



# **Fair Trade Consumerism as an Everyday Ethical Practice – A Comparative Perspective**

**An ESRC-Funded Research Project at the University of Exeter**

## **Results and Policy Implications**

**June 2008**

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## ***Background***

Fairtrade consumption has been growing rapidly over the last years and particularly in the UK, which now is the biggest market for fairtrade goods in Europe. The rise of “ethical” or “political” consumption defies concepts of the consumer as ‘private economic hedonist’ (Sassatelli 2006: 231), leading to claims about consumer/citizens being politicised (Micheletti & Stolle 2007), seeing themselves as ‘economic voters’ (Shaw, Newholm et al. 2006). There have been questions about the remaining involvement of “egoistic” or “hedonistic” motives vs. “altruistic” or “moral” motivations (e.g. Levi & Linton 2003, Daniel, Bricas et al. 2008), but also questions whether egoism/altruism is an issue at all or whether it would not be more appropriate to talk about a new form of ‘alternative’ hedonism (Soper 2007). In that latter category one may also count motives like the search for a ‘warm glow’ (Leclair 2002: 954) and finding ‘joy and confirming our own humanity’ (Gould 2003: 343) – a ‘feel-good factor’ and a positive identity (Zadek, Lingayah et al. 1998: 32f.).

Recent research has shown the importance of another aspect of ethical consumption as integral part of moral selfhood – ‘moral selving’ (Barnett, Cloke et al. 2005). While the importance of the self-identity as a determining factor in ethical consumption has been identified before (Shaw & Shiu 2002), those findings indicate that practices around fairtrade consumption must themselves be seen as functional in the construction and expression of a self-identity which always has a moral dimension. Although such self-making is partly expressed in what could be termed “morally conspicuous consumption” and can involve a claim to superiority of one’s own lifestyle over others’ (Shaw & Clarke 1999: 116), the essential aspect seems to be self-reassurance about being a morally acceptable person. We therefore adopted an approach from character as proposed by Campbell (1990) because, as Sassatelli (2006: 237) puts it, we need to understand ‘the “good reasons” that actors give for their own and others’ practices of consumption and the “type of person” they want themselves to be’.

Our research asks how such ethical selving<sup>1</sup> works both as construction *and* expression of ‘ethical dispositions’ (Barnett et al. 2005: 28) or an ‘underlying moral self’ (Allahyari 2000: 4) into practices of consumption, drawing on (and transforming) established patterns of legitimacy. In this exploration it was essential to acknowledge that for the construction of ethical subjects neither the inner logic of the articulated ethical claims nor the morality implied by the ethical practice can be arbitrary. Any construction of ethical selfhood through consumption, even if it is “alternative”, lays claim to legitimacy and any claim to legitimacy must refer to a shared social context (Sayer 2004: 16). Even the self-expression that takes centre stage in an approach from character cannot do without an element of conspicuousness, needs social affirmation in similar ways as Veblen’s (1994) ‘conspicuous consumption’ (cf. Barratt Brown 1998, Varul 2006).

As a dissenting yet highly plausible ethical concept, fairtrade must be understood as both emerging from and negating the taken for granted legitimacy of contemporary consumer-capitalist societies in a dialectical manner. As Pitkin (1972: 175ff.) argues, the notion of ‘justice’ is rooted in practice not in a purely affirmative way but as pointing beyond the very practice it is a part of. Therefore we have been looking for such notions as emerging from the practices of commerce and consumption themselves (cf. Warde 2005: 140) rather than the philosophical tradition (cf. Barnett, Cafaro et al. 2005).

As fairtrade consumption is found across the consumer-capitalist societies of Europe and North America, our first assumption was that consumer capitalism itself provides such a shared background. Even if fairtrade is working ‘*in and against* the market’ (Brown 1993: 156, italics added), because it is involved it needs to play to moral assumptions that are implied by market practices. Notions of equitability and recognition developed in everyday exchanges in the labour and consumer markets inform the morality of exchange (Varul 2005a, 2005b) that is articulated in fairtrade.

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<sup>1</sup> We will, in the following, speak of “ethical” rather than “moral” selving in keeping with the Foucauldian reference the term is used by Barnett et al.

The underlying assumption is that commercial relations within Northern societies are, overall, fair and the aim is to generalise this over the globe (Fridell 2003: 6) by establishing a global consumer democracy (Waridel 2002: 21ff.).

But this is not the whole story. As Sassatelli (2006: 226) points out, while the aspirations and associations of fairtrade is a transnational and ‘in post-colonial times such as ours, overt nationalistic uses of goods may come under attack, but this does not mean that our consumer identities are truly cosmopolitan’. The now well documented French case (Diaz Pedregal 2007), for example, shows that there are very distinct national pathways to fairtrade consumption.

A comparison of the UK with Germany is of particular interest for several reasons. First of all, there is a notable difference in the overall sales of fairtrade products – less than a third in Germany than in the UK (Krier 2005). Also, there is a wide literature that highlights the two countries as model cases of distinct types of capitalism in Europe (e.g. Lane 1995), with distinct modes of accounting for economic action (e.g. Ahrens 1997), economic ethics (Crouch/Marquand 1993), ideas of distributive justice (Esping-Andersen 1990, Mau 2004), and historical approaches to the assessments of what constitutes the value of labour (Biernacki 1995). Such differences in the cultures of production are matched by differences in cultures of consumption (Deutschmann 2006) and consumer activism (Trumbull 2001, Hilton 2001). And finally, since consumer culture as such is steeped in the history of Empire (e.g. Auerbach 2002, McClintock 1995), and with the flagship fairtrade products (coffee, tea, cocoa, bananas) traditionally being the fruits of Empire, differences in the representation of colonial and post-colonial relations will be also of relevance. Of particular interest are nationally distinct visions of ‘anti-conquest’, which Pratt (1992: 7) identifies as ‘strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony’. If it is the case that anti-conquest enables fairtrade marketing to romanticise products and producers by drawing ‘on a long Western tradition of Orientalism’ (Johnston 2002:

50), the notable differences in British and German Orientalisms (Said 2003, Kontje 2004) cannot be without consequences.

### ***Objectives***

There were two main objectives set out in the initial research proposal:

“1) to establish how alternative ethics of consumption are employed and accounted for in the construction of moral selves

2) to establish how they relate to the moral grammars of larger social contexts by actualising, questioning and developing them: How do consumers construct and justify the morality of Fair Trade? What is the role of this ethicality in defining their moral position within and vis-à-vis their social contexts?”

The first objective has been addressed and achieved by conducting and interpreting in-depth interviews with fairtrade consumers. A first outline of the results regarding this was presented at a workshop and is currently being developed into a journal article (Varul 2009).

The second objective has been addressed and achieved through analysing promotional material and in the analysis of the interviews. In a qualitative study there could not, of course, be a comparison in terms of a differing prevalence of characteristics. What could be achieved, however, was to establish possible ways how promotional material and accounts in both countries draw on general and nationally specific ‘moral sources’ (Taylor 1989: 8f.). This led to specific, empirically grounded hypotheses that now can be quantified.

Further objectives have emerged during the research, which could not be built into the design of the interview schedules, but they have been at least partially addressed in the analysis and will lead to conceptual papers. They are:

- Fairtrade and ‘consumer anxiety’ (Warde 1994): The guilt motive in fairtrade consumption has shown to be relevant in various forms.
- Iconographies of fairtrade: Our analysis of producer “vignettes,” categorised in a matrix of “region” and “product”, and the interview passages that related to such

images showed tensions in the representations of producers as both “innocent victims” and as “saints” that merit further investigation.

## ***Methods***

The study looked at fairtrade promotional material and interviews with fairtrade consumers and activists.

Promotional material included websites, brochures, annual reports and magazines from the national fairtrade labelling organisations (*Transfair* in Germany and the *Fair Trade Foundation FTF* in the UK) and from alternative trading organisations (*Divine*, *Traidcraft*, and *Cafédirect* in the UK, *Gepa* and the *Weltladendachverband* in Germany).

57 interviews were conducted overall, 35 in Devon, England, and 22 in Württemberg, Germany. Six of the German participants currently or in the past volunteered in a fairtrade shop (*Weltladen*), five of the British participants were fairtraders for *Traidcraft* or *Tearcraft*, others were involved in some form of activism relating to fairtrade. The sample reflected the female middle class centredness of ethical consumption. As this is an explorative study, more important than a representative distribution was to have a wide range of different participants (also in terms of age, to reflect generational perspectives), which we achieved (the sample included students and pensioners as well as a few working class people)

Interviews were semi-structured, using a standardised schedule but always giving priority to the narrative flow in the participants’ accounts. Interviews normally lasted between one and two hours. All interviews were tape recorded; all British interviews and 17 of the German interviews were transcribed.

The interviews were interpreted using methods developed under the title “objective hermeneutics” or “structural hermeneutics” (Oevermann, Allert et al. 1987, Oevermann 1986, Maiwald 2005), which are particularly suited to uncover tacit moralities of everyday discourses and practices. Objective hermeneutic interpretation involves a very intensive analysis of interview sequences in a few cases, which then are tested/falsified against the following sequences and other cases. Where identified

rules are falsified the intensive interpretation is taken up anew to either modify the results so far or add a new type of case structure.<sup>2</sup> Recordings and transcripts were taken as results of a process of ‘active interviewing’ (Holstein/Gubrium 1997) – i.e. as performances of identity in their own right and not just as accounts about the person outside the interview situation (also cf. Woodward 2006). Processes of ethical selving were not just reported but crucially also occurred in the interviews themselves, so that we have first-hand protocols of them. Participants in most cases have taken the interview situation as one in which they were under a requirement to justify themselves.

## ***Results***

The results of the study fall into two main categories, responding to the objectives of the research: the question of how *ethical selving* is performed through fairtrade consumption, and the *cultural contextualisation* of fairtrade consumption.

### *Ethical Selving*

Our research confirms that fairtrade consumption is highly identity relevant. Participants inter-weaved accounts of what fairtrade goods they buy with accounts of who they are (often accompanied by a biographical account) in a way that such goods are to be regarded psychologically significant ‘symbols of the self’ (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton 1981: 55ff.), or ‘extensions of the self’ (Belk 1988) that are clearly invested with identity, asserting the self as an *ethical* self.

This became particularly clear when accounting for instances where actual behaviour did not fully live up to the self-set targets. As did Newholm (2000: 157) before us, we too found that in some cases ‘the relationship between [...] attitudes and behavior seemed inconsistent and at times bizarre’. But such apparent contradictions are

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<sup>2</sup> When this occurred in not yet transcribed German interviews, a transcription was then produced

resolved if one explores the role of the teleological character ideal that is anticipated but not yet realised in alternative practices of consumption.

Foucault (1991: 352ff.) suggested four aspects of the relation to the self that is ethics: the identification of morally relevant fields of behaviour, the ways people are called upon to change their behaviours, what part of one's life is relevant and finally, as the *teleological* element: 'Which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way?' (1991: 355). Earlier research (Barnett, Cloke et al. 2005 in particular) has shown the relevance of the first three elements and our research confirms this: fairtrade consumers are referring to a particular field of their behaviour that has been identified as morally relevant (shopping, consumption); they are referring to a set of standards against which that field can be measured (fairness, equity, charity – see below), and are provided with the means to change their behaviour (alternative supplies of consumer goods). In addition, our study shows that the fourth aspect is of central importance. While *doing* good is without doubt a central objective in practices of fairtrade consumption, the main concern in accounting for such practices is *being* good in terms of working towards an ideal self. Being discursively constructed as powerful consumers (e.g. Renard 2003: 92) the use of the power of the purse was experienced as a moral test. Not only actual practices and their moral value were important – it was also important that these are expressions of an underlying ethical disposition, of a good character. In short: the “right thing” needed to be done for the “right reasons”. In the framework of an active interview, accounting for shortcomings could be interpreted as the formulation of an agenda for the future as much as a “confession” of past failure in which interviewees actively negotiated the extent to which they have to move further towards their ideal to remain credible “ethical consumers”.

Another way in which the significance of the projected ethical self as source of actual ethical shopping behaviour showed was in judging the attitudes and behaviours of others. Assessing what others do in most cases included a claim that this reflects, if not ill will (although that too in some cases), at least a lack of care, moral indifference.

Normally this was directed at competing segments of the middle classes (often identified as “middle aged businessmen”, 4x4 drivers etc.), but even when assessing low-income families there was only limited leeway given for price-conscious behaviour. Often stereotyped under-class consumption behaviour (expensive branded track suits, game consoles etc.) was contrasted with own behaviours during past spots of low income (e.g. as students). “Underclass” consumer behaviour – often explicitly associated with being a “single mom” and/or being “on benefits” – appeared in contrast with the more authentic poverty of the producers who appear to – uncomplainingly and tirelessly – work very hard for the benefit of their families and communities. Producers were rarely envisaged as consumers themselves, functioning as cultural heroes of a frugal Protestant work ethic (also cf. Diaz Pedregal 2008: 11) that is seen to have lost out in consumer capitalism. Some informative exceptions to this were found in the rare cases of participants being themselves working class or having working class involvements (e.g. in the Cooperative movement) – with their accounts indicating that there are clear class limits to fairtrade consumption. Taken together this indicates that distorted perceptions of producers such as reported by Berlan (2008) may be due to a subsequent absence of a working-class perspective in a middle-class dominated discourse (also cf. Frank 2003).

Two major forms of ethical selving have been identified – both involving a claim to an underlying disposition in a way that allows us to view both as involving “tastes” in the sense Bourdieu (1979) outlined: as a socially constructed but “naturalised” power of classification. We called them a “*taste for ethics*” and an “*ethical taste*,” the former associated with “true blue” fairtrade supporters and activists, the latter more commonly found in “mainstreamed” fairtrade shoppers. These are ‘ideal types’ (Weber 1978: 6f.) that have been identified as vanishing points towards which empirical discourses gravitated – in a way they are hyperbolised versions of empirical cases to be used to highlight the internal logic of those cases.

In an *ethical taste*, moral and aesthetic judgements tend to coincide. Fairtrade coffee, for example, both *is* morally better and *tastes* better than normal coffee. The packaging of fairtrade goods is more pleasing than the often shrill and shiny presentation of conventional goods, etc. As there already is an attraction to the ‘commodity aesthetics’ (Haug 1986) of fairtrade, ethical choices come natural and do not need to be much reflection. They become, as called for by fairtrade advertising, a character-defining ‘habit’ (much in the sense of Dewey 1922). The implicit statement of an ethical taste is a match between character and consumer choice. For example, in one case, the judgement on consumption behaviours in others required them only to engage in fairtrade if it fits in their general style – i.e. in this one (extreme) case a match with one’s aesthetic style was even more important than the moral and political issues involved. In most cases the ethical taste manifested itself in a predilection for what could be characterised as “natural”, “authentic”, “simple-yet-elegant”, “ethno-chic” (also cf. Diaz Pedregal 2005) which, as is also confirmed by marketing considerations around products like fairtrade wine (Nicholls 2004) play to a certain type of “connoisseur”. While not an absolute criterion for inclusion or exclusion from friendship networks, ethical taste clearly was accounted for as situated in communities of taste, lifestyle communities in which not only the morality of fairtrade was shared knowledge but choices also fitted in both ethically and aesthetically into what, appropriating the notorious stereotype, one participant characterised as the class of the “Guardian reading muesli eaters” – i.e. a liberal/green/academic milieu.

It has been pointed out before that mainstreaming creates a need for the core fairtrade followers to differentiate themselves from what to them appears to be a mass consumer endorsement (Sassatelli 2006: 226). Our results confirm this: While on the one hand mainstreaming is welcomed as generating income for deprived agricultural producers in the South, mainstreamed fairtrade shoppers still are frowned upon for having the wrong motives – buying themselves a good conscience without

further reflecting on their roles as consumers, or even buying only because one now does so. Like a ‘brand community’ (Muniz & O’Guinn 2001), committed fairtrade consumers maintain a sense of exclusivity based on superior knowledge and powers of discernment.

Here the claim to an ethical taste is confronted with a taste *for* ethics where it is not the ethical product itself that is subject to a taste-led decision but the *search* for the ethically best buy – an inclination towards scrutinising, questioning, weighing the consequences of one’s behaviour. Much time is spent on finding out sources, checking out claims, reading up issues etc. – but this is not seen in terms of a “sacrifice” of effort and money for a good cause. Such activities are reported in a way that makes it clear that they come natural, are experienced as satisfying and even pleasurable – and by no means as a “hassle” like ordinary shopping routines would be. While the ethical choice itself may not be governed by a search for pleasure – i.e. the fairtrade product does not necessarily need to be qualitatively or aesthetically superior to the conventional alternative – the process of choosing itself can be an alternative-hedonistic pursuit. Such ethical searching takes the ethical consumer through different social settings, is embedded in a community of like-minded friends, volunteers and campaigners, but also virtual forums, internet searches etc., establishing communities of consumer activism. Within those communities individual customisation of conduits offered by fairtrade organisations played – at least in the UK – a central role in appropriating such discourses and thus transforming them an authentic expression of the *individual* ethical self.

### *Cultural Contextualisation*

The concern for ethical selving did not mean that fairtrade consumers were indifferent to the nature of the moral case made by fairtrade promotion. Our results confirmed that both *consumer capitalism* as such and consumer capitalism *in its national forms* had an impact on fairtrade marketing and consumer narratives (for a more detailed account cf. Varul 2008a, 2008b).

There was a clear sense of causality along the commodity chains that span the globe in which consumers appeared as empowered agents within a global network of exchange who could use their power to enact change at a distance (confirming Whatmore & Thorne 1997). Secondly, there are very strong indications that the fairness of fairtrade indeed is constructed in terms of exchange of labour value – with the general assumption in both official and individual discourses being that (manual) labour should earn the production cost of labour power (on an individual and a class basis): food, shelter, health services, education.

In promotional material commercial exchange was presented as a way of providing not only a fair income but also recognition and self esteem. Already on the level of fairtrade marketing this does not work out smoothly due to a remaining element of charitable aid in the fairtrade price and due to the involvement of colonial imageries (Varul 2008b). In the consumer interviews the contrast between trade and aid was even less clear. With few exceptions statements about recognition only were made after being prompted by the interviewer, and even then creation of self-esteem was often presented more as a beneficial (therapeutic) side-effect while the main benefit of trade was seen in instrumental terms – as a more *effective* and *sustainable* alternative to charity. There was, however, an (often unarticulated) understanding of recognition as an aim of fairtrade, expressed, for instance, as unease about the possibility of “patronising” and “unbalanced” etc. aspects in the imagery used by fairtrade promotion. Our research confirmed a “natural affinity” of fairtrade produce to romantic commodification through exoticising, orientalisising, primitivising imageries (also cf. Johnston 2001, Wright 2004, Bryant/Goodman 2004), which elicited ambivalent statements from many of our respondent – being attracted to some aspects, being repulsed by others.

Differences in fairtrade consumption between Germany and the UK are not only manifest in quantifiable market success, but also in the different retail channels in both countries. Fairtrade in the UK is by and large mainstreamed with the bulk of

fairtrade goods being sold through the five dominating supermarket chains. There is a remaining segment of alternative channels – such as the Traidcraft catalogue business and several smaller mail order businesses (e.g. People Tree), alternative and charity shops that (like most prominently Oxfam) have a small assortment of fairtrade goods, and individual “fairtraders”, associated with Traidcraft or the smaller Tear Craft, who operate church stalls, sell on farmers markets, to friends and acquaintances etc. In Germany, while the relative proportion of supermarket sales is growing steadily, it is, in absolute terms, much below the volume of British supermarket sales. The bulk of fairtrade goods are still sold through a relatively dense network of fairtrade shops (*Weltläden*) that are run by volunteers and get a large proportion of their supplies through the biggest importer, *Gepa*, while often also maintaining links to smaller importers and individual projects in Third World countries.

Also, we found hardly any instances of “ethical taste” in Germany. Matching the historical orientation of German consumerism between “producerist” rationalities of price and of quality (Wiesen 2003), the issue of buying fairtrade goods for any but consciously ethical reasons was alien to the German consumer accounts. Also, advertising did not attempt to speak to the “romantic” (Campbell 1987) side of consumption.

While the UK could be said to be the ideal typical consumer society where the ‘privilege of the producer’ (Abercrombie 1990) appears to have been abandoned for good and the consumer instated as sovereign, German consumerism, in contrast, has retained a strong productionist streak with persisting normative expectations of rational consumption as “reproduction” (Carter 1997) that have all but disappeared in the UK (Hilton 2001). There remains a strong element of expert authority. The *Weltläden* follow the specialist retail (*Fachhandel*) model, with customers seeking guidance from fairtrade organisations and *Weltladen* volunteers. By centring on the not only ethically but also aesthetically distinct setting of the *Weltladen*, they tend to establish socially exclusive moral communities of alternative tastes that make mainstreaming extremely difficult – something British fairtrade in turn is particularly good at. Although not

that different from their German counterparts in terms of lifestyles and tastes, British fairtrade activists do not act from an established territory like fairtrade shops, but going into the market as Tupperware-style sales representatives as it were, acknowledging the privilege of the consumers. Due to a disjunction between true-blue fairtraders as a lifestyle community and the purchase of fairtrade goods mainstreaming both in terms of going supermarket and in terms of a commodity aesthetics dissociated from an alternative milieu becomes a much more likely option. While in Germany, consumers tended to follow the lead of the major supplier (Gepa) and the labelling organisation (Transfair), in Britain both the more committed and the mainstream consumers tended to customise fairtrade discourses – affirming the sovereignty of the consumer.

In terms of different notions of capitalist equitability, in the UK the lead assumption was be that the market, if set up to function undisturbed, is a mechanism that distributes wealth according to desert. Poverty, then, is interpreted as resulting from undue distortions so that means tested benefits are legitimated as remedying market failure. In Germany the rhetoric is set up in a way that the market seems to be a *tool* for social aims rather than a given – hence the self-description of German capitalism as “social market economy” – but not one that in itself tends towards these aims. The market is seen as legitimate only to the extent that it provides “social peace” and stability. Welfare measures are (in a social insurance model) designed to maintain a given social order, i.e. not just to alleviate or prevent poverty, but to maintain status (Mau 2004).

This has consequences for the way fairtrade equitabilities are imagined – though *not* in terms of *how much* people thing fairtrade producers should receive (means testing or status maintenance mean the same under the assumption of poverty: the provision of basic needs). It however does affect how producers are represented in discourses. In British accounts producers were projected as independent market participants, imagined as setting up businesses. The emphasis throughout was on a free market not only as problem but as solution (strongly embracing the concepts of setting up

fairtrade organizations themselves as profitable companies). This was alien to German fairtrade promotion and also to consumer accounts. The business character of the largest importer, Gepa, is consistently played down and their partners in the South are projected as workers, wage earners in a benevolent setting along the lines of the traditional works community (Krell 1994).

It could be argued that this means that on the one hand, political impetus is lost in the UK case while there is more left of it in Germany – but on the other hand, the UK model goes further in commercial recognition through trade (not aid), while the German approach remains more paternalistic.

Producer images are, of course, not only informed by the approach to markets and justice, but also by historical involvements in what greatly contributed to the current global inequality: colonialism. Both the UK and Germany are former colonial powers – but while in the British case this is very obvious (e.g. in the pattern of post-War migration and the existence of the Commonwealth), the memory of German colonialism is largely suppressed. Also, while British Orientalism constructs Western superiorities over imagined Eastern Others, partly due to the failure of imperial adventures German Orientalisms locate themselves as a Third in between East and West, with a tendency to participate in Western claims civilisational (technological, scientific etc.) superiority while also identifying with an assumed Eastern culturally superior authenticity (Kontje 2004).

Visions of anti-conquest as disengaging yet always entangled attitude towards Empire subsequently are distinct as well. British anti-conquest countered imperial subjection with an engagement through commercial reciprocities – aiming for equitability in exchange yet retaining otherness, while German anti-conquest was more identificational (still maintaining superiority, but in terms of incorporating superior authenticity). In both countries fairtrade could be shown to be heir to those visions of anti-conquest. In the UK the cultural hero of anti-conquest still is the *trader* – such as ideal-typically represented by the founder of the Body Shop, late Anita Roddick (Kaplan 1995); consumers imagined themselves in a commercial relationship with

distant others that was modelled in a way that affirmed their otherness. In Germany post-colonial guilt angst was largely absent, and there was a stronger sense of actually being able to be on the side of the producers as much as being implicated in an order of consumption that is harmful to them. In terms of anti-conquest, though, this seemed to justify a more paternalistic approach. The cultural hero of anti-conquest here is the development worker who at the one hand helps people to help themselves, on the other hand exerts control over them. “Otherness” was maintained – but the point was more a pedagogical transformation of both the northern consumer and the southern producer.

### ***Policy Implications***

The study has the following implications that will be put to practitioners and policy makers.

#### *Limits to consumer-choice led fairtrade growth*

Communities based on taste have an inevitable inner logic of self-limitation (Bourdieu 1979, Douglas 1997) – and the communities around a taste for ethics and an ethical taste have been shown to be no exception. We have found evidence that such mechanisms of social closure are at work in fairtrade consumption – not only in that discourses emphasised aesthetic skills that run counter to what was perceived to be working class and underclass aesthetics, but also in the accounts of non-middle-class participants who found themselves isolated in their social contexts when displaying fairtrade goods. Our findings therefore support moves to go beyond individual market choice and towards institutionalisation of fairtrade as reported by Malpass, Cloke et al. (2007) to keep the momentum of fairtrade growth by defeating the logic of distinction inherent in consumerism.

### *The recognition agenda*

The partial failure of the recognition agenda both on a symbolic level and in being communicated effectively is very significant, given the centrality of respect in the fairtrade agenda. In particular, it has become clear that in the current visions of ethical selving there is not enough room for acknowledging producers not as mere victims and/or pure saints but as the resourceful actors that they evidently are (Berlan 2008). It has been shown that failure in recognition has a real potential to lead into failure in redistribution (Wright/Madrid 2007), and thus our results suggest that fairtrade organisations should re-think their communication strategies.

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