand outs” to farmers and workers. Most farmers I interviewed explained that they delivered their demands to the revolutionary state. In one example, a farmer described going to Managua to protest the government’s lack of progress in land reform to the benefit of farm workers and peasants in the Matagalpa region.

We took the struggle for land to Managua (the capital). (The Sandinista revolution) was a revolution to give the land to those who needed it and to those

who would work it. We went to reclaim the land we were working. I remember the poor women that went with us from (our community in San Ramon) and we all marched from the El Dorado neighborhood to the Plaza Carlos Fonseca (in Managua). It was a very long march, and the poor women burning and busting their plastic sandals on the hot pavement of Managua. We all came, frying at the ankles (from the heat), to reclaim the land from the government who was not turning over the land. Because they said they would give us the land if the landowners left the properties and didn't return. (S.B - April, 3, 2007)

Like elsewhere, the agrarian reform in San Ramon did not pick up steam until 1984 when the revolutionary state changed its policies to address the urgent need to form civil defense units in San Ramon and to recruit militia and military soldiers in the region to protect the coffee harvest and patrol the mountains for Contra. San Ramon was located on the eastern frontier of the war, in the heart of coffee country. Because San Ramon was located in the frontier zone of the civil war, its population both experienced attacks by the insurgency and played a significant role in military service. According to one of my informants who worked with the UNAG during this period, the state formed 17 auto-defense cooperatives in San Ramon between 1984 and 1986. Eight of these cooperatives were formed on coffee haciendas previously managed through the APP. Six of these cooperatives were in my research sample and four were the founding members of the Fair Trade cooperative in San Ramon.

The need for civil defense in the municipality was acute. Contra attacks of cooperatives and state-run farms in San Ramon and the surrounding municipalities became a part of everyday life. A member from a cooperative formed in 1986 reflected on this period and the strategy of the Contra.

They'd look for points of opportunity here like the APP (state farms) and the cooperatives formed after the revolution. They'd burn down the facilities of the APP, destroy the vehicles, and they'd kill people, even down to children. So the

situation (by 1984) was very difficult. I can tell you from wounds on my own body (*carne propia*). It was seven years of war that passed over me. I understand all of that history. (A.F. March 23, 2007)

With mounting pressure by the Contra in San Ramon and the surrounding municipalities, the state began to ramp up the land transfers, first by shifting land held in the state-run farms to cooperatives and then by purchasing abandoned properties from hacienda owners in the municipality that fled to the United States. From 1984 to 1990, all of the cooperatives formed in San Ramon were created in a response to both the pressure of the counterrevolutionaries and the need to recruit reservists.

As part of an accelerated land transfer program starting in 1984 in San Ramon, beneficiaries agreed to serve in the military reserves for four month rotations, patrolling the mountains or providing security on the state-run farms (APP) that were frequently targeted by Contra insurgent forces. "When we received the land, we also received rifles and with them we defended our land and our country," explained a cooperative leader and coffee farmer (S.B. April 3, 2007). The conjuncture of the agrarian reform and the war produced strong sentiments among the cooperative members I interviewed regarding their relationship to the land.

The majority of us fought in the war. Some would stay behind and struggle on the farm and others of us would go to fight in defense of our people against the enemy in the mountains. This is history. That some of us would defend the lands here on our terrain and others would defend it out there in the mountains so that those people (the Contra) would not come and sabotage us. Its true, some of us fought in the war of liberation and had experience in the mountains. Most of us were innocent kids. We didn't know what we were fighting for. But, when you got to the front and were caught in battle, you knew exactly what you were fighting for. Defending your family. Defending the country. Defending the land. Because you realize that it is the land that brings benefits to the peasants. From the land we eat. From the land we all live. (S.S. March 26, 2007)

The description of the effects of the war on this farmer's understanding of his relationship to the land illustrates how the war and agrarian reform produced firm commitments to protecting their land claims with their lives. Moreover, through their service as soldiers, agrarian reform beneficiaries I interviewed in San Ramon also came to see their fight as part of a larger struggle for land, the fight for the country and the revolution. As his statement indicates, his understanding of the spatiality of the struggle was such that the war and the agrarian reform became enveloped into one imaginary. Returning to the quote, he stated "some of us would defend the lands here on our terrain (the cooperative)," ostensibly by making the land productive, "and others would defend it out there in the mountains" as soldiers in the war.

The idea of "defending the land" served as a key source of solidarity among cooperative members in San Ramon and would also prove to be one of the core ways that farmers understood the role of Fair Trade in their lives (as Inez depicted earlier in the chapter). But, the relationship between the agrarian reform and the war pushed beneficiaries in San Ramon in one of two directions, explained a cooperative leader from San Ramon. It either generated strong solidarities among reform beneficiaries working in the cooperatives and a love for the land, or it led to attrition. According to my informants, more than 35 percent of the members of the cooperatives left during the war. This was "the tension of the war," the cooperative leader explained.

If you were a part of a cooperative you had responsibilities. If you were part of a cooperative you had to mobilize for the war. It was a requirement. Four months you would go to the war zone as a member of the reserves. And then you would be relieved by another member of the cooperative. So some members who were sent to the front said when they returned? Maybe it'd be best that I don't stay part of the cooperative. Maybe I should leave and hide so I don't have to return there

(to the front). ‘ So they’d come back from the war to work the land or to pick the coffee and they’d just disappear. Just leave the cooperative altogether. But, for the rest of us, when you returned you made a promise to help the families of the mobilized who were left behind in the cooperative. We were all a unit. You had to help all the families economically. These were the hardest promises to keep. Its not the same to tell someone that you are going to work until whatever hour. You had responsibilities to the families and then you have to leave again for the war. These responsibilities weren’t based on hours or minutes. There wasn’t even time to sleep. So many in the cooperatives could not fulfill these demands and so they left. (A.G. - December 16, 2006)

The war was devastating to the cooperatives both productively and psychologically. A cooperative organizer from the UNAG in Matagalpa described how the trauma of war made it extremely difficult to organize production, particularly on coffee cooperatives.

The cooperatives were defensive units too. The whole world was armed. The problem we faced as organizers was that the majority of the cooperative members (from the agrarian reform) were taken to the war. The wives and children were the only ones left behind. The men would leave for three, four months at a time. Ten to fifteen members at a time would go to the war. We’d have trouble planning for production. In the harvest we’d have to pull people from elsewhere, and groups of women went to pick coffee. The men would return. But, of course the dead would return too. This debilitated the cooperative movement. Dead reservists would return to the cooperative. Young men dead. It broke the spirits of the cooperative movement. (J.P. - March 13, 2007)

According to second interview I carried out with an official from the UNAG Matagalpa, an estimated 5,000 agrarian reform beneficiaries would perish either as military targets or as reservist soldiers in the Sandinista / Contra war. The targeted attacks had a tremendous effect on my informants’ understanding of the cooperative movement.

The first time that I ever heard about the idea of the cooperative movement was when I was 12 years old. I heard my family talking about 19 people who were killed by the Contra in San Juan de Rio Coco (in the province of Madriz). I remember my oldest brother explaining that they were all members of a coffee cooperative. (S.M. - November 3, 2006)

The Contra counterrevolutionaries specifically targeted state farms and facilities in the coffee producing region and often specifically attacked coffee producing cooperatives and state-run farms (APP). As Enriquez wrote in *Harvesting Change* (1991: 119), “(b)ecause over 50 percent of Nicaragua’s foreign exchange earnings have traditionally come from coffee and cotton exports, the attacks threatened Nicaragua’s economic lifeline” (1991: 119). Enriquez elaborated on the military strategy of the Contra forces, particularly in the coffee producing region.

From the beginning they were designed to harass army and militia units, as typical of guerrilla warfare, but they also aimed at terrorizing the civilian population into opposing the Sandinistas. Fear of being attacked by the Contra sometimes led people to decide not to work the harvests. This was particularly the case for the coffee harvest in the country’s north-central region. Coffee cultivation extended (from Matagalpa) all the way to the Cordillera de Dipilto, which marks the border between Nicaragua and Honduras. Contra incursions from Honduras constantly passed through this area. The eastern border of the coffee producing region...was also subject to frequent attack by the Contra forces. And within the heart of the coffee region, there was pockets of intense Contra activity. (1991: 118)

The cooperative Silvio Mayorga which I described above, was one of the sites attacked by the Contra, and the cooperative was under constant surveillance. One of the original female members of the cooperative who is now the president explained:

You have to understand, we were all historic collaborators (with the FSLN in the 1970s). And in (the mid-1980s) the Contra were all around. We were very frightened because we feared they’d come looking for us. We were remote and had no protection but our tools and a few guns. I remember we had to bury all of the documents and registry of the cooperative in the ground because the Contra were searching for the leaders. If they found us, they’d kill us for sure. And they did. They came through the property one night and shot one of our members. (...) By 1990 we lost almost all of the founding members. Either they left for the war and never came back or they fled out of fear. It is the wives and children who now make up the cooperative and together we work the land.
(J.D. - April 2, 2007)

Although the agrarian reform and gaining access to land was the turning point in the lives of many of my informants, maintaining those gains proved a great challenge. Many reform beneficiaries left the cooperatives never to come back, sometimes paying the ultimate price with their lives, and in other cases, forfeiting their right to the land out of fear or a desire for a better life elsewhere. As the description of the history of the cooperative Augusto Cesar Sandino by its current president illustrates, the trajectories of agrarian reform cooperatives were uneven.

In the final years of the 1970s there was pressure for the land against the owner of the property La Pacayona. The National Guard (under Somoza) carried out a massacre of workers on the property and 3 people were killed and more wounded. One of the women, a wife of one of the fallen, took the gun of her husband and killed one of the Guardsmen. The revolution and agrarian reform recognized our struggle and gave title to the land to 88 members. In the first years of the 1990s we changed the name of the cooperative to 12 de Marzo following a corruption charge against the president at that time. A few years later we changed the name of the cooperative again to Francisco Javier Saenz in memory of the president of the UNAG who died during an auto accident. We started the 1990s with 110 members but today we only have 68 between the founders and new entrants. From the first land we received in the agrarian reform, only 70 hectares remains with the members of the cooperative and the rest has been sold. We have current members who purchased the land originally distributed during the agrarian reform. Some individual properties have passed through four different hands. (A.S. - March 18, 2007)

This history of Augusto Cesar Sandino demonstrates that even when cooperatives formed out of solidarities based in histories of struggle, it did not mean that they necessarily held together over time. Rather than painting the portrait of cooperatives as wholly good, many of my informants described considerable problems within their cooperatives both currently and historically. As my informant described above, problems of corruption, land sales and attrition were not uncommon among the cooperatives. Attrition from the

cooperatives in the 1980s and 1990s led to a significant disarticulation of the agrarian reform process.

However, through the solidarities formed through the trauma of war, many cooperatives found strength. Indeed, many of the local cooperatives bear the names of fallen youth combatants, family members and heroes in the struggle for land. In an interview with Paul Rice, CEO of TransFair USA and long time volunteer with the land reform office in Nicaragua, he explained that he believed the violence of the war actually had the inverse effect, leading to strong solidarities among coffee producing cooperatives.

The process of cooperative development in (other parts of Nicaragua) did not face the same threat as in the North and Central regions of the country. My sense is that the cooperative movement in areas that the war did not directly effect, pretty much folded. But the coops in the flames of the war, *that* is where the strongest coops are - the coffee producing regions. (Paul Rice - May 24, 2006)

My research in San Ramon in many ways supported Rice's hypothesis. There were high rates of attrition from the cooperatives during and after the war, but among the cooperative members who stayed, their commitment to protecting the land and maintaining the cooperative was only reinforced by their shared experience of war. In an interview with the current president of the Fair Trade cooperative, he explained that among members of the cooperatives that formed as auto-defense units, there was a sense of camaraderie forged through the trials of war. The cooperative members supported one another and each others' families, making the cooperatives and the lands they occupied into a community. At an emotional point in our interview which explored, in detail, many of the trials faced by different cooperatives in the region, he explained that the local cooperatives themselves, in the years following the war, functioned like nests to catch

soldiers and their families with severe psychological stress caused by years of fighting.

“Unlike the veterans elsewhere, such as the United States,” he explained, “these soldiers had nowhere to turn. The government didn’t help them. The local cooperatives and the cooperative movement caught them and helped them get back on their feet.”

3. Stage 3: Counter-Agrarian Reform and the Rise of Cooperative Unionism

The third stage of the agrarian reform (1990-1996) took place in the years following the civil war and after the Sandinistas lost power. In 1990, as the Contra war came to a close, the agrarian reform process was still not yet concluded. Often described as a counter-reform since it was carried out by the UNO party which instituted structural adjustment policies, the third phase of agrarian reform actually began through the peace accords and the exchange of power from the FSLN to the UNO. In efforts to appease the Contra, demobilized soldiers from the militias and military, the rural labor unions on the APP farms, and individuals seeking formal land titles from 1990-1996, the state led by the UNO party, redistributed an additional 26,544 hectares to 1,545 families organized into cooperatives and 464,505 hectares to 23,928 individuals. The UNO government also transferred the formal title of 359,354 hectares of land in cooperatives to 22,282 individuals. In these respects the UNO party extended the legacy of the agrarian reform in redistributing lands to the rural poor. Critics of the Chamorro administration’s agrarian reform policy, however, have called it a “counter-agrarian reform” that undermined the

reform sector, particularly cooperatives, by reducing their access to affordable credit and supporting the return of much of the redistributed lands during the 1980s to the previous landholding elite.

The UNO administration, in several powerful blows to the agrarian reform sector, supported the re-appropriation of properties by many repatriating elites and privatized the national bank which later raised interest rates and discriminated against peasants.

According to a review of the counter-reform process, 90 percent of properties held in common by agricultural cooperatives were decollectivized by their peasant members in 1994 and many were selling off those parcels due to: a lack of desire to work collectively, insecurity regarding the land title, mounting debts to banks, opportunism, and a loss of state support (Envio, 1996). By 1996, more than 50 percent of the agricultural cooperatives initiated during the second phase of the agrarian reform had disappeared. Some 80 percent of the lands redistributed to cooperatives and individual farmers by the revolutionary state had passed out of their hands. These lands were either returned back to their previous owners, or onto a land sales market fueled by the desperate situation of farmers inflicted by the lack of access to credit, technical assistance, and favorable markets, as well as by the distaste of many farmers and workers who no longer wished to hold their properties collectively.

The process of counter-agrarian reform, however, was met with organized resistance by the cooperative movement. In 1990, on the eve of the transfer of power to the UNO party, the UNAG and FSLN representatives passed a law of cooperatives that facilitated the formation of the federation of cooperatives (FENACOOOP) and unions of

cooperatives (UCAs) in Nicaragua that could organize multi-tiered economic enterprises. In response to this new law, agrarian reform cooperatives associated with the FSLN began to form unions as a bulkhead against the disarticulation of the agrarian reform process. Municipal and regional UNAG leaders shouldered an enormous task of legalizing the land of agrarian reform beneficiaries in the face of the power of repatriating elites. In the coffee producing regions, this enabled cooperatives to gain legal title but also to organize the production and marketing of coffee collectively. The UNAG and UCAs in the coffee producing regions of Matagalpa, Jinotega, Esteli, and Nuevo Segovia served as the key nodes in the growing Fair Trade coffee network, linking agrarian reform beneficiaries who produced coffee with Fair Trade importers expanding the market for Fair Trade Certified coffee in Europe and the United States.

When the FSLN lost the elections in 1990, San Ramon once again became a space of contentious land struggles. Repatriating elite attempted to reclaim their previously sold or confiscated properties, cooperatives disarticulated under internal and external pressures, and the neoliberal government under structural adjustment cut back rural development assistance and abandoned the fledgling reform sector and cooperative movement. "When we lost the elections to Dona Violeta, the cooperative movement was in total disarray. We didn't have legal papers so we had to run...because they could dismantle our cooperatives if all of the papers weren't transmitted to the Ministry of Labor," said a cooperative organizer from the UNAG Matagalpa, noting the urgency and threat posed by the political transition in 1990. According to a study by the Union of Farmers and Ranchers in Matagalpa (UNAG), by 1996 only 21 of the 38 cooperatives in

San Ramon remained active and many of the remaining cooperatives struggled with legal control over the properties, attrition, a lack of financing, pressure from returning owners or internal pressure to sell the land. Local cooperative movement organizers from the UNAG that I interviewed stated that less than 50 percent of the agrarian reform beneficiaries were still members the cooperatives in 1996 and many of their property titles remained in legal dispute between the state, ex-landowners, cooperatives and additional claimants such as individual members, coop presidents, and FSLN party members throughout the 1990s.

In San Ramon, as many of the cooperatives formed during the agrarian reform fell apart, small pieces of the agrarian reform legacy slipped away from peasant landholders. The response from the few remaining strong cooperatives in the municipality was to band together to challenge the incursion of ex-land-owners, predatory lenders and land speculators "with the only things we had, our machetes, our people and our politicians" (J.D. April 2, 2007). In 1992, in the midst of what cooperative leaders in San Ramon called the disarticulation of the agrarian reform, four cooperatives representing roughly 120 members met to discuss the possibility of forming a Union of Agricultural Cooperatives (UCA) as a secondary level organizations to help ease the pressure against the cooperative movement. The rationale for forming the UCA was to defend the land gained during the agrarian reform and to helped the reformed sector to get the resources necessary to produce and market their product. The cooperatives were facing tremendous challenges in the early 1990s. In their eyes, the state, which previously supported the cooperative movement had turned against the cooperatives. As one of the founders of the

union described in her testimony to the members of the union at their 15 year anniversary in 2007:

We had lost our state father (papa estado). There was no financing. We were discriminated against by both the national and private banks. There was pressure for the land. There were invasions, sales, and the counter agrarian reform provoked the dismantling of the cooperatives. We were excluded from the policy-making of the private businessmen. We were only seen and understood as political instruments and not as economic subjects. We had organizations but they were islands, each of us to our own side. There was no unified organization. So in 1992 we formed the UCA with the objective of defending the land by various methods. We defended the land by force using rifles, our machetes. We fought for it. We legalized our land titles. We legalized our cooperatives. We defended our land in this way. (B.M. - April 18, 2007)

In interviews with officials and farmers affiliated with the UCA San Ramon, they described the development of the organization in terms of two phases directly associated with the defense of property claims, gaining access to credit and gaining access to coffee markets. Yet, even though the UCA San Ramon would later get access to Fair Trade markets and become one of the largest suppliers of Fair Trade Certified coffee in Nicaragua, it was the first of these concerns, the defense of property claims that led to the UCA San Ramon's formation. Again this history shaped the way farmers engage with Fair Trade as a movement.

We started the UCA without knowing where we were going. I was in San Ramon following the war and I reunited for the first time with all of my family because my brothers were fighting in all parts of the country. We didn't know what the ends of the UCA would be. But we knew the means. We wouldn't let the land be taken from the people neither for pressure from the bourgeoisie that was returning from Miami, nor the poor for economic pressures. This was the foundation and this was the vision and we've gone further from there. (P.H. - March 17, 2007)

As repatriating elite returned to the region in 1990-1991, they applied legal and physical pressure on the agrarian reform beneficiaries in the municipality. The UCA San Ramon

served as a bulwark against both legal and physical aggression. The first need of the cooperatives was to assess and attain legal control over their land. This process was complicated for cooperative members, many of whom were illiterate or lacked formal education. As one of the founders of the UCA explained:

The new government (led by the UNO Party) searched for the weakest part of the peasantry. What was weak for us was our understanding of documents. We were poorly documented when it came to the land. In general we in the countryside didn't have formal education. We thought about the land and how to work it. We thought about how to make it productive but we didn't think about how to have it legally. So for that lack of care, the government in that time, almost took our land away. So we thought, in the case of documentation, it would be good to work together. Not (just organizing) one cooperative or two cooperatives to search for the right documentation. Rather many cooperatives from San Ramon should find a lawyer quickly and not waste time. That way the ex-landowners couldn't get the properties back. Five cooperatives formed the UCA San Ramon to hire a lawyer who could carry out the legal part of each cooperative. (S.S. - March, 26, 2007)

But it was not only the legal opposition that farmers faced. Armed opposition by the repatriating elite also sought to run cooperative members off the land. In the case of five different cooperatives where I conducted interviews (including 3 of the founding cooperatives of the UCA), informants described how ex-landowners hired armed groups to displace cooperatives from the contested properties resulting in the murder of several Union members. A cooperative member explained:

In 1991, the ex-owner and his men came to try and take our land. They came into the property shooting, but we were ready for them and held positions above the entrance. They came toward the property and in the fight they killed one of our members. But then we turned them around and they never came back. Since then the Union has helped us to secure legal title to this property. Those were hard times. (S.M. - November 26, 2006)

The UCA San Ramon in this period also served as a base of armed support against land invasions by the repatriating elite.

The defense of property meant, not only working to organize the legal documents because there was a lot of pressure here in San Ramon to return the land to the old owners. So what was the idea at that time? It was to search for legal documentation and to provide pressure through groups of people, through groups of cooperative members who would mobilize and go to a cooperative where there were armed groups trying to intervene. We, collectively, would try to get (the armed groups) off of the property. To turn them away. You have to understand, there were peasants who had occupied these lands since 1982. Eight years of living and bringing up their families on their land. And they had been workers on those properties for much longer than that. There was no way we could let that land pass back into the hands of the old owners. They had every right to those lands. We would return the pressure of the ex-landowners with our own power. We would provide the legal opposition and joined together to go and support, to back up the peasant who was being displaced. This is the history of the defense of the land. There wasn't a penny between us. There was no other help. Nothing more than backing each other up to legalize and protect the land. Whenever (the ex-landowners) touched one of (the cooperatives) we were there. We would all be ready to defend. (A.G. - December 16, 2006)

Building on the social experience of the civil war years, it is clear that the formation of the UCA San Ramon was formed as both a means to legally and physically defend property claims served to reinforce the strong sentiments of farmers toward the land. As the informant described above, the solidarity of cooperative members to support one another in defense of land claims was not defined in terms of financial support, but by necessity and by a sense of moral obligation to help people who they believed had a right to the land.

Testimonies from members of four cooperatives that founded the UCA San Ramon illustrate how Fair Trade when refracted through their their understanding of the history of agrarian struggle takes on new meaning. Like the previously described cooperatives created during the agrarian reform, each traveled through different trajectories of development. In each, the members of these four cooperatives served both as production units and military units during the civil war. Moreover, for 15 years each of these

cooperatives have supplied coffee to the Fair Trade market. The testimonies from these cooperatives illustrate the similarities and differences of their experiences as well as to provide further illustration of how they perceive their engagement with Fair Trade.

The founders of the cooperative Simon Bolivar were all rural workers that were obliged to work as salaried employees. In 1985 the state purchased the hacienda La Alemania from Walter Framberg and we took possession of the area in 1986. At the time we didn't know about the cooperative movement. We started with 33 members. In 1986 we confronted a lot of difficulties including the reality that the majority of our members and their children had to mobilize for the war. Today our cooperative is made up of 17 original members and 12 new members, primarily the children of existing members. Since 1993 we've sold our coffee as Fair Trade.

The cooperative Denis Gutierrez Cardoza organized in 1986 with an agrarian reform title comprised of 155 hectares. We formed the cooperative with 21 members. To be a member of the cooperative one had to be disposed to go to the war front. In the 1980s the majority of the members were mobilized to different regions of the country and some died in the fighting. At first we received financing for production from the Development Bank but in the 1990s, this bank disappeared and no one would give us financing. In its place we organized a Union of Cooperatives with our comrades from Simon Bolivar, Danilo Gonzales and Sixto Sanchez. In the 1990s there was a conflict with the ex-owner of the property who wanted to take the property from us, but the cooperative won the legal battle and now have formal title to the land. Today we are 16 members, 14 men and 2 women. 42 hectares of the land in the cooperative is devoted to coffee production and 20 percent of our harvest goes to Fair Trade.

Danilo Gonzales (the cooperative) was born in September 1986 with 80 members. When the previous owners abandoned the hacienda in the early 1980s the leaders of the community mobilized the people so they themselves could cultivate their own land in a sustainable manner. The process of gaining title to the land was made possible by the government through the agrarian reform in 1987. Many of us were mobilized for the war. The cooperative began with various objectives. To fight so that every one of the peasants could have their little piece of land to cultivate food and to protect the coffee in production once the landowners left. The membership of the cooperative has reached an equilibrium at 55 members (22 women and 33 men). Members in our cooperative sell coffee as Fair Trade and some of our members have achieved organic certification.

The cooperative Sixto Sanchez formed in 1986 with 29 members in possession of 122 hectares of land. Before, we worked as salaried employees on this estate for the patron Enrique Eliu. Between 1987 and 1990 we didn't have sufficient financing and we suffered. But from 1990 until now, we've seen an advancement by way of our solidarity with other cooperatives in San Ramon. Some members left the cooperative voluntarily and today we have 21 members. In all these years we have not even given up a flea of land (*ni una pulga de tierra*). The land we own is the patrimony of the revolution and the cooperative movement led by the UNAG. Here we need to to maintain and care for this land as we had in the revolutionary process and the defense. In the time of Somoza there wasn't one poor person who had land. There wasn't cooperatives, nor an UNAG. Today exists a Sandinista, an UNAG, a Union of Cooperatives, and a revolutionary movement around which we can all organize. Through our organizations and with our high quality coffee that we sell to Fair Trade, we have achieved a school and a cooperative center. The profits from Fair Trade support our food production and other educational and social services.

Like Inez's testimony at the Empowering Alternative Conference in 2005, Fair Trade emerges in the end of each testimony as an extension of their agrarian struggle. What each highlighted was gaining access to the land, service in the war, the issues of maintaining cooperative membership, the loss of state assistance after 1990, the fight against ex-landowners, the formation of higher levels of organization and only then getting access to Fair Trade markets.

IV. The Legacy of Agrarian Reform and the Emergence of Fair Trade

The (Fair Trade cooperative) is extending the legacy of the agrarian reform from the point of view that agrarian reform is about the transformation of social relations in the countryside and it is not simply a matter of distributing land. The agrarian reform is more than simply one action, but the concept of peasant transformation, to have the land, an agricultural enterprise...the birth of cooperativism. (P.H. - March 17, 2007)

The revolutionary agrarian reform process in Nicaragua set the stage for the emergence of Fair Trade. Fair Trade followed from the formation of the cooperative

movement in the war torn coffee regions and the difficulties faced by that nascent movement in the 1990s as the reform sector held together against the disarticulation of the agrarian reform. I will now briefly examine the role of each stage of the agrarian reform in catalyzing the formation of Fair Trade. In my review, I primarily focus on the second and third stages as they are most closely aligned with Fair Trade. However, the first stage of the agrarian reform, characterized by the formation of state-run farms and the nationalization of coffee agro-exports, also played an indirect role in the rise of Fair Trade.

As the leading quote by the cooperative leader in San Ramon highlights, the revolution in 1979 created opportunities to transform the agrarian structure. In the first stage the revolutionary state identified the coffee sector as vital to the economic growth of Nicaragua. The coffee sector provided revenues and represented a keystone in the state-controlled agro-export model developed by the FSLN. By nationalizing the coffee industry through ENCAFE in the first stage of the agrarian reform, this institution came to serve as the primary mechanism for exporting the first Fair Trade coffees to Europe and the United States. Moreover, as I explain later, as ENCAFE's role in the coffee sector diminished in the 1990s and was privatized, cooperative organizations purchased and used the facilities such as dry mills owned previously and operated by ENCAFE.

The creation of state-run farms such as APP coffee estates during the first stage may seem to have less bearing on the rise of Fair Trade in Nicaragua. The APP was a state-run coffee estate system employing vast numbers of permanent and seasonal labor, the vast majority of whom were landless. Throughout the period of agrarian reform, the

revolutionary state endorsed state-run farms in the coffee sector with the intention of organizing modern production units. As I described earlier, peasant farmers, through the UNAG, challenged the FSLN's focus on state-run farms by calling for a more extensive redistribution of lands that broke the previous landholding structure rather than mimicking it. Drawing on the history of Sandino's peasant cooperatives, the cooperative movement began to organize to win the transfer of state-run farms to peasants and workers. The legacy of the APP in the coffee producing regions is significant when one considers the uneven transformation of the agrarian social structure. While some peasants gained access to coffee producing lands in the 1980s and 1990s, permanent and seasonal workers continued to make up the vast majority of the labor in the coffee sector, even under the Sandinistas.

The development of Fair Trade in Nicaragua and elsewhere emphasized working in solidarity with the peasant cooperatives, not coffee estates such as the state-run farms in Nicaragua during the 1980s. As the Fair Trade movement took shape in the 1990s, this emphasis on working with peasant agrarian reform beneficiaries continued, becoming a key aspect of the Fair Trade standards which emphasized trade with democratically-run producer organizations of small-scale farmers. Yet, this emphasis on peasant coffee farmers rather than coffee estates, led Fair Trade to reinforce uneven development and class differentiation in the Nicaraguan countryside by assisting peasant farmers and excluding landless workers and peasants without access to land for cultivating coffee.

During the second stage of the agrarian reform, linkages with Fair Trade began to germinate. But those linkages were not originally commercial. In response to the

Contra's strategy to target coffee producer communities, agrarian reform cooperatives and state-run farms (APP), the revolutionary state devised several economic and military strategies that were directly linked to the agrarian reform process. First, as I previously described, the state formed agricultural cooperatives as civil defense units, particularly in the provinces of Matagalpa, Jinotega and Nuevo Segovia. This led to the transfer of coffee producing estates to peasant farmers who later gained access to Fair Trade markets. Second, due to major labor shortages for the coffee harvest created through the intimidation and fear produced by the Contra in the coffee producing region, the state called for the formation of a voluntary labor force populated by high school and university students from Nicaragua and international solidarity activists from North America and Europe. Enriquez estimated that in 1982/3, 15,000 Nicaraguan students participated in the the coffee harvest; in 1983/4 more than 17,000 students participated in the coffee harvest; and by 1984/5 some 20,000 students participated. Independently, the UNAG would also play a role in mobilizing local labor for the harvest in the region by calling on all agrarian reform beneficiaries and their families to join volunteer production brigades. From 1983-1986 the UNAG mobilized 4,000 peasant volunteers for the harvest.

Moreover, Enriquez claims, in 1983/4 some 2,000 foreign solidarity activists, 700 from North America, also joined harvesting brigades in the coffee region as witnesses to the Sandinista's rural development strategy and human rights violations caused by the war. These international brigades of coffee pickers came to represent the core of the Nicaraguan solidarity movement world-wide and serve as the foundation of solidarity for

the first exchanges of Fair Trade coffee from Nicaragua. Jaffee, in *Brewing Justice* (2007), reflects on how he became conscious of where his coffee came from during one such brigade in Nicaragua.

In 1985...I traveled to northern Nicaragua to pick coffee with a volunteer harvest brigade. I didn't drink much coffee then - just the occasional cup to get me through an all-nighter writing a college term paper - and I hadn't given a lot of thought to its origins. As it turns out, this wasn't a typical coffee harvest: we found ourselves in the very heart of the contra war zone, and during the four weeks we spent on the state-owned farm, two neighboring farms were attacked and several of their inhabitants killed by the U.S.-funded counterrevolutionary army. (Jaffee, 2007: 36)

It was also during this period that the Reagan Administration, as another counterrevolutionary strategy, called for an embargo of all U.S. imports from Nicaragua, including coffee. The Nicaraguan government and the UNAG began to form alliances with international solidarity organizations in support of the socialist agenda, and against the embargo.

Although at the time, the Fair Trade movement in the coffee sector was not yet formed in the United States, several individuals and companies began to sell Nicaraguan coffee in anti-imperialist solidarity with the Sandinista revolution. One of the first connections was made by Paul Katzeff of Thanksgiving Coffee Roasters from Fort Bragg, CA, who was then serving as the president of the Specialty Coffee Association of America. In his introduction to the *Coffee Cupper's Manifesto* (2004) he wrote:

I first came to Nicaragua in April, 1985, one month before the U.S. embargo on trade with Nicaragua. I came at the invitation of Daniel Nunez, President of the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers (UNAG). At that time I was the third president of the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA)...I came to Nicaragua in search of the producers of the many extremely flavorful coffees I had sampled the week before, which were sent by the UNAG via Ann Seuter, a nurse who was returning to California after many years working in clinics with

soldiers who had been disabled in the war. I came as a businessman and I left a man dedicated to social justice. For that spiritual awakening, I thank the people of Nicaragua, especially the coffee farmers. (Katzeff, 2004: 8)

After Katzeff's trip to Nicaragua his firm began to import coffee through Canada in protest against the Reagan Administration embargo. Moreover, he sued President Ronald Reagan, Vice President George H.W. Bush, and Attorney General Edwin Meese for an embargo he considered "illegal" (Howley, 2006). Katzeff's firm was not the only U.S. company working in solidarity with the revolutionary state. Equal Exchange, the Cambridge, MA-based worker-owned cooperative, also began to import coffee from Nicaragua in solidarity against the embargo. According to Jonathan Rosenthal, co-founder of Equal Exchange, they received their first shipments from Nicaragua through an alternative trade importer in Holland (Stichting Idee Import) that roasted and exported the coffee to Bridgehead Trading in Canada, a company incorporated by OXFAM-Canada. Rosenthal recounted that the first Fair Trade coffee was imported from Nicaragua to the United States via Bridgehead Trading in Canada. In 1986, Equal Exchange formed as a worker-owned cooperative and began to sell Cafe Nica, the first product of what is today a US\$15 million Fair Trade business.

As these stories illustrate, the second stage of agrarian reform in Nicaragua was an important time and place for the shift in consciousness regarding Fair Trade among activists and retailers in the global North. Moreover, key figures among the brokers of the Fair Trade movement were working as consultants in the agrarian reform offices of the revolutionary state. Future leaders of Fair Trade, such as Bert Bergman from Stichting Max Havelaar, and Paul Rice, who helped to form the first Fair Trade cooperative in

Nicaragua (PRODECOOP) and later founded TransFair USA, were also working to advance the agrarian reform in Nicaragua during the 1980s. Paul Rice recounted in an interview with Britt Bravo in April 2007:

In 1982, I went to Nicaragua and spent a summer working on some farms. Nicaragua was in the midst of a revolution in which they were giving land to the poor, and helping poor people organize co-operatives as a way of building a community framework for development and sustainability. I found that very exciting, so I went back after I finished college thinking I would stay in Nicaragua and work with farmers for a year, get my field experience and then figure out what I wanted to do with my life. Instead, I stayed for eleven years and lived in Nicaragua through the Contra War. I worked with farmers and co-ops during that time.

This was a very exciting time but also a very difficult one because of the war, and that led me to start, toward the end of my time there, to start Nicaragua's first coffee export co-op, which I led for four years, and we started selling to Fair Trade buyers in Europe. Fair Trade has been around in Europe for a long time, and there are a few pioneering companies here in the US that have been doing Fair Trade on their own for the last twenty years, but there was no over-arching labeling initiative or certification initiative that could take that effort to scale.

And so after eleven years in Nicaragua, I realized that markets didn't have to be the enemy, that in fact markets could be an incredibly powerful force for liberating the poor and that Fair Trade was a really interesting, innovative, powerful model for approaching that, and that if I stayed in Nicaragua I could continue to impact the lives of 10,000 families, but that if I came back to the States and tried to replicate what the Europeans had done with Fair Trade, and put Fair Trade on the map in a much bigger way in the United States, that maybe I could impact the lives of 10 million farmers. So I moved back and went to business school and got some tools and then launched TransFair a few years later. (Paul Rice - Big Vision Podcast - April 27, 2009)

In the 1980s, according to my informants in Nicaragua, farmers knew next to nothing of the Fair Trade movement, nor about the alternative trade organizations in Europe and the United States that were importing Fair Trade coffee in solidarity with the revolutionary state. Indeed, beside one-to-one relationships with individuals such as Paul Rice, Paul Katzeff or solidarity activists and organizations in Europe, Fair Trade did not

really exist. At this time, even the relationships struck by Equal Exchange, Thanksgiving Coffee and European Fair Trade shops in the 1980s were not directly tied to farmers and cooperatives. The coffee imported from Nicaragua to the United States in the 1980s came by way of Holland and Canada, and was exported by the state monopoly, ENCAFE. In the late 1980s, cooperatives of coffee farmers were just beginning to form in the midst of the war torn regions of Nicaragua; and the official Fair Trade label, created by the Dutch NGOs, La Solidaridad and Max Havelaar, was not conceived until 1988. Fair Labelling Organizations International, the standards-making apparatus for the Fair Trade Certified label, and TransFair USA, the labeling agency in the United States, would not open their doors for another decade. It was not until the 1990s when the UNAG and UCAs formed local and second level cooperatives that agrarian reform beneficiaries began to commercialize coffee and learn more about Fair Trade standards, certification and labeling.

The rise of the cooperative movement, the violence of civil war, the redistribution of coffee estates to farm workers and peasants, and the support of harvest brigades and international solidarity activists in the 1980s, catalyzed the formation of the Fair Trade coffee movement. But it was the third stage of the agrarian reform that proved to be the crucible for Fair Trade in Nicaragua. In a policy environment during the 1990s that farmers and cooperative leaders saw as openly hostile to the cooperative movement farmers and cooperatives, leaders forged ahead collectively to confront land invasions, legal challenges to land claims, the drying up of credit sources, and the changing

structure of coffee markets in a post-Sandinista era. The UNAG was especially important for representing peasants at the national level after the fall of the FSLN from power.

The UNAG helped carry forward the cooperative movement at a moment when the policy environment of counter-reform seemed to offer no exit for the peasant farming sector. The UNAG had already served as the central command for thousands of international brigades that came to Nicaragua in the wake of the peace accords. These brigades, as I stated before, served as key moments for consciousness raising for activists from the United States who later participated in the Fair Trade coffee boycott. But the UNAG would also become critical in the organization of the Fair Trade coffee market in Nicaragua.

In the early 1990s, the UNAG Matagalpa conducted a study of coffee production to examine the market conditions confronting the cooperative sector as they made the transition from ENCAFE to the private export houses. According to Solorzano, the regional director of the UNAG in Matagalpa at the time, due to diminished financing for coffee in the late 1980s the yield among the land reform beneficiaries was extremely low. Because of the cooperative movement's lack of control over the export process, they also failed to appropriate a significant portion of the post-production value. Farming cooperatives selling to export houses tended to make their transactions in "pergamino" - the raw unprocessed form - leaving the processing of coffee for export to downstream firms who could capture more of the profits once the farmers sold their coffee at the farm-gate. According to Solorzano, the UNAG Matagalpa, in collaboration with GEPA, the pioneering German Fair Trade importer, began organizing the processing and

marketing of coffee from peasant cooperatives in the Jinotega and Matagalpa region in 1991, while Equal Exchange from the United States began importing coffee directly from cooperatives in Nuevo Segovia.

In the absence of the state monopoly on coffee marketing through ENCAFE, cooperative UCAs across Nicaragua began to seek export licenses and to market their coffee abroad. However, coffee producers around the world were facing a coffee price crisis from 1990-1993 rivaled only by the price crash of 2000-2004. In 1989, the International Coffee Organization (ICO) member states failed to ratify the International Coffee Agreement, which had set quotas on global coffee production since 1962. Coffee prices plummeted as Brazil, the largest coffee producing country, unloaded its massive storehouse of coffee onto the world market. Struggling to find the necessary market knowledge, infrastructure and clients to support them, unions of cooperatives and regional cooperatives worked together with solidarity organizations that had supported the cooperative movement in the 1980s.

In the period from 1990-1996, Fair Trade pioneers such as GEPA, EZA FairHandel, CTM Altromercado, Twin Trading and Max Havelaar from Europe as well as Equal Exchange and Thanksgiving Coffee from the United States, aided the fledgling cooperative sector formed during the agrarian reforms to weather the coffee crisis by purchasing their coffee at protective prices. These prices and relationships helped to build effective marketing organizations capable of exporting high quality coffee. Filling a void left by the dissolution by ENCAFE - and indeed the revolutionary state - these

alternative trade organizations (ATOs) worked directly with the UNAG to assist the cooperative movement to commercialize their coffee.

In San Ramon, the assistance of the Fair Trade movement with commercialization came at a critical time. While farmers were defending their land claims legally and by force, they were also seeking ways to earn a livelihood from production. Merely owning the land as a result of agrarian reform was simply not enough. The first president of the UCA San Ramon and the current president of the Fair Trade cooperative that represents farmers in San Ramon explained:

After the war the fundamental problem was the people's land. There was a grave threat that farmers would lose their land, so we organized ourselves. We say that in the first place we had to defend the land. But you have to defend the land in two ways. One is being on the land, not leaving the land, and not letting anyone take it away from the people. But, the other is also *making it productive* and for that we needed economic projects. (P.H. - March 17, 2007)

To make the land productive farmers and cooperative leaders began to search for access to credit and access to favorable markets.

Once the defense of property and the legalization of land had passed, it was important to search for financing because every bank was closing its doors to us. So to get access to financing the first thing we did was we worked on the commercialization of coffee. At that time, we were used to delivering our coffee to ENCAFE, then to the local markets after 1990. So we said, let's join all the coffee producing cooperatives together. At first we joined four cooperatives, Simon Bolivar, Danilo Gonzales, Deniz Gutierrez Cardoza and Sixto Sanchez. From there we began to search for a way to commercialize our own coffee. (P.H. - March 17, 2007)

In solidarity, three of the founding cooperatives of the UCA transferred loans they had previously taken with the international NGO Ayuda Obrera Suiza (AOS), an aid organization of the Union of Swiss Trade Unions and the Swiss Socialist Party, to serve as a revolving credit fund and to cover the basic expenses of the UCA San Ramon. A

farmer member of one of the founding cooperatives explained: "We combined our resources to hold the cooperatives together. It is important to remember that. At that time it was a wild mess. We didn't have to share those funds. But we did. We formed the Union that we have today." (S.A. March 26, 2007).

With assistance from the local government officials and a rotating credit fund promised to three of the cooperatives by AOS, seven more cooperatives formed the Union of Agricultural Cooperatives (UCA) San Ramon in 1992. With the funds from AOS, the UCA San Ramon hired 3 administrators and 3 technicians. One of those first administrators, the current president of the Fair Trade cooperative, was charged with finding a way to commercialize the coffee produced in the cooperatives. In an interview in March 2007, the current president of the Fair Trade cooperative recounted the history of the first contacts with Fair Trade importers.

In San Ramon we created an operating structure and (the cooperatives) delegated me to manage the commercialization of coffee (in 1992). To start, I remember researching what it would cost to restructure exportation so that we could sell our coffee directly. It took us 6 months to learn how much it would cost to export one shipping container of coffee (25,000 pounds). It took us 6 months because this was information that no one in the country would give us. So I would investigate, chat, and steal information until we achieved the cost structure. Within the cooperative movement there was market support by way of the UNAG Matagalpa and we had the opportunity to sell 60,000 pounds of coffee through Max Havelaar in Holland in 1993. So we started working with Max Havelaar and through them we made contacts with GEPA from Germany and EZA from Austria. Those were our first contacts with Fair Trade. We started selling coffee without any experience. The next year (1994), we sold 3 containers (75,000 pounds) then the next year 7 containers (175,000 pounds) (in 1995). (P.H. March 17, 2007)

In the first few years the UCA San Ramon focused heavily on searching for coffee markets and working with Fair Trade importers. Working with the UNAG, the UCA in

San Ramon also began to organize with other coffee producing cooperatives around the region. As the current president of the Fair Trade cooperative said:

With the UNAG we registered several Unions of Cooperatives with Max Havelaar at that time, not just the UCA San Ramon. The UCA San Ramon, at first, took responsibility for organizing the rest of the UCAs in the region and form a commission where we could talk and make decisions (about commercialization). Through this process we came to agreement that, to go on working, we needed to restructure the institutional mechanism (away from the UCA San Ramon) to use the license to commercialize everyone's coffee (in the region). Over two years (1995-1996) we discussed the formation of the (Fair Trade cooperative) and in 1997 we officially created the organization. (P.H. March 17, 2007)

The creation of the Fair Trade cooperative in 1997 established a clear division of labor in the production and commercialization of coffee for the Fair Trade market. As I describe in the next chapter, this division of labor was rooted in the institutional requirements of Fair Trade standards and the industry demands for strict quality control. Coffee producing cooperatives in San Ramon continued to supply coffee to the Fair Trade market, but with the formation of the Fair Trade cooperative, they joined other UCAs in the region in the commercialization process. The UCA San Ramon focused on organizing local production cooperatives in the municipality of San Ramon while the Fair Trade cooperative focused on regional organizing and building trade relationships with Fair Trade coffee buyers. Moreover, with the formalization of Fair Trade standards by FLO International and increasingly stringent certification inspections for organic and high quality coffee, the Fair Trade cooperative required knowledgeable administrators and cooperative leaders that could commercialize coffee at the regional scale.

As the role of the Fair Trade cooperative took shape at the regional scale, the UCA San Ramon's role was defined more clearly as serving the local cooperatives in the

municipality of San Ramon. The organization worked to organize more agricultural cooperatives in the municipality that were facing legal conflicts and searching for assistance in other crops such as basic grains, horticulture and small-scale cattle ranching. While the pioneering members were coffee producers, and a great emphasis was being placed by the leadership on commercializing coffee in the early years, the UCA San Ramon, as a reflection of its membership, came to define itself as a credit union that represented the needs of all agriculturalists in the municipality of San Ramon. Between 1992 and 2000, the UCA San Ramon grew from 4 founding cooperatives representing 120 coffee farmers to 21 cooperatives representing more than 700 farmers. In 2000, 12 of the cooperatives affiliated with the UCA represented more than 300 coffee producers while nine others represented more than 350 basic grain producers, small ranchers and horticulturalists.

As the work of commercializing coffee scaled up to the regional level, the UCA San Ramon remained involved in the commercialization of coffee in terms of production, but the management of commercial relations shifted exclusively to the Fair Trade cooperative.

These changes in the division of labor in coffee production and marketing were significant to the evolution of the UCA's relationship with Fair Trade. The leaders of the coffee producing cooperatives of the UCA San Ramon remained involved in the organization of the Fair Trade cooperative at the regional scale, but the role of the local cooperatives grew less and less critical to the commercialization process. The Fair Trade

cooperative was integrating greater and greater numbers of new cooperatives and individual farmers into its network of farmer suppliers.

In its first year (1997-1998), the Fair Trade cooperative commercialized seven million pounds of coffee produced by 500 farmers. Over the next decade the Fair Trade cooperative would grow to represent more than 2000 farmers and export an average of 70 million pounds annually. Over this period, the Fair Trade cooperative also increased their buying clients from primarily mission-based Fair Trade importers, to include new Fair Trade licensees such as VOLCAFE Group, a division of the colossal commodities trading company ED&F MAN, which supplies coffee to Starbucks Coffee Company. Due to their production and marketing capacity, the Fair Trade cooperative has become one of the most distinguished and competitive coffee exporters in the country.

A. Contradictions of the Nicaraguan Agrarian Reform and Fair Trade

The relationship between Fair Trade and the agrarian reform was not without contradictions. Not all of the cooperatives formed in San Ramon gained access to land suitable for coffee production. Many reform beneficiaries in San Ramon were also locked out of the Fair Trade market due to the quality of the lands they inherited. Between 1979 and 1992, only about 30 percent of the agrarian reform cooperatives received lands with the climate conditions and elevation (above 800 meters) necessary to produce marketable coffee. What this reveals is that, although the agrarian reform process opened up spaces for peasant access to land, it redistributed lands of various qualities to

farmers, thereby positioning them for different forms of agricultural production. Some farmers were granted low lying lands suitable for producing corn and beans while others inherited pastureland for grazing cattle. The land distributed directly affected the kinds of agriculture that could be practiced in the municipality. In many ways the coffee producing cooperatives were very “lucky” in that they were granted lands with a pre-existing perennial crop that provided significant cash income. Others, such as producers in the low lying areas had to subsist from self-provisioning basic grains, or sales from horticultural, grains, beef or dairy production.

Even more dramatically than the unevenness in the reformed sector, however, the process of agrarian reform also led to differentiation between the reformed and non-reformed sectors. Keeping in mind that the agrarian reform only reached roughly 3,000 farming families, commonly male heads of household, in San Ramon in a municipality of some 30,000 people, its effects were not comprehensive, but exclusive. In particular, as I described earlier, the formation of state-run farms during the first stage of the agrarian reform and the redistribution of land to workers and peasant farmers in the second and third stages of agrarian reform divided the rural workforce between landed and landless classes. Landless farm workers who did not gain access to land through the agrarian reform could not get access to the means of production and therefore remained locked out from the benefits of the cooperative movement and Fair Trade.

This was a crucial finding in my research as it testified both to the importance of how local organizing and farmer engagement shaped participation in the Fair Trade movement, and to the limits of Fair Trade as a movement designed to create a social

transformation in the countryside. While Fair Trade did indeed extend the agrarian reform legacy for some farmers, for the vast majority of farmers and workers in the coffee sector, Fair Trade has not offered a path toward rural social transformation. The Fair Trade ideal in the coffee sector is to work with already existing cooperatives of peasant farmers who already own their own land. Thus, Fair Trade standards in the coffee sector do not include specific benefits or rules for farm workers; nor are commercial plantations able to register for Fair Trade certification. Although Fair Trade standards claim to adhere to the ILO standards on child labor, Fair Trade certification for coffee is not applied to plantations, and enforcement of labor standards by Fair Trade inspectors do not take place on peasant farms or in agro-industrial facilities where coffee is processed. Fair Trade does not actually directly address the question of living wages for workers, even as they claim to provide fair prices for farmers. In sum, Fair Trade has built upon the uneven redistribution of land and the existing class structure.

Moreover, there were specific gendered consequences for the agrarian reform and the rise of Fair Trade in San Ramon and elsewhere in Central America. Fair Trade principles invoke gender equity as a key objective. However, landownership for women in San Ramon has been severely constrained by the legal interpretation of land redistribution to farming families under the Sandinista agrarian reform. Women have struggled to gain and maintain access to individual property rights. Moreover, both within the family and the community at large, women and children laborers make up the vast majority of permanent and seasonal harvest workers who help maintain the crop or pick coffee from the orchards for a daily wage. These wages are not standardized under

Fair Trade rules and often fall under national living wage limits. Women have also struggled to gain representation within their local cooperatives, the UCA San Ramon and in the Fair Trade cooperative.

V. Conclusion: Translating Fair Trade Across Scales

The history of agrarian reform in Nicaragua sheds light on the presentation of the Nicaraguan delegation at the 2005 Empowering Alternatives Convergence in Chicago. In 2005, when I first met the Nicaraguan delegation, activists involved in the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States were struggling to make sense of its move to the retail mainstream. While activists began to question the tactics and strategies of the boycott because they had had little or no bargaining power against large commercial retailers, farmers and their representatives from Nicaragua, too, questioned their power within the movement, and how Fair Trade itself was imagined and understood.

Exploring the Nicaraguan delegation's histories of local organizing, it is not surprising that they approached the open space session at the Empowering Alternatives Convergence in the way that they did. In a conference where their participation was constrained and in a movement where their voices were subordinated, they reclaimed their right to be seen and understood as agents of Fair Trade. They took the time afforded them to challenge U.S. activists regarding their motivations and tactical approach to waging the Fair Trade coffee boycott. For the delegation, the appeal of the Fair Trade coffee boycott lay not in its claims to defetishize commodities, its persuasive tactics, or its low entry barriers. As the testimonies of farmers in San Ramon revealed, the stakes

for participating in the Fair Trade movement were very high. When seen through the eyes of farmers in Nicaragua, the Fair Trade coffee boycott was intimately tied to their struggle for agrarian reform and social transformation in the countryside. Farmers of Fair Trade coffee were part of a cooperative movement that cleared the way for peasant land claims and the formation of organizations capable of selling coffee to Fair Trade importers abroad. The civil war they endured transformed the consciousness of people from the United States and Europe who would later become the brokers of the Fair Trade coffee boycott. In this sense, they were not just beneficiaries, but also the agents of the Fair Trade movement. The Fair Trade coffee boycott was an extension - both geographically and temporally - of their local struggles.

I began this chapter quoting Ethel Brooks (2005) who argued in her work on the anti-sweatshop movement that activist campaigns needed to understand two things more intimately. On the one hand, activists needed to incorporate local organizers and “knowledge about local organizing initiatives” into activist campaigns so as to create more effective transnational networks of solidarity. As my research with farmers indicates, activists would benefit from a greater understanding of the sacrifices made by farmers to achieve access to land and to commercialize their product. On the other hand, Brooks claims, activist campaigns also need to explore more deeply the way that “global capitalist development structures the choices of workers and others in poor countries.” Farmers see Fair Trade as a relationship of solidarity through which they are partly enabled to “vindicate economically” their right to have power in the coffee market and to be compensated fairly for their production. However, with recent changes in the coffee

market and Fair Trade certification, particularly toward improving coffee quality, farmers are beginning to question the fairness of Fair Trade.

Chapter 5

Fair Game?

Peasant Coffee Farmers Engage with Fair Trade as a Market

There is a lot of evidence to suggest that consumers are increasingly looking for higher quality products. People are trading up, as it were. (...) People are looking for higher quality food, they're looking for healthier food, and they're looking for a more pleasurable experience around food. Well, it just so happens that there's a direct correlation between the quality of a cup of coffee, or the quality of a banana, or some other piece of fruit, and the amount of money that the farmer actually gets paid for that harvest. As you might guess, if prices are low, farmers have to cut corners on quality. If farmers, on the other hand, get a decent price, then they can invest more in the quality of the final product. So, there's actually an alignment of interest there between your and my desires as consumers for higher quality products, and the return to the grower. Fair trade is all about ensuring that that grower gets a fair price.

--Paul Rice, CEO of TransFair USA, Big Vision Podcast, April 24, 2007

I. Introduction

We are bounding down a muddy mountain road in a borrowed pick-up truck loaded with coffee. The truck chassis creaks under the weight of the load it bears and the tires bump and scrape against the wheel wells. The road is treacherously slick. Rain pools into deep potholes which pull the truck from side to side, shifting the sacks of raw coffee in the bed behind. We are delivering 1700 pounds of wet coffee to the dry mill for processing. Sweet honey water oozes from the red synthetic sacks, drains into the bed of the truck and drips onto the ground behind us. The air is warm, humid and pungent; an aromatic mixture of gasoline fumes, fertile earth, and ripening fruit.

The precious cargo we are carrying is owned by 16 first generation coffee farmers who fought for and gained land during the Nicaraguan agrarian reform in 1986. Farmers in the local cooperative farm a total of 44 hectares of coffee orchards in San Ramon. In a

little more than four months from now, twenty percent of the highest grade coffee they produce will be sold under Fair Trade standards for use by U.S. and European companies in retail blends, cappuccinos, espressos and lattes. On this day however, some nine months before they receive full payment for the coffee they sell, these farmers are to make this delivery and fulfill a small percentage of their annual commitment to the regional Fair Trade cooperative.

We are accompanied in the pick-up truck by the cooperative president and the treasurer, both of whom are noticeably tense. The farmers in the cooperative have a lot riding on this delivery. Labor costs for the cooperative members increased substantially over the past month due to skyrocketing costs of food and the resulting subjective pressures by local workers for higher wages to pick the coffee from the orchards. The added demands for labor were caused by torrential rains in October 2006 which caused the coffee to ripen prematurely on the trees at the beginning of the harvest.¹⁷ The day before, many members of the cooperative took the opportunity to harvest a great deal of coffee at one time, doubling their workforce to harvest and process the coffee in the wet mill they collectively own. The investment in so many short-term laborers by cooperative members made the monetary outcome of the delivery very important. If the coffee does not receive an adequate price, the gamble to harvest all of this coffee at one time will likely 'eat' away most of their profits.

¹⁷ Once the natural process of fermentation begins, decomposing fruit, if not processed, will reduce the overall yield of the crop and/or diminish the qualitative attributes of the coffee seed (bean). If farmers do not harvest the ripening coffee fruit, it will fall to the ground in a matter of days. Rapid ripening can force farmers to employ an even larger labor force than normal to harvest and mill greater volumes of coffee. For peasant farmers, the increased incidence of rain raises costs, and therefore, the stakes of market delivery.

To guarantee a good price farmers need a favorable quality assessment when they arrive at the dry mill, some 30 kilometers away from their farm. At the dry mill the farmers pass over custody of their crop to the regional Fair Trade cooperative and they receive a receipt indicating the shipment's weight, level of humidity, and percentage of defects, as well as the time and date of the delivery. They use this receipt to collect payment on their coffee and to account for their production. At the gate of the dry mill, a receptionist inspects the shipment and makes the first sensory evaluation of the coffee's quality by smelling its odor, sampling it for color, estimating the percentage of defects it contains, and employing a machine to test for its moisture content. To win a good evaluation from the dry mill, the farmers must master a range of different labor practices that preserve the intrinsic qualities of the beans. Transportation is one of the critical stages in this process. Coffee must be picked, milled and delivered on time to preserve quality.

We are halfway to the dry mill and it is already 5:00 p.m. The mill closes its gates at 5:30 p.m. and we must cover 20 kilometers of potholed roads to get there. If we cannot deliver the coffee to the dry mill this afternoon and the farmers have to turn back at the gate, the coffee will ferment overnight, reducing its value and subsequently its price on the market. Over-fermentation, as it is described by expert coffee tasters, can result in a disagreeable taste on the tongue which is considered undesirable to foreign coffee buyers and discriminate Northern American and European consumers. Over-fermentation can produce a fishy smell detected in the first quality evaluation that would cause the cooperative to incur a price penalty. Under the quality standards enforced by

dry mill, over-fermented coffee would be "down-graded" thereby taking it out of competition for Fair Trade Certified prices and premiums. Even a brief whiff of fishiness could determine the fate of their delivery that day - the result of multiple years of work on the farm. Over-fermentation is only one of many "defects" the receptionist searches for when evaluating each shipment.

The delivery by the farmers could generate between US\$700 and US\$800 for the cooperative, if it meets the standards of the dry mill receptionist. However, if we don't make it to the dry mill before it closes, a delay in the delivery may cause a loss of US \$100 or more, the equivalent of about half of the wages paid to the workers the day before. Plus, the local cooperative would also waste their delivery costs of US\$22, and even more to return again. We are driving as fast as we can, determined not to puncture a tire, break an axle or flip the cargo. The engine is screaming under the weight of the heavy load. We must get to the dry mill before the guard closes the gates.

We arrive just in time. With luck, the mill gates are still open at 5:45 p.m. A large delivery from another cooperative in the region stalled the receptionist and the workers at the dry mill, and we pull into the queue behind them and await the inspection. After the workers from the dry mill unload the coffee from the truck onto an industrial-sized scale, the receptionist sticks what looks like a long hollow spike into each sack of coffee, drawing out small samples of the wet beans. He places about two pounds of coffee into a plastic bowl and he smells the beans as he walks over to the receptionist office where he tests their humidity, evaluates their color and blemishes, and then provides the cooperative president with a receipt. If three to five percent of the beans have visible defects or the shipment smells foul, the coffee will not be considered viable stock for

future sale on the Fair Trade market. After the judgment has been made, the president looks at me with a slight smile and then takes a breath of resignation. “They calculate about 6-7% defects. Much of the coffee will go as second grade. Its still early in the season yet, so we’ll still have a chance to improve the quality and hopefully get a better price.”

As we drive back toward the farm, the late day sun peeks through the clouds and the president and treasurer talk about tomorrow’s work. As we pass through town, they stop to run an errand, pick up a bottle of cheap rum for a member of the cooperative, and we share an orange soda. The treasurer says, “You know we haven’t been playing the quality game for very long. In the eighties we used to just deliver the coffee on a mule and get paid a fixed price. That was when prices were good. Now we’ve got Fair Trade which pays us decent prices for part of our crop, but (the Fair Trade buyers) demand quality too. So the policy of the dry mill is to demand quality (for all of the coffee we deliver) and so their policy can be heavy. It is hard. (Laughing) Sometimes I wish we could return to the time of the mule.”

Over the past decade, Fair Trade has evolved from an a solidarity initiative into a market niche requiring farmers to meet strict quality standards to participate. In this chapter, I explore the contradictions of the market imperative for Fair Trade Certified coffee experienced by farmers in Nicaragua. As opposed to Paul Rice’s declaration that there is a direct correlation between consumer desires for quality and higher prices paid to

farmers, my research demonstrates that, from the farmer's standpoint, Fair Trade does not always live up to such a win-win proposition.

Chapter 5 is organized into three sections. Building on the historical research presented in Chapter 4, I first describe the economic and institutional make up of peasant coffee farming for Fair Trade markets in San Ramon, Nicaragua. To introduce the basic dynamics of Fair Trade Certified coffee production, I begin by describing the structure of the peasant coffee sector, such as land tenure patterns and the cooperative organization that facilitates certified coffee market access for peasant farmers. I then describe the labor process required to bring coffee to the Fair Trade market. In particular I emphasize the on-farm and off-farm labor required to produce and preserve coffee quality, what my informants describe as "el juego de calidad," the quality game. As geographer, Tad Mutersbaugh, in his work on certified coffees argues, the institutionalization of both intrinsic (natural) and extrinsic (social) quality standards create downward pressure on farmers and cooperatives and erect high barriers to market entry (Mutersbaugh, 2005). I end with a discussion of overlapping coffee certifications such as Fair Trade and Organic and conclude the section by assessing their role in differentiating the coffee supply chain in San Ramon.

Second, I examine how the cooperative organizations in San Ramon coordinate coffee production and marketing under Fair Trade standards. To compete with the conventional channels of coffee production and marketing through local middlemen or large commercial buyers, the Fair Trade cooperative adopted a contract farming scheme which provides farmers with certain social and economic benefits. After a description of

the mechanics of the contract farming arrangement, I present data on the economic dynamics of the contract scheme, paying particular attention to the transfer of credit and payments and how those translate into household budgets and coffee profits for farmers. What I illustrate in my analysis of the contract arrangement is that, even under Fair Trade standards, the production costs and costs of living among farmers of San Ramon frequently exceed the income generated through production of coffee for Fair Trade markets. The result is that farmers report losses and cycles of debt. Therefore, I raise the question of why farmers continue to produce coffee for the Fair Trade market. In conclusion, I emphasize the social benefits provided by cooperative contracts such as the anti-foreclosure clause and local development initiatives, as well as the advantages of advance payments, which farmers employ for household consumption.

Finally, I explore the contradictions in the moral claims made by Fair Trade from the farmer's perspective. I begin with a discussion of the actions taken by the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Pequeños Productores de Comercio Justo* (CLAC), a transnational organization representing Fair Trade accredited cooperatives, to increase the Fair Trade price and premium to reflect changes in the costs of production and costs of living for farmers and cooperatives. I argue that market demand for quality Fair Trade exacerbates numerous constraints on farmers' profitability even as it portrays itself as a win-win proposition.

II. The Market Imperative

...the potential of certification to provide an alternative to conventional trade will depend...on whether certification network participants are able to address tensions

created...as they operate within highly competitive, and decidedly non-democratic, conventional markets. (Mutersbaugh, 2005)

A. Market and Movement Imperatives Revisited

This chapter brings the story of the agrarian struggle of farmers in San Ramon up to the present day. As I described in the previous chapter, 90 percent of the members affiliated with the Fair Trade cooperative in San Ramon were first generation farmers who received their land during the agrarian reform process in the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapter 4). The majority of my informants previously worked on large coffee estates and served in the military reserves as a condition of the land transfer program. In terms of Fair Trade movement imperatives, their political subjectivity was not solely predicated on their access to the benefits of Fair Trade as a market, but was articulated through a history of popular revolution, civil war, agrarian struggle, and cooperative organizing that sought to preserve their right to the land.

Collective memories of war and violence, in addition to the great sacrifices made by community members to win access to land, cannot be underestimated as shaping the ways that farmers engage with Fair Trade as a movement. The agrarian reform experience and the struggle for land was a defining feature of my informant's lives and a key reason for their loyalty to cooperatives that participate in the Fair Trade market. Having suffered exploitation under the plantation system and the violent consequences of the revolutionary insurgency and subsequent civil war, peasant farmers in San Ramon saw their cooperatives, and by extension international solidarity through Fair Trade initiatives, as supporting their efforts to create a new life in the ashes of the past.

In the United States, however, the Fair Trade coffee boycott evolved in a different way through the efforts by NGOs to recruit activists and to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee in conventional retail channels. The strategy and tactics of the boycott, centered on increasing market penetration of the product, emphasized winning consumer sympathy, created morally acceptable tactics for activists and persuaded retailers through positive bargaining rather than through coercion. The result has been tremendous success for NGOs and activists in expanding the market share of Fair Trade Certified coffee in the United States coffee sector, particularly through large commercial retailers such as Dunkin Donuts, Starbucks, and Walmart. But this success has not come without circumspection. In recent years, activists (see Chapter 3) and social scientists have begun to scrutinize the promises and pitfalls of Fair Trade as large commercial retailers entered the market certified coffee in the United States. Adoption of Fair Trade Certified coffees by multinationals has highlighted the potential contradictions associated with cooptation when capitalist firms concerned with downstream supply management and upstream image management leveraged the positive message of Fair Trade Certified coffees to win the respect of consumers, NGOs and activists. Furthermore, growing discontent expressed by committed Fair Trade activists in the United States has encouraged critical reflection on the ethical claims of Fair Trade standards, asking if the leadership of the movement has been invested with a power to define Fair Trade based on a flawed consensus over the long-term goals and short-term strategies for carrying out the boycott in the United States.

The debate over the future of Fair Trade in the global North has also included questions expressed by farmers and social scientists about declining democracy, reduced transparency and the erosion of sustainable economic benefits passed on to farmers (Bacon et al., 2008; Mutersbaugh and Lyon, 2010; Raynolds et al., 2007). Considered the cornerstones of the Fair Trade movement, democracy, transparency and sustainable development are becoming increasingly illusive as market priorities trump movement principles. While Fair Trade is still considered one of the strongest guarantees that farmers will be justly compensated for their work in the coffee sector, researchers working at the household scale in Central America report that low incomes and indebtedness remain key barriers to stimulating sustainable economic growth in farming communities and cooperatives participating in Fair Trade (Bacon et al., 2008a and 2008b; Calo and Wise, 2005; Jaffee, 2007; Lyon, 2006; Oxfam America, 2005; Utting-Chamorro, 2005). Moreover with the market imperative for quality control and demands for double or triple certification, greater numbers of farmers are being squeezed out of the Fair Trade market all together or funneled through a smaller window of opportunity (Mutersbaugh, 2002 and 2005). Although Fair Trade accredited cooperatives - as market-oriented enterprises staffed with professional administrators can respond effectively to the challenging demands of discriminate coffee buyers and certifying agencies peasant farmers represented by these organizations continue to confront major barriers in their efforts to improve their standard of living and to foster sustainable development in their local communities (Bacon et al., 2008a and 2008b; Jaffee, 2007; Oxfam America, 2005).

Contrary to the ideal that higher quality products return higher profits to farmers, the production of Fair Trade Certified coffee is a costly operation. To earn the price and premium guarantees touted in the Fair Trade coffee buycott, peasant farmers must deliver a product that meets the high quality standards demanded in foreign retail markets. As the anecdote that opened this chapter illustrates, farmers in San Ramon, Nicaragua scale numerous barriers and navigate a complicated set of labor and market requirements to sell even a small percentage of their coffee as Fair Trade Certified. Recently, with tightening standards for product quality, farmers feel greater pressure to meet market imperatives of the Fair Trade coffee buycott which they see as undermining many of their cooperative movement goals. As one cooperative leader I interviewed stated: "Every year the certifications get more intense. There are more restrictions. There is more documentation. There is a lot of pressure on the farmers. Again, what is the original purpose of these certifications? Wasn't it about helping farmers?" (J.G. - November 13, 2006)

B. Flipping the Value Proposition: The Quality Game

Fair trade can pose a dilemma, because, sadly, much of (the coffee) doesn't taste very good. (...) Delicious coffee has become mainstream over the past decade. That's a positive legacy of companies like Starbucks, and you can't beat them by selling crap. A politics that overlooks pleasure has no future...

Liza Featherstone, Co-Author of *Students Against Sweatshops: The Making of a Movement* (2002) from her blog in thenation.com accessed April 25, 2008.

In the United States, Fair Trade is analogous with coffee quality, and with good reason.

Throughout the late-1990s Fair Trade movement brokers in the United States leveraged

the growth of consumer and retailer interest in gourmet coffees with "distinctive character" to communicate Fair Trade's message and to convince early adoption of the Fair Trade Certified coffee. In doing so the Fair Trade coffee buycott moved beyond its roots in international solidarity work and earned a loyal following among regional coffee roasters, coffee shops and discriminant consumers increasingly interested in the social and environmental impacts of their retail choices. Today, Fair Trade Certified coffee is the fastest growing market segment within the multi-billion dollar specialty coffee niche.

The marriage of Fair Trade with the specialty coffee market has had consequences for both for the production and consumption of Fair Trade Certified coffee. Although Fair Trade has made inroads in the low-grade soluble "instant" coffee market in Europe for two decades, in the United States, Fair Trade Certified coffee has remained exclusively a premium product. Fair Trade Certified coffee, as well as other "sustainable coffee labeling initiatives,"^{33y3y} joined ranks with the proliferation of novel coffee branding schemes in the specialty coffee sector associated with the geographic location, taste characteristics, and the social and environmental conditions under which it was produced (Rice and McLean, 1999).

By linking into the marketing channels of what Stephano Ponte has called the "latte revolution" (2002), activists, retailers and consumers turned Fair Trade Certified coffee into a luxury item for an affluent, discriminate and educated class of consumers who identified with the cause and could afford to support it (Guthman, 2002; Roseberry, 1996; see also Chapter 3). Indeed, this class of consumers, no matter how progressive their ethical ideals, have come to demand both high quality and Fair Trade. They want

good coffee if they are going to do good. According to a consumer and retailer survey by Levi and Linton (2003), the decision by retailers and their customers to buy Fair Trade Certified coffee was most often based “as much on good taste in the cup as on a desire to help farmers” (420-421). These findings are reinforced by market research conducted by TransFair USA, which found that coffee consumers who were aware of the Fair Trade Certified label were willing to pay more for Fair Trade Certified coffee only when the coffee was of equal or greater quality than their existing brand. Furthermore, in the study by Levi and Linton, their informants claimed that “quality trumps ‘doing the right thing’” (2003: 421).

In 2005, I attended the annual conference of the Specialty Coffee Association of America in Seattle. Before the conference that year, TransFair USA hosted the Fair Trade Forum, a one day event designed to bring together specialty coffee industry members already involved in the boycott and entice others to join them. In his “state of Fair Trade coffee” speech, Paul Rice discussed what he called the changing value of Fair Trade Certified coffee to the U.S. coffee market. Rice offered an extremely revealing commentary on the tension between the market and movement imperatives of the Fair Trade coffee boycott.

...(W)hat we inherited from Europe in terms of Fair Trade, was a model, message and business approach, that was marginally a “let’s do the right thing” kind of approach. The industry should embrace it because it was the right thing to do. Consumers should embrace it because it was the right thing to do. (Fair Trade) was (originally) sold on that basis. It was essentially the social message first and then “oh, by the way the coffee might taste ok.” But (at that time) it was really all about the farmer. We have flipped that value proposition here in the United States. *You* have flipped that value proposition. You have decided that Fair Trade in the United States has to be about quality. (Paul Rice, 2005 emphasis added)

As Paul Rice explained in the statement above, retailers and consumers in the United States “flipped the value proposition” for Fair Trade over the past decade from one focused on sympathy to one focused on quality. Today, farmers must deliver high quality coffee to get a fair price for their product. Rice continued by explaining that even though retailers had changed the rules, the “farmers have risen to the occasion. They’ve invested in infrastructure. They even developed cupping labs. In some cases with your direct support, they’ve learned how to cup.”

Flipping the value proposition in the U.S.-based Fair Trade coffee boycott has had (un)intended consequences for consumers and producers. First, by marketing Fair Trade coffee as high quality, movement brokers and activists reduced anxiety among consumers and retailers who were concerned that they might have to sacrifice their desire to buy or supply a valuable product to support the cause. As I described in Chapter 3, one of the key concerns of coffee consumers and retailers was whether Fair Trade Certified coffee was consistent, affordable, and equivalent to existing coffee brands. By persuading their targets to see Fair Trade as high quality, activists effectively raised the expectations of retailers and consumers and branded Fair Trade as synonymous with a high quality product. Transfair USA, has vigorously promoted the notion that integrating Fair Trade and quality standards in the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a win-win proposition, capitalizing on and circulating the idea that consumers should also be rewarded for doing good. (Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1. Quality Taste for You, Quality of Life for Farmers. Now that's a Fair Trade.
 Buycott slogan by TransFair USA, 2006.



Quality taste
 for you.
Quality of life
 for farmers. Now that's a
Fair Trade.




Fair Trade guarantees that family farmers receive a fair price for their top-quality products. This allows millions of people around the world to stay on their land, put food on the table, and keep kids in school. Fair Trade farmers are also careful stewards of the environment. With Fair Trade Certified you know that what you're buying is naturally delicious and was grown with respect for the earth.

Look for the Fair Trade Certified™ label.
 Your taste buds – and the farmers – will thank you.

www.FairTradeCertified.org

Fair Trade Certified™ is a trademark of TransFair USA. Design: ArtStudio.com and Studio.com Photography: Scott Dennis, David S. Ross

Kenneth Davids, a coffee assessment expert and author of the *Coffee Review* has claimed that for farmers, “(e)ssentially, Fair-Trade certification is just...an entry ticket into a niche market” (quoted in TransFair USA, 2007, accessed November 16, 2007). Therefore for producers, flipping the value proposition has meant changes in the standards, conventions and rules associated with coffee production and marketing. As Davids highlights, Fair Trade itself has become a seal of quality which attracts international buyers. By defining the movement imperative of Fair Trade as analogous to the market imperative for quality products, the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States made playing the quality game, as farmers call it, a pre-requisite of the exercise of Fair Trade standards. In opposition to the stated win-win claims of movement leaders such as Paul Rice, I argue that the emphasis on quality standards does not attend to the existing inadequacy of pricing and premium standards for Fair Trade, let alone to the high production and transaction costs of delivering quality coffee. Farmers must rise to meet new standards for production of coffee quality, often with little change in patterns of compensation. In effect, to gain their “entry ticket” into the Fair Trade niche market peasant farmers and cooperatives play by a new set of rules.

III. Case Study: San Ramon, Nicaragua

A. Background

San Ramon is located in a prime coffee growing region due to its mountainous highlands, fertile lowland valleys and geographic proximity to major transportation routes. The 360 farmers in San Ramon who sell coffee to the Fair Trade market are

members of one of 12 different marketing cooperatives representing more than 6,000 peasant coffee farmers – about 12 percent of the total farmer population of the Nicaraguan coffee sector (Bacon et al., 2008a). According to CAFENICA, an national organization representing Fair Trade accredited cooperatives, these 12 organizations produced roughly 19 percent of all Nicaraguan coffee exports in 2006.

In San Ramon, Fair Trade farmers supply coffee to international markets through a three tier cooperative structure, which seeks to improve the market competitiveness of peasant farmers by creating economies of scale. At the local scale (first tier), farmers affiliate with a farming cooperative. At the municipal scale (second tier), farmers are represented by their local cooperative in a cooperative union (the UCA San Ramon). And at the regional scale (third tier), local cooperatives are represented by the UCA San Ramon in a regional marketing cooperative (what I call the Fair Trade cooperative). The Fair Trade cooperative (regional marketing cooperative) provides credit, legal representation and competitive pricing, and organizes the production and marketing of coffee from cultivation to export.

Since 2003, leaders of the Fair Trade cooperative that works with farmers in San Ramon have championed quality control as a means for maintaining access to international coffee markets. The promise of appropriating added-value from defining and enforcing high quality standards figures centrally in the discourse and policy-making of the Fair Trade cooperative operating at the regional scale.

We've always had the vision that we must work with quality. For us the theme of quality is fundamental. We must work continuously to better the product, but also to better the organization. (...) We need to improve the quality, improve the competitiveness, improve the productivity, improve the marketing, but all with the

the function of improving the quality of life of the people. We have been re-appropriating a concept. The concept of the exchange of qualities, fair trade in the countryside. We offer the quality product, quality environment, quality service in exchange for a better quality of life for the people. (P.H. - March 17, 2007)

In 2005, the Fair Trade cooperative achieved ISO 9000 certification for quality assurance.

Due to their proficiency in producing, processing and preserving high quality and certified coffees, sixty percent of all exports by the Fair Trade cooperative receive differential pricing above the world market price. These price differentials enable it to provide an annual sales dividend each October to farmers that meet their contracted production quotas for first grade coffees. The Fair Trade cooperative also manages a social development fund from the social premiums accumulated through Fair Trade Certified coffee sales and it distributed those funds back to its member organizations such as the UCA San Ramon for use in locally determined development projects.

As I described in Chapter 4, farmers in San Ramon won their first Fair Trade coffee contract with European Fair Trade importers in 1993 making them one of the oldest Nicaraguan Fair Trade Certified coffee suppliers. Twenty to thirty percent of the coffee produced by Fair Trade farmers in San Ramon is exported as Fair Trade Certified. From their international reputation as a responsible enterprise and as ideologically committed to Fair Trade, the Fair Trade cooperative working with farmers from San Ramon attracts projects from international NGOs who fund programs to increase literacy, decrease child mortality, improve women's health, improve access to drinking water, campaign for gender equity, encourage farmer-to-farmer education, initiate youth leadership activities, and increase awareness of agro-ecological practices that conserve biodiversity. On rare occasions the Fair Trade cooperative, in collaboration with the

UCA San Ramon, also acts as a broker of government and NGO programs for electrification, road-building, house construction, and water purification. In a municipality lacking a robust public sector, the cooperatives in San Ramon provide services otherwise unavailable.

B. Land Tenure in the Coffee Sector

Land tenure in the coffee sector in Nicaragua can be divided into five major categories illustrated in Table 5.1. These land tenure categories correspond to broader agrarian class patterns based on property control, access to capital, and employment. The agro-industry category represents investments by agri-businesses that conduct coffee production on large estates and carry out their own processing and marketing of coffee. Agro-industry represents a vertically integrated system that employs the vast majority of permanent and seasonal labor in Nicaragua and tends to capitalize on its access to capital to increase productivity through the use of agro-inputs such as fertilizer and herbicides. Large and medium sized farmers represented the landed elite in Nicaragua agrarian class structure. While not as efficient in the vertical integration of production and marketing, and not quite generating the same yields as the agro-industrial category, the medium and large-scale estates employ a great deal of labor, have strong ties to the national banking sector and tend to be politically entrenched.

The micro-scale farming household categories represent what I call peasant farming households. Peasant coffee farming is a prevalent form of labor in coffee production in which a household produces coffee as a cash crop on small plots of land

(less than 3.5 hectares) and supplements household consumption by self-provisioning food and seeking off-farm employment. In the peasant coffee farming household, a majority of the labor is carried out by the family members who are compensated, not in pre-defined wages, but rather as a proportion of the income of the household in a given month, season or year. As peasant coffee farming families tend to have very low capital resources and in recent years coffee prices have significantly diminished, peasant coffee farmers cannot simply deduct their costs of production and living from the cash income they receive from their coffee sales. In conditions of increasing quality demands and decline prices, farmers tend to be dependent on credit for coffee production.

The small-scale farming household category in Table 5.1 represents the ideal for Fair Trade in that small-scale farmers are a petty capitalist class that can get access to greater resources and capital than micro scale farmers. In addition, because coffee farming is intensive, small-scale farming households tend to employ both household labor and wage labor to maintain and harvest their orchards. The tendency to employ workers makes the small-scale farming household a distinct farming category from micro farming households who may, in fact, sell their labor (or household labor) as workers on other farms. Within the small-scale farming household category however, there is a great diversity of farming and labor arrangements given that property sizes can range from 3.5 hectares to 14 hectares.

Unrepresented in Table 5.1, are the roughly 175,000 permanent workers and more than 300,000 seasonal workers employed in the coffee sector to maintain coffee orchards and harvest coffee in Nicaragua. An estimated 42 percent of the active rural workforce is

employed in the coffee labors. The vast majority of laborers are employed in the agro-industrial, large and medium-scale estates. However, micro-scale and small-scale farming households with more than 1 hectare of coffee in production and few household members also tend to employ day laborers, or *mozos*, from the surrounding community. With increased quality control requirements, Fair Trade and Organic certified farmers tend to employ more *mozos* to comply with quality requirements (see below).

Table 5.1. Typology of Coffee Producers by Farm Size in Nicaragua, 2000-2001

Farm size (ha)	Micro = <3.5	Small-scale = 3.5 < 14	Medium = 14 < 35	Large = 35 < 70	Agro-Industry >70	Total/average
No. of producers	41 698	5 204	732	245	159	48 038
Total area (sq ha)	36 000	45 000	14 000	8 000	5 000	108 000
Average Yield (lbs oro/ha)*	250	550	1100	1900	2087	16.62
% of total area	33.25	41.83	13.11	7.09	4.72	100
% of total farms	86.8	10.8	31.5	20.5	10.33	100
% of production by group	14.6	33.3	15.8	21.9	14.4	100

*lbs oro / hectare = pounds of export grade coffee per hectare

Source: Adapted from Bacon, 2005. Data from CEPAL, 2002 and UNICAFE.

C. Land Tenure and the cooperative coffee sector in San Ramon

In the literature on Fair Trade, a great deal of attention is paid to market relations. However, access to land, the quality of that land, and the labor force that works the land

collectively determine who can engage in the Fair Trade as a market. Among members of the UCA San Ramon, land tenure is highly variable due to the uneven redistribution of lands during the agrarian reform in the 1980s (see Chapter 4) and the availability of capital to purchase new land, better land or more land. Not all terrain in the municipality offers conditions for the production of coffee. Even fewer parcels offer the conditions for the production of high quality coffee grown at altitudes beyond 800 meters above sea level.

Farmers that supply coffee to the Fair Trade market in San Ramon tend to fall most heavily in the micro-scale farming household category, or what I call peasant farmers (92 percent of the population). There are also small-scale farming households as well (8 percent of the population). According to a survey carried out by the UCA San Ramon field technicians in May 2007, on average, Fair Trade farmer households were composed of seven dependent members. Seventy-seven percent of the peasant coffee farmers in San Ramon managed less than two hectares of coffee in production and sixty-five percent of coffee producing members managed equal to or less than 1.5 hectares.

Table 5.2. Typology of Fair Trade Farming Households by Farm Size in San Ramon, 2007 (n=59)

Farm Type	Coffee Plot Size (ha.)	No. of Farmers	Farmers by Gender (% of Sample)		Dependent Family Members	Coffee Yield (lbs.oro/ ha.)
			M	F		
A	≤ 1	11	36%	64%	5.6	825
B	≤ 2	17	76%	24%	6.2	1150
C	≤ 3	17	82%	18%	7	1100
D	> 3	14	71%	29%	9.4	825
Average			69%	31%	7.1	1000

Source: UCA San Ramon Member Survey May 2007.

While this provides a general picture of my informants, it is crucial to highlight the considerable differences in land-tenure and income among farmers within the Fair Trade cooperative in San Ramon. As Table 5.2 represents, four significant categories of farmers can be distinguished based on land-holding size, yield, labor, income from coffee and total income. In terms of gender difference, women tend to have smaller plots (concentrated in groups A and B) while men make up the majority in groups B, C and D. Around 20 percent of the farmers in my research area (groups A and B) owned very small properties and could be characterized as semi-proletarian, as they or someone from their household worked seasonally on a neighboring coffee farm or in other off-farm rural employment. Around five percent of the farmers in my research area owned much larger properties and employed considerable numbers of permanent and seasonal laborers

suggesting their class position was fundamentally different than those who supplied household labor for cultivation and harvesting. In fact, these larger farmers even employed members of other Fair Trade farming households. Farmers with properties between 2 and 4 hectares (groups B and C) most closely resembled the “family farm ideal” where the household carried out a majority of the coffee labors on their own farms, employing day laborers primarily for the harvest.

Illustrating, anecdotally, the uneven land tenure pattern among farmers, two of my informants managed 17.5 hectare farms with over 20 permanent workers and 75 seasonal workers for the harvest. Such farmers reported higher yields, owned trucks and cattle, occupied multiple properties and wielded significant power in the cooperative. In other words, those who owned larger properties stood out from the rest in terms of their access to ample credit, their investment in yield improvement, and their ability to shape cooperative policy. These farmers represented a different class of participants in the Fair Trade cooperative, visible in their participation in cooperative activities, and their appointment to elected and appointed positions of leadership.

D. Fair Trade Cooperative Structure

Farmers engage with the Fair Trade market through a nested hierarchy of cooperative organizations. At the local scale (first tier), farmers affiliate with a farming cooperative of anywhere between 10 - 70 members. Eight of the cooperatives in San Ramon formed in the 1980s and four were organized in the mid-to-late 1990s. For these cooperatives, three of the most important socio-economic benefits provided by the local cooperatives were access to credit, social services (health care, educational subsidies,

social and infrastructural development projects) and the coffee market. In every case, these socio-economic benefits were secured by the local cooperatives through their affiliation with the municipal union. In its relationship with the municipal union, the local cooperative served as the guarantor of the crop agreements and loans of its members, and it therefore acted, in all cases, as the final arbiter of any credit dispute or contractual disagreement. Due to the significance of these socio-economic processes in the lives of its members, the local cooperative tended to maintain high levels of farmer engagement and require considerable participation of its membership.

According to Nicaraguan law, ten or more farmers can form a local cooperative assembly (first level) and elect a board of directors of 5 members (president, vice president, treasurer, and two vocals) to form a legal commercial entity. Local elected officials tended to receive a stipend and travel expenses to cover the costs associated with representing their membership. In most cases in San Ramon, officials from local cooperatives are elected primarily to represent their members in the municipal cooperative union and they select those representatives based on their alliances with union leadership, their experience with the union, and in some cases, their historic contributions to the struggle of the local or municipal cooperatives for land and recognition.

The UCA San Ramon (second tier) is made up of 21 local cooperatives. The mission of the UCA San Ramon (UCA hereafter), founded in 1992, is to protect land claims and provide credit, legal services, technical assistance, social programs and market access for its member cooperatives. The UCA was an initiative of 5 local cooperatives

and FSLN party members to protect the land claims of the agrarian reform beneficiaries in the municipality. In 1993, through connections made by international solidarity groups, the UCA won their first Fair Trade coffee contract with European importers. Since then, the producer union in San Ramon has doubled its membership and increased its total coffee production from 60 thousand pounds in 1993/4 to over 2 million pounds in 2006/7.

According to farmers I interviewed, legal service, credit and contracting for coffee are the most important services that the UCA provides (see also Lyon, 2002, for a similar case in Guatemala). The UCA is made up of an administrative staff of 21 employees and four elected bodies including the board of directors (5 members), the vigilance board (3 members), the finance board (3 members), and the education board (2 members). While farmers have one voice and one vote in the local cooperatives, farmers in the municipal union vote by proxy representative. Every three years, the UCA's general assembly meets to elect the four bodies on which all members of local cooperatives are eligible to serve. Two officials from the local cooperatives represent their members in the election. By law, the general assembly of the municipal cooperative union also meets each year to review the annual reports provided by both the administration and board of directors, as well as to evaluate the progress of the union, make necessary adjustments, and reinforce the solidarity of its membership. At these meetings, local cooperatives, again, send only two delegates.

The four elected bodies of the UCA are tasked with representing its members in all external affairs, evaluating credit policy and credit requests of more than US\$2,500,

establishing and overseeing education policies and programs, and providing vigilance over all financial and social matters within the union. However, since the UCA carries out many day-to-day responsibilities, particularly pertaining to capital management and extension services, the board of directors' primary responsibility is to oversee the work of the administrative staff, which holds wide-ranging authority to to conduct the affairs of the UCA. The administration makes proposals to the board of directors with regards to policy-making, consults with the different standing committees, and is otherwise invested with the power to make the organization profitable in the interests of its members. In other words, the UCA, though democratically elected, is managed on a day to day basis by an executive agency (director, credit office, social services office, technicians, secretariat) whose primary goal is to ensure economic growth. The result of this arrangement is that the administrative staff is empowered to manage the affairs very assertively and with great latitude. This is evidence of the central concerns of the market rather than the movement per se.

There is considerable political distance between farmers in the local cooperatives and those who serve and staff the UCA. Individual farmers only have democratic influence over union activities through their elected leadership at the local level or in rare instances when they are elected to positions within the board of directors. Given the few elected positions and the fact that many farmers cannot afford to leave their farms to pursue elected positions, their most direct and public democratic participation is limited in all cases to the local scale. Therefore, in my interviews, most farmers most commonly referred to the UCA in terms of its administrative staff and the services it provides. On a

day-to-day basis, farmers and local cooperative officials interact most commonly with the administrative arm of the UCA through meetings regarding the coffee crop, credit policy, or extension visits from technicians. Moreover, since the UCA is charged with managing farmer loans and coordinating the market chain, many farmers see it primarily as a bank and a coffee buyer (at times representing an antagonistic position with regards to their accounts.) Although many farmers described the municipal union in terms of its historical role in defending the land claims of the local cooperatives following the agrarian reform (see Chapter 4) most farmers perceived the greatest benefit provided by the UCA, on an annual basis, as the credit it provided and the market access it afforded its members through the regional marketing cooperative.

At the regional scale (third tier), peasant coffee farmers link into the Fair Trade coffee market through a regional marketing cooperative (the Fair Trade cooperative). The Fair Trade cooperative has grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade. Since 1997, it expanded from representing eight municipal unions made up of 500 farmers to 12 municipal unions representing more than 2000 farmers. While maintaining its roots to the social goals of cooperativism and meeting the legal standards of a commercial cooperative according to Nicaraguan law, the Fair Trade cooperative operates in near complete isolation from the local cooperatives in San Ramon. The Fair Trade cooperative, like the UCA, has considerable day-to-day responsibilities, and its administrative staff, too, possesses considerable latitude to manage the affairs of the organization.

The relationship between the farmers and local cooperatives in San Ramon and the Fair Trade cooperative is primarily based in the crop agreements and credit transactions that are brokered by the UCA. Since the UCA San Ramon is the Fair Trade cooperative's largest member, its most voluminous coffee supplier and its founding member, farmers and officials in San Ramon tend to maintain considerable power at the regional scale. The UCA has equal voting power with the other 11 municipal unions to elect a board of directors and committees that function in a similar way to the unions. However, this voting power and decision-making in the Fair Trade cooperative is three steps removed from peasant coffee farming families. Members of the local cooperatives in San Ramon have served on elected positions in the regional marketing cooperative, however the pool of candidates is much larger and dispersed throughout the region. Therefore, with little contact among the general assemblies of the different cooperatives in the region and a small group of elected officials voting in Fair Trade cooperative elections, there is a tendency toward low turnover.

The Fair Trade cooperative serves as the key broker of commercial and agricultural credit to the 12 second tier municipal unions under its umbrella. In 2005/6 the Fair Trade cooperative managed over six million dollars in loans, more than half of which was sourced through international credit lenders and pre-financing provided through international Fair Trade contracts. The other portion of their operating capital came from private domestic banks. Over the past decade, private banks have increased their loans to the marketing cooperative due to its credibility generated by a strong track record of fulfilling coffee contracts and paying back loans to international clients.

Over the past decade, the Fair Trade cooperative increased their portfolio of clients from primarily mission-based Fair Trade importers such as Equal Exchange and Thanksgiving Coffee to include newer Fair Trade licensees such as Starbucks Coffee Company and VOLCAFE Group, a division of the colossal commodities trading company, ED&F MAN. Due to the economy of scale created through vertical coordination of production, and their extraordinary marketing capacity (enabled in part through years of consulting and financial support from ATOs, NGOs and coffee professionals), the Fair Trade cooperative has increased its total exports from 7 million pounds in 1997/98 to more than 70 million pounds in 2005/06, making it one of the most distinguished and competitive Fair Trade Certified coffee exporters in the country (or, indeed the world).

E. Coffee Cultivation and the Labor Process

Coffee is a tree crop with an annual harvest cycle that is labor and capital intensive. Peasants rarely plant a coffee monoculture. In Nicaragua, like the rest of Central America, peasant-managed coffee orchards tend to be diverse agro-ecological systems as coffee trees are integrated with banana, guava, citrus, and select shade trees. Coffee orchards are maintained by farmers and workers from March to October and coffee is harvested regularly from November to February.¹⁸ The organization of labor in coffee production (see Figure 5.2) follows multiple steps that begin with selecting (or

¹⁸ Export contracts for green coffee are commonly fulfilled and delivered to importers from March to September. Green export grade coffee can be stored up to seven years in optimal conditions. However, changes in quality standards call for coffee to be roasted and consumed within nine months of the harvest to retain its distinctive flavor - thereby limiting producer-side power to withhold coffee from the market and provide objective pressure for higher prices (See Talbot, 2004).

purchasing) the area for a coffee orchard and preparing the land where the coffee is to be planted. To prepare the land, farmers either selectively cut forested areas to maintain some tree shade, or they will plant trees roughly one to two years in advance of planting coffee trees. Next, farmers will select their coffee varietal and procure seeds from either existing coffee orchards on their property, from another cooperative member, or on the seed market. Over the course of several months farmers germinate select seeds in their nursery and once they reach a mature height they systematically plant them in soil. The selection of an appropriate property (soil quality, climate and elevation) and seed type (varietal) are critical elements in determining the future quality of coffee. A newly planted coffee orchard will come into maturity at three to four years, and can produce a consistent yield for up to ten years. As most farmers claimed however, farmers need to renovate and repopulate their orchards roughly every six to eight years.

Once the coffee is planted, maintenance tasks become very labor intensive (80-120 days of person days working per hectare annually). In comparison to other agro-export crops including bananas, sugar cane, sesame, palm oil, and cacao, coffee is the most labor intensive crop. For small-scale farmers, this means that maintaining a coffee orchard beyond two hectares requires either undivided attention or additional labor. Coffee orchard maintenance includes pruning, weeding, pest control, and fertilization which are carried out at different stages throughout the year. Weeding is the most labor intensive job where farmers and workers use machetes to clear the vegetation under and around the coffee trees. In peasant production systems, farmers tend to weed by hand rather than use herbicides. However, most farmers with more than two hectares of coffee

orchards who are not organic certified do use chemical defoliant at least once during the year to cut down on mobilizing and paying additional labor. On non-organic certified farms, if farmers have access to credit, they tend to apply fertilizer at varying intensities roughly four times a year. Most farmers, especially organic certified farmers, will distribute leaf litter and decomposed coffee cherries (the fruit surrounding the coffee bean) in the orchards as a natural fertilizer.

Harvesting is a very labor intensive process that requires a captive and flexible labor force. The most critical and labor intensive period of the year for farmers is the harvest. Coffee harvesting must be conducted in a very orderly manner to capture what specialty coffee experts define as the intrinsic values of coffee. The fruit of the coffee tree becomes a warm red (or yellow depending on the varietal) when it reaches maturity. To protect the intrinsic value of the coffee through the fruiting, workers must be very careful to pick only the ripe fruit. Since the fruit ripens unevenly on the branches of the tree over the course of the harvest season, this may require five or more different days of harvesting through a given 0.25 hectare area over a four month period.

After the coffee fruit is harvested on the farm by the farmer and workers, usually groups of women (and sometimes children) organized into columns supervised by men, the workers will transport bags of coffee fruit to a wet mill where the fleshy fruit layer surrounding the inner coffee seed (bean) will be stripped off by either a manual or gasoline powered mill. Following the milling process (which takes place immediately following the days harvest), the coffee bean must be fermented in storage tanks for 16 to 24 hours under the supervision of either the farmer or the *patillero*, a hired hand with

technical knowledge of the fermentation and washing processes. After the fermentation process is deemed complete, the fermentation tanks are flooded with water and the fermented coffee beans are channeled into a concrete waterway where they are washed by running water and turned over by workers using paddles. After the fermented coffee is washed, farmers and workers commonly pick through the washed coffee using *sarandas*, or screens, to select out coffee beans with defects. Common defects include discoloration, low weight (floaters), infested beans (broceado), or poorly shaped beans. Once these biophysical and labor processes are complete, then the raw wet pergamino coffee is packed in 100 pound sacks and transported to the dry mill (see the introduction to this chapter).

Once coffee reaches the dry mill, farmers pass custody of their coffee over to the Fair Trade cooperative. At this stage, the coffee is still in pergamino, or parchment, form. Pergamino is coffee which has been wet processed and washed but has not been dried, graded or industrially processed for export. At the Fair Trade cooperative's dry mill reception, farmer's coffee is evaluated for defects and then laid out for six to eight days on concrete patios or plastic tarps. Once the moisture content of the coffee bean is reduced through sun baking, it is transferred to the industrial facility where it passes through a thresher that takes off the final layer of external parchment, a screen that removes any foreign matter (stones, sticks, dirt), and then a mechanized grading machine that sorts the coffee by weight, size and in certain cases (where buyers demand it) color. Once the coffee has passed through this stage of the industrial processing, it is re-bagged and stored according to the grade it has achieved. At this point, the coffee is ready to be

assigned to fulfill export contracts. Samples of the coffee are sent to the sensory evaluation laboratory for cupping by cooperative officials and international buyers. This sensory evaluation is critical for assessing the value of the coffee within the specialty market. If a coffee is particularly unique or meets a particular flavor profile, administrators at the Fair Trade cooperative may set it aside for a differentiated price, or to fulfill a specific export contract. Once an export contract has been negotiated, coffees that have already been industrially processed are then either blended or separately bagged, loaded into shipping containers and sent to port. Until the coffee reaches its port of call, the Fair Trade cooperative is liable for the cargo on board.

Figure 5.2. The Labor Process and Quality Control in Coffee Production
Field observations of peasant farmers and cooperatives in Nicaragua

Labor Practice	State of Product	Quality Labor*
Stage 1 – Cultivation Seed Selection Labor Recruitment Land Preparation Nursery Maintenance Planting	Coffee seed Coffee seedlings in nursery Coffee plants in orchard	-Selection of land/variatal -Training workers -Efficient cropping pattern
Stage 2 – Inspection-Certification	Adult coffee trees (age 3 – up)	-Non-farm agents inspect, document or evaluate farm for quality, conservation, organic practices, and productive capacity
Stage 3 – Annual Labors Coffee Tree Pruning Weeding Shade Tree Pruning Purchasing Inputs Fertilizing Pest control Mill Maintenance Labor Oversight Cooperative Meetings	Adult coffee trees (age 3- up)	-Financial and labor investment in quality work and tools -Reducing pest and fungal infestation -Attendance in cooperative meetings and seminars -Investment in short term labor force
Stage 4 – Harvest Labors Coffee Picking Pre-Mill Sorting	Coffee fruit (cherries, or <i>granos</i>) Coffee fruit sorted/delivered from orchard to wet mill	-Discriminate selection of ripe coffee fruit -Sorting ripe and non-ripe coffee cherries -Withholding unripe coffee from wet mill processing
Stage 5 – Wet Milling Pulping Fermenting Washing Post-Wet Mill Screening	Coffee fruit pulped Coffee seeds fermented Coffee seeds washed Washed coffee seeds <i>Pergamino</i> coffee sorted for defects	-Maintain a clean wet mill, processing area, fermentation tanks and water source -Correct timing of fermentation -Screen and withhold unripe and defective coffees before packing
Stage 6 – Transportation	<i>Pergamino</i> coffee packed and delivered to dry mill	- Access prompt transportation - Maintain clean truck bed to prevent foul odors

Chain of Custody - Upon Delivery Ownership of Coffee is Passed to Fair Trade cooperative

Stage 7 - Reception at Dry Mill Dry Mill Grading	First Grade < 5% Defects Second Grade < 10% Defects Third Grade > 10% Defects Certified Organic separated <i>Pergamino</i> coffee laid out to dry on concrete patios or plastic tarps	-Receptionist evaluates for humidity, visual defects, olfactory defects, and wet milling defects - Certified organic coffee separated - All coffee given point of origin identification for future assessment
Stage 8 - Dry Mill Processing Drying Threshing Screening International Grading Mechanized Grading Hand Grading Storage	<i>Pergamino</i> coffee drying (6 days) Parchment removed from coffee First, second, third grade sorted Sorting first grade - weigh / size Sorting first grade - visual defects Export Grade Coffee - <i>Oro</i> (Gold)	- Quality management of sanitary agro-industrial facilities is best represented in the ISO 9000 standards. - Threshing, screening and grading must be carried out on precisely modulated machines - Hand grading is a critical final visual assessment carried out along moving bands overseen by factory workers (commonly women)
Stage 9 - Marketing Sales Account Management Hosting Buyers Specialization Sensory Evaluation Certification Evaluation Contract Negotiation Exportation	Export Grade Coffee Differentiated Coffee Distinctive flavor profiles Certified Organic Fair Trade Certified	

* Quality labor refers to the work associated with identifying, screening and isolating coffees of potentially high value. In each stage, farmers and workers must also perform quality labor to preserve the coffee's intrinsic value.

F. Quality Control

Quality control in Nicaragua, and elsewhere, is driven by market actors downstream in the global value chain, particularly exporters and importers who are searching for coffees with the potential for high retail value. Coffee quality is generally understood through two forms of valuation ultimately perceived in the consumption of a brewed coffee beverage: (1) the *intrinsic value* of coffee which refers to qualities perceived through sensory evaluation (such as fragrance, aroma, taste, nose, aftertaste, body); and (2) the *extrinsic value* of coffee which refers to social or environmental practices perceived through certification and labeling systems (such as Shade-Grown, Bird-friendly, Fair Trade, Organic, etc.) (Daviron and Ponte, 2005; Mutersbaugh, 2005). The intrinsic value of coffee originates in spaces of production, where value is created through biophysical processes on the farm (soil, climate, varietal) and through labor practices such as varietal selection, orchard maintenance, selective harvesting, and wet milling as well as off-farm processing and screening. A farmer explains:

Coffee quality comes from the plantillos (orchards). Agronomic management by the grower starts the quality game. The types of demands (that come from quality control) greatly influence the production process. Principally, you need a person who can play with the agro-inputs, the shade, and the varieties of coffee. You need someone who understands the coffee diseases such as *ojo de gallo*, *la roya*, *mancha de hierro*, *malrosado*, *fusarion*, and *antracnoci*. You need good clean machines on the farm and a *patillero* (wet mill operator) who has discipline. You need to harvest the coffee very well, making sure only to pick the ripest coffee cherries. You need machines to separate the pulp from the coffee bean and to manage the waste water in the wet mill (on the farm). The most critical part of the process in the wet mill is fermentation, washing and sorting. The coffee must be fermented (for 12-16 hours), then washed and sorted. It is best to sort the coffee very well for imperfections because it will hurt you (in price) at the moment of delivery (to the dry mill). A little coffee with defects will damage the whole delivery. The packing and transportation will be critical too. You have to

deliver it right away and make sure the truck is clean. Coffee is like a sponge. It picks up all kinds of odors. (M.M - December 16, 2006)

As this farmer illustrates, the labor process required to produce quality coffee is complex and demanding. The new quality requirements entering through the farm-gate to increase labor requirements and penalize production defects. Increased market knowledge and labor discipline, as well as new technologies, force peasant farmers to work and plan production more than ever before.

As I observed during fieldwork, quality standards have challenged farmers inside the farm-gate. Natural cycles in coffee yields create uneven production and profit every year no matter the level of technological advancement or expertise of the grower. This means that the quantity of coffee produced by yield in a given year will be cut nearly in half the next year. Climatic changes can limit yields, force farmers to hire labor, and hurt the quality of the coffee by increasing susceptibility to infestations and plagues of fungus. Too much rain during the harvest will cause coffee cherries to ripen and fall from the branches faster than workers can pick them; too little rain over the course of the dry season (late-February-to-mid-May) and the plant will yield little fruit; heavy rain or lack of rain during moments of key maintenance such as fertilizing or pest control will cause labor costs to rise as they wait to apply yield improving technologies. If necessary equipment is not available to depulp, ferment and wash the coffee on the farm, prices will drop sharply upon reception due to "defects" in quality evaluated in coffee processing and export. Infestations of pests without proper maintenance can turn first quality coffee to second quality coffee in a matter of weeks. If timely transportation is not available,

washed coffee will ferment in sacks, and if the truck bed is unclean, the coffee can pick up the odor of manure and gasoline causing quality to drop.

After on-farm practices, coffee passes through three stages of off-farm quality control along the coffee supply chain (Daviron and Ponte, 2005). The first stage of off-farm quality control is a visual evaluation of the coffee produced by farmers, effectively assessing the quality of labor employed on the farm. As I described in Figure 5.2 farmers and exporters carry out the first stage of quality assessments at the point of reception when the farmer delivers coffee to the dry mill. This quality assessment focuses on the verification of the size, odor, color, humidity and form of wet mill processing carried out on the farm. The receptionist at the dry mill establishes a formal designation of coffee quality by assigning coffee delivered in *pergamino* a first, second or third grade based on the prevalence of defects. This grading system directly correlates with the price paid to the farmer. Therefore, farmers commonly self-conduct pre-screenings at the wet mill to reduce the number of defects that might be perceptible to the receptionist. The first stage of quality control - visual evaluation - was precisely the moment described in the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter.

Once farmers pass custody of their coffee over to the dry mill and it has been dried, processed and graded for export, the export grade coffee enters the second stage of quality control. In the second stage, professional coffee tasters (cuppers) experience the quality of the product via sensory evaluation. Sensory evaluation simulates the end-consumer experience to determine the more subjective (non-visual) aspects of the coffee's intrinsic value. Sensory evaluators work for exporters and importers to help

assess the value of coffee being exchanged. In sensory evaluation for exporters, laboratory technicians will taste coffees to evaluate their particular positive attributes or negative defects as a brewed beverage. This gives Fair Trade cooperatives a greater sense of what their product is worth. Cuppers are also employed by importers to evaluate the the value of the product they intend to buy. Qualities assessed through sensory evaluation are usually agreed upon contractually between exporters and importers to legally bind the parties to ship and pay for coffees. International coffee contracts are formalized through sensory assessment. Sensory assessments can take place in the producer-country - during a buying tour - or the consumer-country - via the shipping of samples. But, the final sensory assessment of coffee quality is always carried out when the importer receives shipment of the contracted coffee to ensure they have received what they paid for.

The third stage of quality control is the *certification* of the production and processing method as a whole thereby assigning the coffee an extrinsic value in addition to the intrinsic value. Tad Mutersbaugh calls value creation through certification a “parallel rail” to the creation of intrinsic value (2005: 393). The certification of extrinsic value enables actors in the coffee value chain to communicate qualities such as fair prices, biodiversity conservation, democratic decision-making, sustainable development, and labor rights as represented by the product itself. Unlike intrinsic values which derive from visual assessment (first stage) and sensory evaluation (second stage), certification of extrinsic values attaches materially non-detectable attributes to coffee by using labels to communicate them. You cannot perceive extrinsic qualities just by looking or tasting

coffee. Mutersbaugh writes that ““(e)xtinsic’ qualities, such as biodiversity conservation or fair-trade labor practices, may only be introduced into the commodity through monitoring of labor at the point of production and along the commodity chain to retailer venues” (Mutersbaugh, 2005: 390). “This monitoring” he writes, is “accomplished via inspections and document production on a track that parallels the commodity movement...” (Mutersbaugh, 2005: 389). Certification assessment takes place through private or public agencies that verify or prove that civic, ecological, labor, development, or conservation programs exist and adhere in the product via production and processing. Certification evaluators achieve this by winning trust and demonstrating capacity or expertise to a public that seeks these qualities in their products (i.e. consumers of Fair Trade Certified coffees).

G. Fair Trade and Organic Standards

Fair Trade and Organic standards represent two certification assessments available for coffee produced by peasant coffee farmers in San Ramon. Fair Trade standards and certification procedures are designed to guarantee consumers that: (1) producers of labeled goods are small farmers (or workers) with decision-making power in democratic organizations; (2) producer organizations receive a fair-price for their out-put, defined according to a pricing and premium standard covering the “costs of sustainable production” and a social premium to be used for development projects in farming or worker communities; (3) pre-harvest financing is furnished on the producer organization’s request; and (4) long-term trade commitments and development

partnerships exist between buyers and sellers. According to Fair Trade standards from 1992-2007, if a peasant farmer, organized by a democratically-run export organization, sold their coffee under contract to a Fair Trade licensed buyer, then that coffee was pledged a price of US\$1.21 or more per pound (after it had been cultivated, harvested, de-pulped, fermented, washed, transported, sampled, dried, lab-tested, de-husked, sorted, graded, packaged, transported, exported and shipped) even if the market price fluctuated lower than US\$1.21 per pound. In addition to the floor price of US\$1.21 the peasant farmers were pledged a US\$0.05 per pound social premium raising the combined "economic" and "social" pledge to US\$1.26. The social premium was to be managed by the Fair Trade cooperative or its affiliates to fund social and economic development projects that directly benefited the peasant farmers. If the coffee was certified organic by a legitimate certification agency such as OCIA, or Bio Latina, then the peasant's coffee received a US\$0.15 cent differential price above the minimum price and a US\$0.10 per pound social premium. The Fair Trade price mechanism and premium guarantee just described is arguably the most important aspect of the Fair Trade certification. According to Fair Labeling Organizations International, the fair-price is what differentiates Fair Trade certification from other coffee certifications competing for market share in the global North such as Starbucks CAFE Practices, Utz Kapeh, USDA Organic, or Rainforest Alliance.

Unlike other certification systems, FLO guarantees the producers a Minimum Price for their produce, which takes into account the costs of sustainable production (COSP). Producers also receive the 'Fairtrade Premium', which is invested for the benefit of the producers, their organizations or their communities, and an extra payment for organic production. (FLO, 2007)

Another aspect of Fair Trade certification that makes it unique, compared to other certification schemes, is its explicit claim to benefit peasant farmers. Fair Trade standards seek to make the process of coffee contracting more democratic, transparent, and reciprocal as well as to proliferate a model of ethical contracting across products (bananas, tea, flowers) and across institutional and regional contexts (Africa, South Asia, Latin America). Fair Trade standards seek to make the contractual obligations of buyers and sellers more just by imposing specific “observable” criteria for buyer participation such as abiding by a price-floor and providing pre-financing. Buyers with any business structure are free to gain a license to use the Fair Trade label and voluntarily enter contractual agreements with producer organizations on the FLO registry. Adherence to the criteria for *buyers* is observable through formal written contracts between Fair Trade producer organizations and licensed Fair Trade importers. Producer organizations, on the other hand, are required to have their business structure inspected and verified as part of the Fair Trade standards. Producer organizations must meet FLO expectations for democratic decision-making, demonstrate capacity to meet international standards for production, processing and exporting, and they must create a work plan for improving environmental practices. Adherence to the criteria for producers is observable through site visits, interviews and documentation prepared by and for Fair Trade inspectors (Mutersbaugh, 2002; 2005).

Organic certification verifies compliance with USDA Organic standards for production and processing methods that prohibit the use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers and genetically modified seed as well as demonstrate that there is a plan to prevent soil

erosion and employ other sustainable methods such as composting and integrated pest management. To achieve organic certification, farms must be herbicide and pesticide free for three years as well as provide a sufficient buffer between organic and non-organic farming areas. Moreover, organic certification requires that coffees that meet on-farm standards must be kept separate from conventional coffees in the chain of custody. Therefore, farmers must work with exporters that also comply with chain of custody standards for organic. Organic certification is different from Fair Trade in that it certifies farms, groups of farms, processing facilities and export facilities for adherence to a specific set of farming and processing practices. Farmers and cooperatives must keep detailed documentation regarding their farming practices and compliance with chain of custody.

The certification assessment for extrinsic values in organically-produced coffee is more closely related to intrinsic quality assessments than Fair Trade certified coffee in that it directly relates to qualities produced in the labor process. Fair Trade certification verifies that standards are met in the contracting process. In other words, the labor processes before contract obligations are observed in Fair Trade certification procedures (except in the case of Fair Trade-Organic Coffee), remain largely opaque. Whereas organic certification requires site visits to farms and chain of custody documentation that seeks to make production and processing methods transparent, Fair Trade certification takes place only at the regional scale of the Fair Trade cooperative, i.e., the third tier of the cooperative system. By certifying coffee contractual obligations between international buyers and the Fair Trade cooperative at the regional scale - Fair Trade

certification effectively creates a “black box” which shrouds the production and processing methods employed prior to contract negotiation (Goodman, 2004; Lyon et al., 2010). Like the fetishization of the labor process in commodity production and exchange, the Fair Trade certification process conceals the labor that goes into the production and marketing of coffee (Goodman, 2004). While Fair Trade standards include general rules for labor and invoke the ILO protocols for child labor, etc., within the inspection and auditing process there is no oversight on these rules and Fair Trade cooperatives are largely at liberty to coordinate production and marketing as they see fit. Indeed most peasant farming households employ a combination of unpaid family labor and low wage day labor which rarely meet international protocols for labor rights. As I describe below, this lack of transparency regarding the labor process and the market imperative to produce high quality Fair Trade coffee has led to a passive acceptance of a local contract farming scheme as a means for Fair Trade cooperatives to get access to sufficient coffee to fulfill international contracts.

Recent studies have shown that Fair Trade farmers in Nicaragua, and elsewhere in Central America and Mexico, are struggling to increase their household income, improve the solvency of their farm enterprises, and compete in a niche market that is increasingly discriminate, quality-driven, and dominated by multinational retailers (Bacon et al., 2008a; Bacon et al., 2008b; Calo and Wise, 2005; Jaffee, 2007). As I have argued in a recent paper, many farmers in Nicaragua and Central America, even with access to Fair Trade markets, experience a simple reproduction squeeze (Bernstein, 1981) and are living in cycles of debt (Wilson, 2010). Given that the *raison d’etre* of Fair Trade is to

guarantee favorable conditions of market access for peasant farmers and to *provide assurances* that they can meet the costs of production and attain a decent standard of living, their struggle for solvency calls attention to potential limits of Fair Trade alone in resolving the structural constraints to profitability that peasant farmers face (Wilson, 2010). Understanding how peasant households who supply coffee to the Fair Trade market engage with contract farming agreements can provide critical insights as to whether the rhetorically powerful ideals and principles of economic justice propagated by the Fair Trade movement are indeed giving "disadvantaged small producers and workers more control over their own lives" (FLO, 2008).

III. The Fair Trade Contract and Peasant Farming Households in San Ramon

A. Coffee in a Competitive Market

San Ramon is situated in a region known for producing high quality coffees due to its mountainous highlands and ease of access to major transportation routes. Fair Trade cooperatives compete for their members coffee with two different groups: local middlemen and large brokerage firms. Competition can be fierce between these buyers, each of which vies for access to a steady coffee supply (see also Raynolds and Perez-Grovas, 2007). Traditionally peasant coffee farmers did not negotiate directly with large brokers but rather with local merchants and middlemen who were pejoratively called "coyotes." Since peasant coffee farmers had low yields and were often geographically distant from processing facilities, larger firms tended to purchase coffee from coyotes,

who bore the transaction costs of searching for and purchasing coffee from peasants.

Coyotes were most often petty capitalists that had no forward obligation to peasant farmers, no contractual control over the conditions of production, no advance ownership over production, and little overall influence on the decision-making power of the farmer on their farm (Watts, 1994: 27). Coyotes tend to buy cheap from farmers and attempt to sell dear to the larger firms. Because coyotes have the person-to-person contact with farmers and have a reputation for being swindlers, they have played an important part in the narratives told in the Fair Trade coffee boycott. Equal Exchange, in a web expose they call "A Bitter Cup," mobilizes the image of the coyote to describe the importance of Fair Trade.

Coffee is big business - it's one of the most heavily traded commodities in the world. But for the majority of small coffee farmers, the benefits are small. The chain of events that leads from the coffee farm to your cup is long, often leaving the farmer with very little to live on. Most small coffee farmers live in isolated communities in some of the poorest countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Cut off from markets, they usually sell their coffee through middlemen, known to Central American farmers as "coyotes." With world prices in constant flux and coyotes offering the lowest price possible, farmers never know how much they'll get for their crops. (...) But there is an alternative: FAIR TRADE. Fair trade shares the bounty of the coffee trade with those who grow the crop, helping them build a better future for themselves and their communities. (Equal Exchange, 2009)

In the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States, open-market exchanges between peasant farmers and local middlemen were regularly defined as unfavorable to peasant coffee farmers and to the cooperative movement. In fact, the "coyote" served as an early signifier of the "outside" of Fair Trade market exchanges as local middlemen were vilified as a threat to farmers and the development of farming communities. In certain respects this vilification may be misplaced. In Nicaragua coyotes often come from the

same class background as many peasant coffee farmers and rarely have the kind of capital that large national and international brokerage firms have. Indeed, given that the end result is the transfer of coffee to national and international brokerage firms, both coyotes and peasant farmers tend to remain subordinate actors within the broader drama of the coffee trade.

In recent years in San Ramon however, coyotes have not been significant players in the coffee market. Given San Ramon's proximity to major roads, many of the agribusiness firms are purchasing coffee directly from farmers. There are no less than 10 national and international agribusinesses competing for coffee in the countryside of San Ramon. These firms have ample capital resources and offer a range of incentives to attract farmers such as cheap inputs and free transportation (e.g. sending trucks directly to the farmer's property, thereby helping the farmer cut costs and reducing risks of delivery). But the most important strategy used by firms with large capital resources such as Atlantic (a subsidiary of the commodities giant ECOM Group) and VOLCAFE (a subsidiary of commodities giant ED&F Man), is to leverage their powerful capital position to provide credit to farmers at low interest rates and lock them into an annual contract. Coyotes do not have the kind of capital necessary to provide farmers with credit. They have minimal power to enforce contract farming arrangements, and certainly little interest in bearing the kinds of market risk that come with giving farmers a loan some 9 months before seeing any returns. In San Ramon, coyotes find it difficult to compete with the agribusinesses. To compete with the agribusiness firms and capture a share of the market, the Fair Trade cooperative has had to play by the new rules as well.

No longer competing against solely coyotes who could not afford to provide farmers with cash advances, the Fair Trade cooperative has also had to compete head-to-head with well-heeled agribusiness firms searching for a steady stream of high quality coffees in San Ramon. In 2003, seeking to lock in its own members, the Fair Trade cooperative established a new market coordination arrangement in which the cooperative would stop paying farmers in export prices (i.e. the Fair Trade price and premium) and instead pay them at the farm-gate for pergamino coffee. By selling coffee in pergamino rather than export grade coffee, ownership of the product passed to Fair Trade cooperative through what amounted to a contract farming scheme. Michael Watts (1992) describes contract farming as

...a crop agreement made in advance, the processor-buyer-exporter (the nonfarm firm) has title to a portion of on-farm resources and shares, in varying degrees, the decision-making power with the grower. The grower lends to the production process labor power and the effective property within his or her possession. Conversely, the contractor provides some of the production inputs, participates in production decisions and supervision, and holds title to the product. (1992: 21)

In the contract, farmers were obligated to deliver their coffee to the Fair Trade cooperative (third tier), thereby closing "open-market exchanges" (Watts, 1994: 27). The contract also called on the farmer to relinquish rights of sale in export grade in return for access to cash advances in the form of a loan. The cooperative paid them a farm-gate price for unprocessed coffee and a dividend from the final sale of export grade coffee to international buyers. In sum, by selling coffee through the Fair Trade contract, farmers entered a chain of custody whose end result would be the sale of their coffee to either domestic or international markets by the Fair Trade cooperative. The Fair Trade

cooperative ultimately controlled the product and had the right to appropriate the added-value from processing and selling the coffee abroad.

To qualify for a contract, the farmer had to be a member in good standing of a local cooperative. They were also required to provide their land-title as collateral to their local cooperative, which acted as guarantor of the loan. The contracts themselves were written by a cooperative technician who estimated the productivity of the farmer's coffee plot during an on-farm inspection and assigned the farmer a production quota. If farmers did not fulfill their production quotas and failed to payback their loans, farmers would have to pay an interest rate penalty of 25 percent for the remaining debt. Respecting the contract, therefore, was critical for farmers. Failure to fulfill their obligations in the agreement, either through flagrant disregard for their debts or through sales of coffee outside the cooperative were potentially grounds for expulsion from the organization.

For scholars steeped in the contract farming literature, invoking the words "fair trade" in the same sentence with "contract farming" may seem provocative, if not foolhardy. Ideologically speaking, Fair Trade standards claim to enhance the autonomy and solidarity of peasant farmers through democratically-run cooperative organizations while contract farming has been shown, in cases of unequal terms of trade, to nakedly exploit the subordinate position of peasant farmers to secure the production of raw product for an export enterprise. Ideally, in contractual agreements, farmers and the Fair Trade cooperative can share the risks and and benefits that accompany coffee production and marketing. Farmers and producer cooperatives (first tier) bear the risk on production - such as rising labor and input costs, or weather events and infestations that reduce yields

- and, once the product is exchanged at the farm-gate the Fair Trade cooperative (third tier) bears the risk on selling the final product. Contract farming facilitates economies of scale and enables Fair Trade cooperatives to ensure a steady stream of product to meet international contracts, a core requirement of accreditation under Fair Trade standards. Yet, contract farming may also contradict the very goals of Fair Trade. While contract farming represents a unique production and marketing process that can provide farmers with access to credit and markets (a hallmark of Fair Trade), it also shares many of the profits and pitfalls associated with conventional contract farming, including reduced farmer autonomy, the devolution of production risk, and the perpetuation of cycles of indebtedness.

B. The Fair Trade Contract: Selling Farmers Short?

A common misconception among activists and consumers of Fair Trade Certified coffee is that coffee farmers receive, directly, the international FOB contract price of US\$1.21 plus US\$0.05 per pound for conventional coffee or US\$1.36 plus US\$0.05 for organic certified coffee, and that all of their output is sold according to Fair Trade standards. In fact, peasant farmers and production cooperative (first tier) in San Ramon do not sell export grade coffee under Fair Trade standards, nor do they earn Fair Trade prices. Farmers in San Ramon sell coffee to the Fair Trade cooperative (third tier) at the farm-gate in the raw commodity-form called pergamino, or parchment.

Instead of being compensated at the prevailing Fair Trade price and premium standard, farmers were compensated by the Fair Trade cooperative (third tier) at the

prevailing world market price equivalent *in pergamino*. Through the contract for pergamino, the Fair Trade cooperative established an internal market that operated independently from the international coffee contracts that they negotiated with importers. Farmers delivered their quota to the dry mill owned by the Fair Trade cooperative and received a receipt which could be redeemed at the farmer's call. In the contract for pergamino the buyer, lender and point of delivery is predetermined, however the price could vary based on shifts in global market prices. In this way farmers were free to "game the market" by selling their coffee, based on daily indicator prices, whenever they wished. This price risk mechanism, although uniquely "democratic" in facilitating farmer participation in price determination, also devolved market risk to the farmer, especially when the market price was poor.

From 2004-2006, farmers supplying coffee to the Fair Trade market from San Ramon averaged only 72 percent of the international Fair Trade contract price. As per their contracts, in 2006, the Fair Trade cooperative provided each household with a cash advance of US\$32.00 per 100 pounds of export grade coffee they produced. Since the average production by farmers was 1000 pounds of export grade coffee per hectare and farmers managed coffee orchards of on average 2 hectares, cash advances hovered between US\$650.00 and US\$750.00 for the average farmer. Based on prevailing market prices through the Fair Trade cooperative contract, sales in pergamino amounted to US\$1856.12 for the average farmer according to a survey conducted by the UCA San Ramon. In October of 2007, farmers were provided a dividend from the coffee sold to the Fair Trade market (20% of production) amounting to around US\$2.45 per 100

pounds, bringing the total revenue from coffee sales to roughly US\$1892.62 for the average farmer.

For most farmers in 2006, unfortunately, the coffee production under contract with the Fair Trade cooperative came up well short of compensating them for costs of production and costs of living. According to the survey conducted by the Fair Trade cooperative in 2007, farmers reported net losses in household income at an average of US \$413 in 2006. In addition, more than sixty percent of my informants reported outstanding debts with the Fair Trade cooperative averaging US\$200 dollars. These informants experienced losses that were comparable to the Oaxacan coffee farmers studied by Daniel Jaffee in Mexico (Jaffee, 2007). Despite access to Fair Trade premiums, the later still reported losses of more than US\$347 in household income, "even as they invest hundreds or thousands of hours to weed, harvest, and process their coffee" (2007: 101).

Table 5.3. Income, Expenditure and Surplus for Fair Trade Farmer Households in San Ramon in 2007 (in U.S. dollars, 2007).

Farm Type	Coffee Plot Size (ha.)	N=	Coffee Income	Coffee Expenditure	Net Profit	Household Income	Household Expenditure	Household Surplus
A	≤ 1	11	347.94	238.32	109.62	836.55	1536.00	-699.45
B	≤ 2	17	1287.63	619.67	667.96	1495.92	2050.60	-554.68
C	≤ 3	17	2533.39	1612.81	920.58	2554.79	2913.12	-358.33
D	> 3	14	2742.82	1734.17	1008.65	3483.82	3641.09	-157.27
Average		59	1856.12	1108.87	747.25	2149.20	2562.30	-413.1

Source: UCA San Ramon Member Survey May 2007.

As Table 5.3 illustrates, farmers supplying coffee to the Fair Trade market in San Ramon, while reporting losses in household surplus also turned a net profit in coffee sales (see also Jaffee, 2007). What is confusing is that farmers who are profiting from coffee sales should report household surpluses as well, but they are not. How could this be? In the peasant coffee farming households, both farm budgets and household budgets are actually calculated together, since labor costs and reproduction costs come from the same source. While isolating the coffee income, expenditure and net profit can produce the illusion of profit (for the farm), what it does not account for is labor. In other words, the expenditures referenced in Table 5.3 describe costs related to inputs, farm improvements, transportation and wage labor costs (i.e. hiring day laborers) but these expenditures do not represent the non-paid family labor costs provided by the peasant household (i.e. the farming family). When we consider that coffee profits had to cover the costs of both production (of the farm) and social reproduction of the household, both cash advances and coffee profits fell far short in providing farming families a sustainable source of income. Farmers from San Ramon who sold coffee under contract to the Fair Trade cooperative confronted high costs of production and low returns from coffee production by stretching their family's labor and resources to reproduce the family and the farm each year. Fluctuating yields, rising consumption and production costs, rising wage labor costs and the appropriation of value added through quality control downstream in the coffee chain was making production costs and household budgets unsustainable.

Peasant farmers experience severe swings in yields every year caused by limited cash advances, low input use and aging coffee trees in their coffee plots. Fluctuating yields can cause farmer revenues to change by as much as 50 percent a year. These yield swings can lock farmers into cycles of indebtedness and declining income by limiting their total production and hindering them from meeting their production quotas under contract. A farmer explains the effect of this yield fluctuation on their capacity to repay debt and turn a profit.

So what happened with my family last year is that we came to produce some 2000 lbs. 2000 lbs. was only enough to make payment to the debt, but not to repay it or the obligations that we had over this year. And this year we are thinking we will produce 4000 lbs. So the situation is different. But we still can't breathe because you have to pay the credit that we didn't pay last year. So if one harvest drops it hurts the other harvest even though it could be a little higher (yield). So this is a problem that we Nicaraguans call 'stretching and shrinking.' Stretching and shrinking because in one year we falter and the other year it is a little better, but because we have to pay the past debt we always end up in the same situation. Then, in the next year we run the risk of returning to a drop in the harvest. (A.G. - December 12, 2006)

As the farmer describes in the statement above, the revenues earned by a farmer in one year may be stretched to cover debts from a previous year, thus diminishing overall surpluses, even in a good year. The farmer's conceptualization of his situation as stretching and shrinking, captures the subjective experience of uncertainty and vulnerability under conditions of fluctuating yields.

Organic certified farmers reported severely declining yields between 1996 and 2006 while conventional certified growers in my sample maintained or showed minimal yield increases. A union leader described his declining organic yields in the following way:

When I started growing organic with the cooperative my yields were around (50000 pounds on 5.5 hectares). I made a lot of money in that year. Then they

went down from there. 25000, then 15000, then 5000. This year I'll harvest less. But, I still have the highest yields in the cooperative. I don't think I am going to stay organic next year unless (the fair-trade accredited export firm) comes up with some form of assistance program. I think I can get my yields back up if I can apply (chemical) fertilizers. (C.G. - April, 26, 2007)

In interviews with his colleagues in the cooperative, they too stated the desire to stay organic but planned to begin applying chemical fertilizers to increase their yields and get out of debt. If the organic farmers shifts to conventional coffee production she/he may not be able to sell coffee as Fair Trade Certified due to other quality control requirements.¹⁹ Many certified organic farmers in San Ramon and the surrounding municipalities produce coffee below 800 meters above sea level, generally taking them out of competition for quality coffee profits.

Household budgets were a big concern to farmers in San Ramon. Peasant coffee farmers I interviewed produced a little more than half of the food consumed in their households (see also Bacon, 2005) and they described farming for subsistence as a necessary means for reducing the costs of food. However, farmers still depended upon cash purchases for a number of household necessities including education and health care. In interview after interview, farmers lamented the rising cost of food and supplies, labor costs and reduced profits and their combined impact on the household budget.

This past year's harvest was good for us we got up to (50 dollars) per 100 pounds selling our coffee. I made about (2000 dollars) but it didn't feel that way. It sounds like a lot, but our family had to take food costs from that and if you want to eat three times a day you have to spend more. Imagine, corn costs 16 cents per pound

¹⁹ The problems faced by certified organic coffee farmers starts inside the farm-gate and extends well beyond there. Since 17 percent of Fair Trade Certified coffees imported into the United States come from Nicaragua and 85 percent of those Fair Trade Certified coffees are also certified USDA Organic flight from organic certified production in Nicaragua due to declining yields could seriously jeopardize the future of all Fair Trade contracts in Nicaragua. This has been characterized as the curse of the demand for double certification.

right now. Sugar, beans, rice, cooking oil. You spend a lot in food. (S.H. - May 3, 2007)

According to the Nicaraguan Central Bank in 2006, the basic basket of household goods (*canasta basica*) for one family in Nicaragua was over US\$1900.00, more than the total revenue generated by the average Fair Trade farming household (Banco Nacional de Nicaragua, 2008). One year later food costs climbed to over US\$4000.00 (Banco Nacional de Nicaragua, 2008). In September 2007, food prices in Nicaragua quadrupled due to a scarcity of basic grains lost in heavy rains. Administrators in the Fair Trade cooperative reported that eighty percent of peasants in San Ramon, farmers who traditionally produced at least a portion of their own beans and corn for household consumption, lost both of their annual bean harvests in 2007 thus forcing them to buy more food in the cash market, just as the costs of those food products spiked. Throughout 2008, food prices in Nicaragua remained two times higher than they were in 2006.

Yet, household budgets were not the only rising costs in recent years that diminished household surpluses. In our interviews farmers also lamented the rising costs of seasonal labor and agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, fungicides, and pesticides, the costs of transportation, the costs of tools, health care and education costs, the costs of home improvements, and more.

There are a lot of costs. Think, how much does it cost to just pick the coffee? Then think, how much does it cost to transport it from the plots to where we process it? Sometimes you have to pay a worker to carry it. Then, what is the cost to manually process the coffee? Then there is the cost of transporting it to the dry processing center. No one can do this by themselves. Labors in coffee come during specific periods and must be done right away. So you have to pay people sometimes to get the work done at once. I can't do it all by myself. So right there you spend money to hire a few workers. And if you spend too much to

do these necessary labors you could get caught in debt. Maybe there's not enough money left over to pay for fertilizer. (S.S. - March 12, 2007)

Paying short-term laborers is commonly necessary to accomplish tasks in the production of coffee, even on coffee plots as small as 0.5 hectares. Demand for labor comes in brief spurts of intense activity around pruning, fertilizing, weeding, regulating tree shade, and applying pest management. Orchard maintenance averaged US\$2.25 a day in 2006 and wages paid to harvest coffee averaged US\$17.50 per 100 pounds of export grade coffee. With rising food costs, day laborers demanded higher wages and forced farmers to pay out a greater share of the household income to non-household labor. Farmers raise the wages of laborers at great cost to their own profits. An administrator at the producer union explains the dilemma of rising production costs and hiring day laborers.

The problem is that we cannot spend too much money or else we fall into debt. And where do we need to spend less money? In paying workers because we cannot manipulate the price of fertilizer. If they tell me 100 lbs. of fertilizer costs US\$14.00 I can't say give it to me at US\$6.00 because they won't sell it to me. But in the payment of workers you can negotiate costs because I can get my family to help in the labors to cut down on the need to pay a worker and be continuously indebted. A farmer says, "Look, I want to go and fertilize the coffee, so I am going to need money to search for workers." I say, if the farmer takes out credit to pay laborers it is an administrative error. Right now, no one works for US \$1.50 a day. Its US\$3.50 that the laborer asks for. If you pay a worker that amount, well, that is where the costs elevate. (L.D. - January 12, 2007)

In turn, farmers pay workers at great risk to their own household solvency and/or they must self-exploit family labor. The choice facing farmers is a painful one; they must increase their unpaid labor output to stay out of debt, or accept a diminished household income to pay workers.

The inability of farmers to cover costs of production and costs of living, as well as the exploitation of unpaid family labor and poorly paid day labor, complicates the win-

win proposition that producing higher quality coffee results in higher prices paid to the farmer. In an interview concluding my field research in October 2007 a farmer spoke openly about his concerns about balancing quality of life with the production of quality coffee under Fair Trade certification.

I believe that the labels (etiquetas) are good, but the prices we are paid need to compensate the farmer for the demands that are imposed, in addition to the costs of production. Quality is good. And working along the quality route (rumbo de calidad) is good if the prices would compensate us. But, every year the requirements for quality are higher. Higher in the harvesting. Higher in the wet mill. We need to regulate more of our activities. We need to do it. We have the desire. We have the pride. We have the seal of quality from (the Fair Trade cooperative). But we need the compensation to maintain the people who work with us, to maintain the family and the farm. The credo of the (regional marketing organization) is to sell quality coffee. And so it is more costly, more requirements, more time and more work (to do so). But the compensation is not there. There is no incentive. The price that they are assigning the product doesn't compensate the work. There is no incentive to sort out the (ripe and unripe) coffee to improve quality during the harvest. There is no money right now to improve infrastructure for washing, fermenting, or de-pulping the coffee. We do not have well compensated workers. It might seem insignificant, but what about transportation? The coffee that we depulp and wash must be delivered that day to the dry mill. We need vehicles in good condition and roads that are well maintained. We want to do more scientific work on the farm. Research is a huge struggle for us. We want to know more about what our soil needs and understand the incidence of infestations on our farm. But there is no compensation for these costs. The costs that guarantee quality. (S.M. - October 26, 2007)

Returning to the discussion of high quality coffee and Fair Trade prices and premiums, we can clearly see that they are not having the intended impact on farming families purported in the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the global North. Rather than providing farmers a living wage, or a decent price, farmers supplying coffee to the Fair Trade cooperative are struggling to meet the basic needs of their households and to cover their costs of production. They are exploiting themselves, their family and their day laborers

to squeeze out what little income they can. The result is that they are caught in cycles of debt that are compounded by a treadmill of declining productivity. This declining productivity hurts their ability to play in the quality game by reducing overall yields and cutting into the resources they have to invest in quality labor, technology and knowledge. The cycle feeds upon itself. Yet, the poverty of their situation at the bottom of the Fair Trade value chain raises a critical question. In the face of such hardship, why would farmers continue to work with the Fair Trade cooperative under these exploitative contractual conditions?

C. The Moral Economy of the Contract

We owe a lot to Fair Trade...But today the farmers here are in debt. We are facing a crisis in the costs of production. I was buying fertilizer the other day and it was the most expensive I have ever seen. Labor costs are rising because food is more expensive. And (the Fair Trade cooperative) is demanding that we improve the quality of our product. We don't have the money to invest in the farm to make it productive. God willing we will have a good harvest and better prices in the coming year. It would give everyone a chance to breathe. (J.G. - March 3, 2007)

The Fair Trade cooperative was not always the best option for farmers when examined purely on economic rationales. For example, Atlantic/ECOM offered farmers contracts in 2007 at 12 percent interest, paid an equivalent advance, provided transportation to regional pack houses and paid farmers the equivalent of US\$102.00 per 100 pounds of export grade coffee at the farm gate. In contrast the Fair Trade cooperative in San Ramon offered credit at 18 percent interest, paid more than US\$10.00 less than Atlantic/ECOM, and the majority of farmers made their own transportation arrangements at great personal cost due to high gas prices. What this revealed was that cooperatives associated with Fair Trade did not always provide “the fairest deal” in the immediate

term. It indicates how critical the incentives are in contracts with the Fair Trade cooperative so as to win access to coffee in the face of the open market. Agribusiness firms such as VOLCAFE or Atlantic/ECOM may have offered farmers short term economic incentives, but the Fair Trade cooperative provided a range of long term social benefits as well. According to my informants, the Fair Trade cooperative incentivized farmers to participate in contracting in four principle ways.

Access to a Cash Advance. First, contract farming provided farmers access to cash in advance of the harvest, particularly during the dry months - *tiempos muertos* - when they had no income flowing through the household. Farmers needed liquidity for household and farm expenses however, they lacked a household capital fund from which to finance their own production. Farmers depended on the credit outlay provided by the contract to cover both productive and household costs throughout the year. The cash advance tended to be diverted by the farmer to cover the reproduction costs of the household. Farmers will stretch the resources provided by the cash advance to make the minimum investments in farm maintenance and to make vital purchases for consumption needs. Indeed, many farmers with little additional household income treat their advance payments like a wage. Managing credit funds in this way, farmers risked debt for subsistence, banking on a good crop. In the context of few credit alternatives, farmers consistently remarked that contracts through the Fair Trade cooperative were the primarily reason for joining.

Access to Social Entitlements. Second, the contract established more than just a form of income, it also demonstrated the farmer's commitment of economic solidarity

with the Fair Trade cooperative and therefore guaranteed them access to both social and economic benefits. By committing to a contract with the Fair Trade cooperative, farmers also indirectly secured their access to social services such as educational grants for children and adults, healthcare assistance, funeral fund assistance, credit for basic grains and horticultural production as well as development projects funded by external agencies that are brokered by the Fair Trade cooperative. These social and economic benefits were not available through conventional agribusiness firms (or the state) and represented important incentives for entering into the arrangement.

Long-Term Credit Security. The third rationale for farmer participation in the contract was that even in a low price market, the Fair Trade cooperative maintained active credit funds at relatively stable interest rates while conventional agribusiness firms in San Ramon would cut credit to producers or raise interest rates to high levels to cover market losses at the expense of farmer livelihoods. For instance, during the coffee crisis of 2000-2004, the Fair Trade cooperative remained an active lender due to their relationship with pro-poor development banks while other private domestic banks and conventional agribusiness firms reduced or froze lending to farmers due to the lack of profitability and high risk of default.

Security Against Land Foreclosure. The fourth incentive to enter a contract was an anti-foreclosure clause by the Fair Trade cooperative that protected farmers against confiscation of their property for a debt. Whereas conventional banks or agribusiness firms may foreclose of a peasant farmer's property over a defaulted loan, the Fair Trade cooperative would seek alternative means of recuperating the investment. This does not

mean that farmers affiliated with the Fair Trade cooperative have not sold property to get out of debt (indeed the practice was not uncommon) but that the cooperative would not, by policy, confiscate land assets from a member to resolve a prolonged debt. These flexible contract policies and debt-collection arrangements were a product of solidarities cultivated over many years in the struggle by peasants over access to land (see Chapter 4) and cannot be underestimated as a basis for farmer loyalty to the cooperatives and to the contracting system.

As these four rationales illustrate, even though agribusiness firms may provide farmers an alternative to the Fair Trade cooperative, farmers were incentivized by a combination of social and economic benefits. In combination, the logic of these rationales are directly related to the situational needs of farmers in San Ramon, Nicaragua (as well as farmers elsewhere in Central America). First, the cash advance and long-term credit security provided through the contracts aided farmers to provision themselves during dead times, or *tiempos muertos*, between April and November (see also Jaffee, 2007: 96). In a region with very high unemployment, and little saving gleaned from coffee profits, peasant coffee farmers described themselves as dependent on their cash advances from the Fair Trade cooperative to cover the costs of social reproduction. Moreover, many farmers perceived these cash advances as one of the benefits of having formed the cooperatives in the first place.

Second, the social entitlements and the anti-foreclosure clause embedded in the Fair Trade cooperative's contract farming scheme reflected the spirit of sacrifice and collective struggle of farmers in the region. The relations of solidarity and local histories

of the farmers supplying coffee to the Fair Trade cooperative was a motivating rationale for loyalty to the cooperative, even in the face of economic hardship (see Chapter 4). San Ramon is a very poor municipality and the social entitlements such as access to local development projects, educational assistance or even a funeral fund paid for by the Fair Trade cooperative offer farming families benefits that are otherwise unavailable.

As I learned during my field work however, the farmers in San Ramon were increasingly reluctant to acknowledge the fairness of the contract farming scheme. In a changing moral economy of the contract, farmers are beginning to challenge what they see as an unfair system. As one farmer I interviewed claimed, the problem lies in the structure of the contracting process which distances the farmer from the sale of their coffee by the Fair Trade cooperative.

We've created a beautiful (three tier cooperative) infrastructure in San Ramon. You have seen it right? But, it is important to revisit this business model because there are hidden costs. The situation is as follows. The Fair Trade cooperative controls our coffee and the dry mill receives and processes our coffee. Our coffee is what keeps the machines running. They tell us that the profits of the Fair Trade cooperative and the dry mill are for us. But I don't see that. All I have is a debt. It's our work, that maintains the business run by these *cabrones*. We're getting screwed and we don't even know it. Those (administrators) live off of the farmer's coffee. The value-added (valor agregado) stays with them. That money should be for the (first tier) producer cooperatives. We have no idea what our coffee is being sold for (on the international market). There is no sales information. We don't know that world. I asked the (administrators) if they pay us our dividends from the defective coffees (third grade) that they sell on the local market. That dividend is a trick. It's not from what they sell as Fair Trade (comercio justo). I wish (the director of the Fair Trade cooperative) would come here (to my farm) and I'll take his position. I'll eat well there. We farmers have to change this situation with the (Fair Trade cooperative). The exploitation is simply too much to bear. We've arrived at the poorest point where we don't sell in oro (export grade) but in pergamino. It is a robbery to the finish. They're dicking us over (nos hacen verga). We're being tricked like little children. (P.M. November 26, 2006)

As this farmer reveals, by selling their coffee in *pergamino* - before value is added through processing, quality control and marketing - the farmer forfeits the right to earn higher prices on the international market. Those added-value profits are appropriated by the Fair Trade cooperative. In an interview with another farmer, he described the lack of transparency created by selling in *pergamino* and illustrated the frustration of farmers when the Fair Trade cooperative appropriates the added value from their coffee.

I feel poorer by the day. They tell us we have a dry mill. But we don't own it. We have capitalizations in the organization but we have no knowledge of these actions. We have invested in (the Fair Trade cooperative) for more than 15 years. When we go to deliver the coffee, they tell us, "No you don't have coffee here. This coffee is owned by (the Fair Trade cooperative)." Well do you see the professionals from the (Fair Trade cooperative) working out here, sweating in the fields? No they're in an air conditioned office in front of a computer. So there it is. When they fix the price, they don't speak with us and we have no knowledge of what they sell it for. I think they pay themselves in dollars and they pay us with pigs feet. They earn a thousand dollars or higher and we earn 2 dollars a day, in the sun and rain, harvesting the coffee. (S.B. - April 5, 2007)

As these farmers illustrate, one of the key problems with the contract farming scheme was opacity in the post-production process. By selling in *pergamino*, farmers lost control of their coffee and therefore could not win the profits generated from added value. The question of whether the Fair Trade cooperative was redistributing the added-value back to the local cooperatives and farmers, indeed whether they could even do so without sacrificing the solvency of the organization, was up for debate in farming communities. As I observed in Nicaragua, and other scholars have identified in studies in Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala (Raynolds, et al., 2007; Taylor, 2002: 11), decision-making by appointed cooperative administrators (professionals) in regional scale cooperatives is

frequently perceived by farmers as antagonistic and distant from their needs and lived experiences. In fact, returning to the structure of the cooperative system in San Ramon, farmers and local cooperatives have little democratic power in shaping the decisions made higher up in the three tier cooperative structure. In addition, with greater and greater responsibility being passed to administrators (i.e. non-farmer members) farmers were suspicious of corruption and their lack of understanding and class consciousness.

In sum, for many farmers I interviewed the cooperative had its original mission of defending the land and to vindicate the rights of farmers. As the institutional structure of the Fair Trade market evolved from local cooperatives, to the UCA San Ramon, to the regional Fair Trade cooperative, farmers in my research expressed growing concern that market savvy professionals had usurped their power and were changing the organization behind their backs. Coop administrators, however, responded by claiming that exogenous demands on efficiency, competitiveness and quality, as well as problems such as "free-riding" among some farmers in the local cooperatives had forced them to negotiate the line between coercion, control and cooperativism in the contracting scheme to protect and sustain the growth of the Fair Trade cooperative for everyone. As an employee of the Fair Trade cooperative once said to me, "they call me a capitalist because I enforce these policies, but if I didn't we'd all be bankrupt and we'd lose the institutions we fought so hard to create" (B.M. - March, 13, 2007)

In certain respects, the administrators had a point. Placing all of the blame on the Fair Trade cooperative for creating the contract farming scheme draws attention away from at least two deeper structural problems in the coffee market to which the contract

farming scheme is a response. First, the future of the cooperatives in San Ramon was always in jeopardy due to competition from agribusiness firms. For many farmers, these firms represented precisely what they wished to avoid. For the pioneering leadership of the cooperative movement in San Ramon, the agribusiness firms represented national and international adversaries whom they fought to drive out of their country in the 1970s and 1980s, who had benefited from the fall of the Sandinista government in 1990, and who wished to undermine the cooperative sector in the 1990s.

Second, by critiquing the Fair Trade cooperative, we risk shifting attention away from the actual inability of Fair Trade standards to meet the needs of the very farmers and cooperatives who helped to foster the movement in the first place. Fair Trade itself is at least partly to blame as well for this turn of events. Indeed, to see farmers struggle to make ends meet in Nicaragua while consumers and retailers called for an improvement in Fair Trade coffee quality is representative of a complete dis-embedding of the moral economies intended to result from the exercise of Fair Trade. The Fair Trade cooperative, in its bid to export the kind of high quality coffee that is demanded in Fair Trade, has alienated itself from its farmer base. To compete with agribusiness firms such as VOLCAFE (which today is a licensed Fair Trade coffee buyer) and to coordinate the production and marketing of coffee among its more than 2000 farmer suppliers, the Fair Trade cooperative has employed a contracting system that devolved production risk to its members and called on them to improve quality without raising prices. To do otherwise, the Fair Trade cooperative needs to earn prices and premiums that can enable it to carry out those functions, as the executive director told me, “in a high quality way.” But to do

that, Fair Trade prices and premiums need to be much higher. Farmers needed to find a voice to apply pressure and to increase prices paid under Fair Trade standards.

IV. Farmers Find a Voice: Challenging Fair Trade Standards

I want the buyer to get flavor, but how do you get that system to compensate the farmer in the chain justly?

S.M. - October 26, 2007

Since the 1990s, the Fair Trade coffee buycott has asserted that a universal price standard coupled with exponential growth in market share should translate into sustainable development for peasant coffee farmers historically marginalized in the global coffee economy. For years, that price and premium standard was US\$1.26 per pound for conventional coffee and US\$1.41 for organic certified coffee. In November 2006, in the third month of my field research in Nicaragua, the *Coordinadora Latinoamericana y del Caribe de Pequeños Productores de Comercio Justo* (CLAC), a transnational organization representing Fair Trade accredited cooperatives, articulated one of the most powerful challenges to that moral claim. The CLAC demanded that Fair Labelling Organizations International (FLO), the standards-making agency for Fair Trade labeling, increase the Fair Trade price and premium for conventional and organic coffees by more than 30 percent, revealing through cost analysis the inadequacy of the current "fair price" to meet the needs of Fair Trade cooperatives in Latin America and the Caribbean. The CLAC gave voice to concerns among farmers that were bubbling to the surface in a number of meetings I witnessed during my field research at Fair Trade conferences in the United States.

According the Fair Labeling Organizations International website, a fair-price is "...one that covers the producer's cost of sustainable production." These fair-prices are "not determined by bargaining, pressure tactics, or traders in commodity markets half way around the world," rather they "are determined in a fair and systematic manner, and are periodically reviewed to ensure producers' production costs are still being covered" (FLO, Frequently Asked Questions, 2008). Originally, the fair price standards were, according to Paul Rice, CEO of TransFair USA,

...developed through research in producing countries; looking at, first, the cost of production, but then taking the labor component of the cost of production out and looking at, what should labor cost if you want to provide quality of life? To provide an opportunity for a decent living standard to a family? (...) Our experience has been that minimum wage doesn't translate into decent wage or decent living and so we take the labor component out and we look at what it costs to provide a decent living for a family. And then we build out basically a Fair Trade floor price that reflects cost of production and cost of a decent living. (Paul Rice, 2004)

Fair Trade pricing standards sought to create a universal pricing structure that could be adopted on a global scale. Rather than accounting for geographical differences in, for instance, minimum wages in Peru, or the costs of fertilizer in Ethiopia, differences that would create considerable unevenness in the calculation of Fair Trade minimum prices, Fair Trade standards reduced that complexity in cost and compensation to an average price for coffee that is assumed to cover the costs of production and costs of living of a family.

Calculating the costs of production and costs of living in producer countries is complicated because cost of production varies from one country to the next or from one region to the next. So we could have a huge matrix with a different floor price for every region of every country. And the people who designed the model in Europe chose simplicity over that level of complexity and so the US\$1.26 and a US\$1.41 represent an average. They represent a price that *should* cover most

people's costs of production at a high quality level and still provide a decent living for that family. (Paul Rice, 2004)

In 2006, Fair Trade pricing and premium standards had not been periodically reviewed and updated in 15 years, contradicting the claim that the fair-prices promoted by the Fair Trade coffee boycott indeed reflected actual costs of production and costs of living in coffee producing regions. The pressure applied by the CLAC against FLO challenged precisely whether the current Fair Trade price and premium did indeed “cover most people’s costs of production” and “provide a decent living” for farming households. These concerns were not just an exercise in democracy within the Fair Trade standards marking process. At a more critical juncture, the demands delivered by the CLAC were an effort to protect Fair Trade cooperatives around the world against disarticulation caused by increasing farmer debt, rising food costs, capital costs, fertilizer costs, and the costs of quality assurance required to grow, industrialize and commercialize Fair Trade Certified coffees.

After a month of deliberating the CLAC proposal for a price and premium increase in the Fair Trade standards, the FLO standards committee deemed on January 16, 2007 that the CLAC demand for a price hike was inappropriate at that time, noting a "wide variety of views among stakeholders about the need to increase the price, and the rationale, timing and wisdom of doing so." In particular, the press release noted the view held by "many stakeholders" that "the result of a rapid or large increase of the price would be *to significantly reduce sales or limit growth*, which would actually harm producers most." In sum, the initial response from FLO implicitly stated that increasing

the minimum price and premium would cause a potential exodus of coffee firms away from buying and supplying Fair Trade certified coffee.

The FLO ruling of January 16, 2007, determined that Fair Trade coffee farmers, who had no representation on the FLO board, should continue to subsidize the growth of Fair Trade Certified coffee markets by simply accepting the conditions of their exploitation - i.e. living below the costs of production and subsistence. Furthermore, the press release implied that they should be grateful for the FLO board's wisdom in protecting them from their own lack of sophistication about market dynamics – i.e. that capitalist firms are bottom-line driven and seek to keep supply costs down. Three years earlier, Paul Rice, CEO and founder of TransFair USA was put on the spot to answer a similar concern and provided the following response.

...why don't we raise (the fair-trade price) every year for costs of living? Because since 1988 we've only raised it once and so I guess in real terms the Fair Trade floor price has gone down. That's a great question and I'm sure the growers would love to see it go up and the industry on the other side is saying 'Hey your competitors (other labels) have no floor price. Fair trade coffee is already really expensive to me compared to what I *could* get with some kind of sustainability label on it down the street. Don't price yourself out of the market.' And that's the dialogue there. That's the dialogue between growers and industry and that speaks to the essence of Fair Trade... (Paul Rice, 2004)

In March 2007, FLO tried to save face by providing a minor concession of a five cent increase on premium and 10 cent increase on price for conventional and organic coffees, respectively, while they undertook a review of costs of production and costs of living in producer countries scheduled for September 2007. On June 1, 2008, after years of pressure from the CLAC and a research process facilitated by FLO, a new pricing policy took effect within the Fair Trade system. Under Fair Trade standards for conventional

coffee, FLO increased the minimum price and premium for conventional coffee by 7 percent (from US\$1.26/lb to US\$1.35/lb), and for organic coffee by 10 percent (from US\$1.41/lb to US\$1.55/lb). While the changes in price standards demonstrated some grade of democracy within the standards-making process and the Fair Trade movement, it also revealed the tensions generated by what Mutersbaugh has termed “highly competitive, and decidedly non-democratic, conventional market” (Mutersabugh 2005). The paradoxical question that haunts the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the global North and global South is: Who decides how to determine a fair price? Within “highly competitive” markets the fairness of this price determination is certainly not decided by farmers. As Rice describes, Fair Trade prices and premiums are supposed to reflect research in coffee producing regions regarding costs of production and costs of living, but this principle of Fair Trade was not exercised for 15 years. And it seems that in non-democratic markets, fair prices are also not actually determined by FLO. Fair Trade prices and premiums are supposed to hold importers and retailers accountable for their business practices, but as the quote above illustrates, it seems that they are quite powerful stakeholders in deciding what they will and will not pay for. Without the threat of coercive pressure, companies that are sourcing Fair Trade Certified coffee, like many activists and consumers, can opt in and drop out whenever they wish. Adding insult to injury, Rice’s remark that farmers should not “price themselves out of the market” is a moot point. Farmers do not have the power to set prices under Fair Trade standards. In fact, as my research in this chapter illustrates, they do not even have the power to directly earn prices and premiums under Fair Trade standards. Indeed if they did, perhaps “the dialogue between growers and

industry” which Rice claims is “the essence of Fair Trade,” would yield farmers compensation that meets their costs of production and costs of living, let alone premium prices for the high quality coffees that they produce.

V. Conclusion: Winners, Losers and Lives

Certainly, the producers are not the *only* stakeholders in the chain, but aren't they *the most important*? Were they not the *raison d'être* for the creation of the fair trade system? If the Northern administrators of fair-trade certification don't appreciate the struggle for survival faced by small coffee producers who will? (Jaffee, 2007: 240 emphasis added)

For some 15 years, farmers in San Ramon have supplied coffee to an evolving Fair Trade market. At first, this market represented an extension of the agrarian reform which they fought for years to attain. Fair Trade worked in solidarity with farmers to build organizations that could represent them and meet the production and marketing requirements called for in international markets. In this sense, Fair Trade aided farmers in San Ramon to, as the cooperative leader said in Chapter 4, “build commercial enterprises” and “vindicate their right” to be compensated for their costs of production and costs of living. But in the past decade, as the Fair Trade coffee boycott “flipped the value proposition” in the global North from solidarity to quality, the retail marketization of Fair Trade Certified coffee and changes in Fair Trade coffee contracting in Nicaragua has eroded these gains. Indeed, as my informants from pioneering cooperatives in San Ramon claimed, they felt “poorer by the day,” and that today “the exploitation is simply too much to bear.”

I began this chapter with an illustration of the precarious situation of Fair Trade farmers in San Ramon. In attempting to deliver the high quality coffee required by the Fair

Trade consumer and retail market, they must pour their labor and resources into a risky venture. With rising quality control standards, once stable access to Fair Trade prices and premiums is now contingent upon meeting retail market standards that often contradict the movement imperative of Fair Trade (Mutersbaugh and Lyon, 2010; Raynolds, et al., 2007). Access to Fair Trade markets is increasingly determined by augmenting on-farm and off-farm labor discipline, investing in technology, and becoming more knowledgeable about cultivation. Among farmers, quality production is skewed in favor of those with access to high quality land and more abundant resources; and for the Fair Trade cooperative, quality standards have required its administrators to become more market oriented, reflected in a pronounced vertical structure in production, marketing and decision-making. Specifically, market competition and quality control requirements have led the Fair Trade cooperative to employ a contract farming scheme that purchases farmer's coffee in *pergamino*, the raw commodity-form, at the farm-gate, enabling the organization to appropriate the value-added from processing, marketing and export; and stretching the Fair Trade price and premium, however inadequate, to work for the entire cooperative system and the farmers. Underlying the changes in standards are economic problems felt objectively in peasant households such as declining yields, indebtedness and strained relations with their cooperatives. Farmers have responded creatively to the constraints placed upon them, directing their cash advances in their contracts to cover household expenses. Yet in doing so they have also stretched household labor to the point of exploitation. The question that remains is indeed, how long farmer loyalties to

their cooperatives, forged through agrarian struggle in San Ramon, will last under the weight of such an unsustainable production and marketing system.

By presenting the link between coffee quality and Fair Trade as a win-win scenario the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States fetishizes the negative repercussions of collapsing the boundaries between market and movement. By framing improved consumer tastes and improved farmer lives as analogous within the Fair Trade guarantee, the boycott staged a “mutual exchange” where retailers and consumers do not have to sacrifice their personal pleasure for a quality cup of coffee. “Flipping the value proposition” of Fair Trade from solidarity to quality, operated to decrease anxiety and facilitate acceptance of Fair Trade in mainstream outlets in the United States (Chapter 3). But, in producer countries like Nicaragua, promoting high quality Fair Trade Certified coffee obscured the material burdens of production and masked the inadequacy of existing pricing and premium standards for Fair Trade. For farmers, quality is a rule of production not a choice for consumption. The equation of quality standards with the movement imperative of Fair Trade to support farmers, actually required farmers to work harder to benefit from the advantages set forth by Fair Trade. To use the metaphor employed by the farmers, the quality standards add new rules into a game that was already in play. In sum, the consumer and retailer’s desire for higher quality products tilted the game’s playing field in their favor. The losers in this game, inevitably, are the farmers. But, unlike consumers and retailers who risk losing a pleasurable taste, or retailers who risk a reduced retailing edge, farmers risk losing a sustainable livelihood.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

...Fair Trade is both a market and a movement at the same time. I think, clearly it's a market, it's a set of products with a specific set of product attributes and you can think about it in those terms and develop marketing strategies and develop it that way. But the other side of it is that it is something that a lot of people feel very passionate about. And it speaks about the values upheld by a movement for social change. *I like to think of the market and the movement in Fair Trade as like two wheels of a bicycle.*

--Paul Rice, Fair Trade Forum, April 14, 2005

Ideally, Fair Trade seeks to bring consumers and producers of coffee together. What I have illustrated in this dissertation is that the Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States, in its current guise, drives them apart. The particular relations of solidarity once envisioned to be at the heart of Fair Trade's alternative to market capitalism have been eclipsed by more global ambitions to take Fair Trade Certified coffee into mainstream retailing. These global ambitions do not, as a whole, reflect the place-based political visions of either U.S.-based activists or Nicaraguan farmers, even as it employs them in different ways to proliferate the cause. For these two constituencies, located in disparate corners of the boycott campaign and at different nodes along the Fair Trade Certified coffee value chain, the results of Fair Trade's move to the mainstream were, ultimately, disillusioning. For U.S.-based activists, their engagement with the Fair Trade coffee boycott represented both an opportunity to extend their world of concern to include distant others, *and* much to their dismay, their co-optation as voluntary 'affective laborers' into the 'ethical' marketing channels of large commercial retailers with ambiguous commitments to Fair Trade. For Nicaraguan farmers their engagement with the Fair Trade coffee boycott represented both an opportunity to extend the legacy of the

agrarian reform by “vindicating their right” to be fairly compensated for the fruits of their land and labor, *and* reluctantly, their cooptation as “contract farmers” of high quality coffee to the benefit of downstream coffee buyers under conditions of masked exploitation.

Activists and farmers alike, were bound by a particular political understanding of the meaning of Fair Trade. Yet, for each, in recent years, the values, imaginaries and practices that once cohered around the label “Fair Trade”, have lost their proverbial luster. U.S.-based activists and Nicaraguan farmers find themselves in a strange place, trying to make sense of what Fair Trade means for them, let alone what Fair Trade means to/for each other. It is an unsettling place for me as well as I try to make sense of the project I embarked upon four years ago. Indeed, for me, the Fair Trade coffee boycott had represented one “space of hope” in which capitalist market logics were being trumped by movement logics. The Fair Trade coffee boycott was rooted in a particular process of alternative economic subjectivation and helped forge links beyond the particular to reach for more global dimensions of non-capitalist futurity (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Harvey, 2000).

My multi-sited ethnographic research introduced me to two groups engaged with the Fair Trade coffee boycott as a market and movement. The first group was U.S.-based Fair Trade activists affiliated with the United Students for Fair Trade, the largest Fair Trade activist network in the United States. By focusing on self-defined activists whose actions extended beyond mere coffee consumption my study yielded insights into the ways that collective action through boycotting as a tactic and Fair Trade as a movement,

intersected with product marketing in complex and contradictory ways. My research in Chapter 3 revealed that the Fair Trade coffee boycott appealed to activists both in terms of the motivational frames it produced as well as its tactical approach. Motivational frames, including notions of global connectivity, defetishizing commodities and humanizing trade, tended to resonate with activists across the ideological spectrum, suggesting that Fair Trade, as an ideology, was not perceived as politically exclusive, but inclusive of various points of view. Moreover, a significant finding from my research was that the boycotting tactics promoted to increase sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee also resonated with activists because they were deemed satisfying and pleasurable, “a positive step.” The boycott called on activists to use persuasive tactics over coercive tactics to “gently nudge” retailers to adopt Fair Trade Certified coffee into their existing product lines. Campaign brokers such as NGOs Global Exchange and Oxfam America also facilitated the collective action of activists by creating menus and campaign recipes that directed activists step-by-step. In concert, the persuasive approach and the step-by-step guidance proved enticing to many activists who saw the Fair Trade coffee boycott as not radical, but still personally empowering and offering low barriers to entry that enabled large numbers of people to get involved, regardless of their political stripes.

I also found that, over time, activists who partook in campaigns came to question their role in the Fair Trade coffee boycott as large commercial retailers began to sell Fair Trade Certified coffee. Many of my informants claimed that they had lost faith in the boycott as a social movement tactic, claiming that their “voluntary work” was being exploited by large commercial retailers in their effort to fair wash their image. After

successfully completing campaigns, many realized that they had bought into a model of social movement organizing in which they had little bargaining power beyond persuading their local targets, particularly on college campuses. TransFair USA, on the other hand, could use their bargaining power as owners of the Fair Trade Certified label to go over the heads of boycott campaign constituents and cut deals with large commercial retailers, a practice which has caused pioneering ATOs, NGOs and activist groups to distance themselves from the labeling agency. In response, activists began to search elsewhere for other movements to join and especially to attempt to create closer ties to the coffee farming communities that they claim to represent and benefit by boycotting Fair Trade Certified coffee.

The second group of people engaged with Fair Trade as a market and movement were Fair Trade coffee farmers from San Ramon, Nicaragua. As I show in Chapter 4, my farmer informants engaged with and saw Fair Trade as an extension of their local struggles for agrarian reform. Farmers understood Fair Trade, not through the positive motivational frames and morally acceptable tactical approaches that appealed to U.S. activists, but through their local organizing to gain access to land, build effective cooperative institutions and commercialize their coffee. My research revealed that, even though farmers are consistently represented as “beneficiaries” of Fair Trade, they are social movement actors in their own right. Their lack of access to speak and be heard, illustrated in anecdotes at U.S.-based conferences, and reflected in the lack of power to set and redefine pricing standards within the FLO system, demonstrates the weak solidarities and tenuous democracies maintained in a movement waged in their name.

The case of San Ramon is especially important as an example of how different constituencies engaged with Fair Trade to produce their own meanings and interpretations of the movement and market. Through their lived histories of social sacrifice during the Sandinista revolution, the agrarian reform process and the Nicaraguan civil war, farmers interpreted Fair Trade in terms of the defense of their land. Unlike the U.S. activists who praised the low entry barriers they faced to engage in Fair Trade, the farmers I interviewed in Nicaragua described extremely high entry barriers to participation such as being conscripted into the military as a basis for access to land that they would later use to cultivate and produce Fair Trade Certified coffee. While Fair Trade's wide appeal in the United States reflects a sort of *non-radical tone*, the farmers in Nicaragua produce narratives that suggest Fair Trade is nothing but a radical form of solidarity forged at a specific time of need as a means for ex-coffee workers to become land-owners, build cooperative enterprises and export coffee from orchards that they once harvested as landless laborers "working for a rich man."

From another perspective, my research challenges the notion that Fair Trade originates in a sort of North-to-South beneficence by calling attention to the fact that it was revolutionary Nicaragua and the flames of civil war that drew solidarity activists into coffee producing communities and spawned the Fair Trade movement in the first place. Turning the origin narrative of the Fair Trade movement on its head, I claim that by taking into account the "broader politics of Fair Trade" described by farmers, the place-based struggles of the communities in San Ramon take on a global dimension as a productive site for Fair Trade as a movement. Fair Trade as a market and movement was

facilitated by the cooperative movement, civil war, agrarian reform, and relations of solidarity that subsequently led to the exports of Fair Trade Certified coffee, the institutionalization of FLO, the establishment of the national labeling initiative TransFair USA, and the staging of the Fair Trade coffee boycott.

Foreshadowing the discussion in Chapter 5, I complicate a more romantic interpretation of this story by emphasizing that even though my informants represented a certain “success story” of agrarian reform beneficiaries turned Fair Trade coffee farmers, the vast majority of agrarian reform beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in San Ramon (and elsewhere in the world) remain locked out of the Fair Trade market for lack of quality land or no land at all. By only attending to the sales of Fair Trade Certified coffee produced by farmers who are property owners the Fair Trade coffee boycott both erases the history of struggle to get access to land, and overlays the uneven topography of land tenure and class difference in the coffee producing countryside. In this sense, Fair Trade has provided some a new window of opportunity for some while foreclosing it for others. Opening this window on the rural inequalities exacerbated by Fair Trade is most certainly disruptive. How can we reconcile the fact that landless workers outnumber Fair Trade farmers in Nicaragua 40 to 1, and that these workers labor on the farms of Fair Trade “beneficiaries” but have no right to a living wage under Fair Trade standards. Why is Fair Trade not held accountable for a policy that fails to compensate workers for a living wage?

The window of opportunity, however is also closing on farmers in San Ramon who *do* have access to Fair Trade markets. As I depict in Chapter 5 through the anecdote

of the farmers attempting to make a delivery of coffee to the Fair Trade cooperative in San Ramon, bringing Fair Trade Certified coffee to market is an increasingly labor intensive, costly and risky endeavor. Many farmers are increasingly reluctant to acknowledge the fairness of Fair Trade in the context of tightening quality control standards without an equivalent loosening of the billfold to pay for higher quality coffee. I argue that in the United States, coffee quality usurped solidarity as Fair Trade's reason for being. 'Flipping the value proposition' of the Fair Trade market and movement from an effort to "do the right thing" by working in solidarity with disadvantaged coffee farmers, the integration of Fair Trade with specialty coffee in the 1990s led to a quality revolution. The Fair Trade coffee boycott in the United States proposes that this quality revolution offers farmers and consumers a win-win proposition. As I show, however this quality revolution created significant changes in the way that farmers produce coffee and cooperatives coordinate their supply chains to their mutual detriment.

Contextualizing the Fair Trade coffee market in the economic and institutional make up of the coffee economy in San Ramon, I demonstrate that access to Fair Trade prices and premiums is facilitated by land tenure and cooperative organizations, on-farm and off-farm labor, and sensitive quality control mechanisms that collectively determine who sells Fair Trade Certified coffee and how much. Counter to the claims made by boycott activists, NGOs, ATOs, and labeling agencies in the global North, I illustrate that Fair Trade farmers earn only a percentage of the Fair Trade price and premium promised in the standards. A portion of the floor price is appropriated within the Fair Trade cooperative to pay for the high transaction costs associated with quality control,

managing economies of scale and ensuring the solvency of the cooperative complex.

Further challenging the vision that Fair Trade provides farmers a “fair deal,” I demonstrate how the Fair Trade cooperative - responding to both internal pressures (free-riding) and external pressures (market competition) - has come to employ a contract farming arrangement in which farmers sell in *pergamino* (raw unprocessed coffee) rather than the export grade. These sales produce opacity in the commodity chain, leading farmers to question who appropriates the added value from their coffee as it passes through quality control screens en route to fulfill international contracts.

Farmers’ reluctance to acknowledge the fairness of Fair Trade as a market is felt primarily in the objective rise in costs of production and costs of living, which were not reflected in the Fair Trade prices and premiums they were receiving. Farmers were struggling to maintain livable incomes in their households while confronting cycles of indebtedness. The poverty of their conditions within the cooperatives led me to investigate why they continued to stay a part of the cooperatives. What I learned was that the contract farming relationship between the Fair Trade cooperative and the farmers reflected moral economic obligations that exceeded the mere exchange of coffee. The Fair Trade cooperative provided farmers with forward payments that helped them stay afloat throughout the year, provided them with social benefits in the cooperative such as assistance with health care, education, farming techniques and funerals, and guaranteed, through an anti-foreclosure clause rooted in their histories of agrarian struggle, that their land would never be taken for a debt. Yet, at the conclusion of my research, these moral

economies were beginning to unravel and uncertainty about the future of Fair Trade in San Ramon loomed.

I conclude Chapter 5 by describing the debates that ensued in 2007 over the call by the CLAC, the transnational representative body for Latin American Fair Trade producers, for FLO to raise the Fair Trade minimum price and premium for coffee, then stagnant for 15 years. What these debates revealed is the tension between market and movement inherent in the pricing mechanism which differentiates it from both the conventional market and other competing quality labels. As farmers I interviewed struggled to make ends meet, FLO initially responded to the CLAC's request by saying that making increases in the Fair Trade minimum price and premiums would undermine mainstream support for increasing Fair Trade coffee sales (i.e. large commercial retailers would be unlikely to accept price increases). What this argument also illustrated, however, was just how far the institutions representing Fair Trade in the global North had strayed from their originating impulse. How could Fair Trade claim that it was providing farmers a "fair deal" when its own standards were not being upheld? The Fair Trade minimum price and premium was supposed to cover farmers costs of production and costs of living, yet in reality, these pricing and premium standards had no relationship to actual conditions of production. In an effort to satisfy the Fair Trade cooperatives, FLO did make incremental increases in the pricing mechanism in 2007 and 2008, however, it is uncertain how this will translate into improvements in farmer livelihoods in the future.

Throughout the dissertation I exploited a duality between market and movement that I felt was productive in analyzing and narrating what I observed during my years of

field research in the United States and Nicaragua. At first, my inclination was to employ these terms in an either/or dichotomy, seeking refuge in the notion that Fair Trade was more a movement than a market or vice versa. While it seemed to be enticing to emphasize the redeeming or corrupting power of one logic over the other (for instance that the Fair Trade movement was redeeming the retail marketplace, or that the retail marketplace was corrupting the Fair Trade movement) I sought to keep the terms market and movement in tension throughout the analysis. As coordinating logics for the expansion of Fair Trade Certified coffee sales, market and movement supplement one another. Neither market nor movement, I would argue, can be isolated as the force that drives Fair Trade Certified coffee sales. As I conceptualized through the notion of the ‘buycott,’ today social movements can sell products just as retailers can. Activist volunteers can sell Fair Trade Certified coffee as well as any paid salesperson at Starbucks. And as the anecdote describing the Fair Trade coffee buycott at Rutgers University depicts in Chapter 3, such as commercial retailers like Green Mountain Coffee Roasters can also play a central role in fostering and supporting movement actions by activists. Both market and movement do represent the synergetic coordination of social and economic processes.

However, my research does not celebrate this synergetic relation between market and movement. If we return to the bicycle metaphor that Rice used in 2005 to describe the relationship between market and movement in Fair Trade, we must ask: who is steering the bike? As Nicaraguan farmers and U.S.-based activists described in our interviews, they were not in control of the bike, even though they may contribute to the

pedaling. This was a point driven home by Jonathan Rosenthal, co-founder of Equal Exchange, when in the aftermath of Rice's speech at the Fair Trade Forum in 2005, he remarked rather cleverly that "the biker has his blinders and earphones on and is headed for a ditch...Or even better, it's not a bicycle at all but a speeding car and the driver has the windows rolled up and the music blasting. We're the ones on the old rusty bicycles and you are passing us by like we are standing still." Since the bike riders (i.e. TransFair USA, FLO, NGOs, Fair Trade cooperatives) steered the movement toward increasing the market share of Fair Trade Certified coffee "as an end in itself," both market and movement (front wheel and back wheel) have moved in that direction; with painful consequences.

The result for U.S.-based activists, was that boycotting - as opposed to boycotting - would serve as the principle social movement tactic that they adopted. Promoting the Fair Trade Certified coffee label would be the central objective. To induce large numbers of people to buy into the boycott, campaign brokers generated sound-bite motivational frames that reduced complexity and sold activists and consumers on the non-radical nature of Fair Trade; appealed to activists by lowering barriers to participation and encouraging them to "do good"; and finally innovating tactics that called for persuasion over coercion, thereby robbing activists of one of their most important weapons of accountability - contentious protest. The result was a successful boycott campaign reflected in the involvement of large numbers of short term activists and the rapid increase of Fair Trade Certified coffee sales. But at what expense? For U.S.-based activists, the costs of adopting the boycott as a tactic were felt unevenly. Among the

masses of activists, the boycott represented an ephemeral chance to “get involved” in a movement for social change that meshed with their values. For staunch social justice activists, the boycott represented a failed movement strategy since its “base” was built among privileged Northern consumers who, in the final analysis, conceded power to large commercial retailers. Finally, for the core group of Fair Trade activists, the boycott resulted a loss of innocence and faith in the strategy of boycotting as an end in itself. The latter group of core Fair Trade activists have stuck with the Fair Trade cause but are searching for a new direction. Today, USFT is a much different organization than it was four years ago when it was deeply enmeshed in the Fair Trade coffee boycott.

By observing and interviewing Nicaraguan farmers and U.S.-based Fair Trade activists, I learned that Fair Trade is not an immutable ideal, but its meaning shifts and moves, is interpreted in diverse places and by various people, often in contradictory ways. Some of those ways have been more or less market and movement oriented; and in other ways more or less rooted in ideals and materialities. In contrast to the romantic vision of global solidarity which connects consumers and producers, NGOs and corporations, in the motivational frames of the Fair Trade coffee boycott, I have learned that constituencies within the boycott campaign often interpret Fair Trade through lenses of incompatible moral concerns, obligations and expectations. I have observed a friction between the global aspirations of the brokers of the Fair Trade Certified coffee label and the polyvalent and situated moral concerns of the people who advocate for, produce, buy, sell and consume Fair Trade products. Indeed the execution of campaigns touting global

goods (i.e. moral values and/or commodity values) often bring together strange bedfellows.

There is hope, I believe, in the fact that farmers are finding spaces and places through which they can articulate the particular political visions and assert global ambitions of their own. Revisiting the intervention of the Nicaraguan delegation to the Empowering Alternatives Convergence in 2005, I am reminded of the words of one of the participants.

We wanted to invite you here to consider *our* ideas on Fair Trade. Fair Trade is about relationships that cannot be represented by money. It is not just about coffee or other products. We want to bring forth an idea that is much broader about Fair Trade. It is a bigger story that you may not know or have not *yet* heard.

Clearly the Nicaraguan farmers with whom I studied Fair Trade have not all completely lost faith in the promises of Fair Trade as part of their broader political vision. And U.S.-based activists, though often ambivalent about the politics of Fair Trade, have, in their effort to look beyond the boycott, come into contact with alternative visions of Fair Trade rooted in more clearly articulated political and moral values. The political visions that movement members articulate, while still contextualized within the realities of the U.S. market and movement for Fair Trade Certified coffee, are increasingly attempting to translate the demands of farmers and workers into forms of solidarity that are claimed only abstractly by the Fair Trade Certified label.

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