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*Narrative Connections:
Promoting the Moral Economy of Fair Trade*

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Abstract

Fair trade is an alternative approach to international trade. It is both a social movement and an economic approach that aims to make trade fair for the many small scale producers disadvantaged in international trade. This thesis explores the discursive devices used by fair trade organisations to promote fair trade. These devices have two roles: to promote an ethical connection from consumer to producer and to involve the consumer in the work of fair trade through purchasing behaviour and political action. This second role refers to the politicisation of consumption whereby shopping becomes an act of political solidarity with disadvantaged producers. I explore these devices through narrative analysis, focusing on a thematic analysis of Trade Aid's publication, *Vital*.

My research is framed by Michael Goodman's (2004) work on the semiotic production of fair trade. The concept of a reflexive consumer is explored. This is the idea that consumer awareness of the conditions surrounding production can lead to purchasing decisions that reflect care for the distant producer. This opening up of the concept of consumption involves an active and engaged consumer who chooses to purchase fair trade because they feel a connection to the work of these organisations. I am interested in the particular form this information takes in *Vital*. I apply narrative research methods to explore the meta-narrative of fair trade promoted in *Vital* that tells the reader about the work of fair trade organisations, the impact this has on the lives of producer and how they can be involved in the story as a consumer and as a global citizen.

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Chapter One: Introduction

My sorrows have all gone and my hope has been fulfilled. Many of us are very poor, but we can change our lives through income-generating works (Haricha Begum from Jute Works quoted in Trade Aid 2008a:9)

Fair trade is an idea that is striking a chord with more and more New Zealanders every year...Many of us are concerned about the direction in which a lot of global trade is taking us, trade that doesn't account for the needs of millions of small-scale producers and which doesn't allow them to receive a fair enough share of the pie. (Trade Aid General Manager, Geoff White quoted in Trade Aid 2007b:5)

These two extracts tell the stories of fair trade, one in the words of a producer and the other focusing on consumers. The first tells the reader of a transformation from sorrow to hope. The second speaks of a growing consumer awareness of this suffering. My research explores how these two positions connect. The statements are not simply about one producer or a few isolated consumers. They form part of the narrative of fair trade connecting producers and consumers across borders in an imagined community united by the struggle for social and economic justice that is at the heart of the fair trade movement.

The statements represent two perspectives of the fair trade story. Haricha Begum tells her personal story of transformation from sorrow to hope. In her brief statement, she tells the reader about the experience of people living in poverty who seek the opportunity to improve their situation, not through charity, but through sustainable livelihoods. Fair trade focuses on developing these livelihoods that help producers transform their lives from poverty and sorrow to a world where hope can become a reality. The second statement introduces the consumer's involvement in fair trade. Geoff White refers to the shared concerns of the consumer and Trade Aid, New Zealand's most prominent fair trade organisation. White describes the consumer as an ally in the work Trade Aid does to right the wrongs of international trade and to direct trade in a way that benefits producers like Haricha Begum. Fair trade becomes an expression of consumer concern for Begum and the many other producers whose stories connect in the narrative of fair trade.

Fair trade is therefore an alternative approach to international trade that focuses on maximising the benefits of market access to producers. As an approach to trade, fair

trade differs from conventional models by focusing on the social and environmental impacts of trade as well as the economic. Fair trade organisations forge partnerships between producers and consumers based on shared awareness of the social and economic injustices of international trade networks.

Fair trade is often described as simply paying a fair price for a product. As White describes in the statement above, it is about making sure producers receive a *fair enough share of the pie*. Beneath this surface however, fair trade goes beyond simply paying more, it involves taking social responsibility for the products that we buy and the conditions of their production.

Fair trade promotion is different from mainstream advertising that is so prominent in modern society. I am interested in how Trade Aid uses the stories of producers to promote fair trade sales. The way fair trade organisations communicate to consumers is visibly different. The focus of fair trade is less on the product and its benefit to the consumer and more on benefits of buying a product to the producer. Whereas mainstream marketing images focus on the consumer, fair trade brings the producer to the foreground.

Research Aim and Scope

Sociologists and other social scientists are interested in fair trade as an alternative approach to consumption. Current sociological thinking on consumption is described as sharing a common ground where “goods are not simply consumed for their function or use value, but for their symbolic and communicative qualities that help express and mediate social relations, structures and divisions” (Rief 2008:562). My research explores the symbolic production of fair trade products as a device promoting social connection between consumers and producers.

The recent growth in fair trade markets is attributed to an increasing sense of connection between producers and consumers. (Nicholls and Opal 2005:57) I am interested in the promotion of this connection, particularly the way the consumer connects to the producer. My thesis will examine how fair trade organisations promote the network between producers and consumers. I will argue that the basis of this network is a moral

connection that mediates an alternative economic relationship between consumer and producer. Fair trade therefore promotes a *moral economy* that motivates consumer purchasing behaviour through this sense of connection.

Geographers are also interested in fair trade as a spatial connection between producer and consumer across global boundaries. Taking recent studies from geography as a starting point for my study, I will explore the connection between consumer and producer as a relationship of care from the consumer towards the producer. This kind of connection was once considered limited by spatial distance, in other words the distant or unknown other was thought to be beyond the bounds of care. In my research, I will draw from recent geographical studies that challenge the spatial limits of care to address how fair trade promotes an alternative connection based on symbolic interaction between unknown producers and consumers. My research therefore draws on recent work across the social sciences to explore this relationship.

The aim of my research is to examine the way the consumer is involved in fair trade. I will argue that fair trade exposes the conditions of production by telling the stories of producers in a bid to connect the consumer to the producer in a relationship based on care and a belief in justice. I will consider the fair trade consumer as a reflexive being making informed purchasing decisions based on ethical considerations and an awareness of the distant producer.

My interest in studying fair trade developed from my experience as a fair trade consumer. My first encounter with fair trade was through Trade Aid. One of the striking things I have found about Trade Aid stores is the way the producer is present through the images and stories displayed amongst the products. In my research, I will explore how Trade Aid promotes a connection to these producers that overcomes the distance between producers and consumers like me.

Studying fair trade also raises questions regarding the position of the consumer. As a global citizen, there is a sense of responsibility towards the producers that extends beyond the producer/consumer exchange relationship. To this end, I will analyse the representations of fair trade aimed at consumers in New Zealand and discuss how this connection is promoted and what actions are made available for the reflexive consumer.

Through this research, I will argue that fair trade represents an alternative approach to trade as a moral connection from consumer to a distant stranger. The moral economy of fair trade promotes this ethical connection. My research focuses on *how* this connection is promoted. I will argue that Trade Aid's representation of producers through narrative material encourages this connection by making the producer known and involving the consumer as part of the story. The reflexive consumer is both empowered and held responsible as they may choose to be complicit in unfair trade practices or active in challenging the injustices of trade.

How does Trade Aid represent fair trade and producers to the consumer? How is the consumer involved in this story? Fair trade stories tell the reader about the transformations in the lives of producers. My research will look at how the consumer is involved in this transformation and the role they play in this story.

OUTLINE OF THESIS

The thesis contains seven chapters. Chapter two begins by defining fair trade then providing a historical background of the fair trade movement internationally. From this general outline and international perspective, I will focus on fair trade in New Zealand and the background of the prominent organisation, Trade Aid. Lastly, I will outline the challenges facing the future of fair trade as identified in recent literature.

In chapter three, I will discuss the theory and literature that frames my research. This discussion is based on Michael Goodman's (2004) work on political ecology imaginaries. Goodman outlines two moments in the production of fair trade products: material production and semiotic production (2004:893). Material production refers to the physical processes of creation whereas the semiotic production refers to the production of the meaning that surrounds a fair trade product. I will expand on these moments further in chapter three. My focus will be on the second moment of semiotic production.

Goodman's ideas will form the framework for my discussion on the representational issues surrounding fair trade. Notably, Goodman's exploration the moral economy of fair trade and the connection between producers and consumers is discussed in reference

to recent case studies. Three studies will be introduced. Each has a different perspective on the representations produced by fair trade organisations. These studies will later be discussed in comparison to the representations promoted by Trade Aid. I will argue that the narrative connections promoted in *Vital* are essential in promoting the moral economy of fair trade.

Chapter four provides an outline of my methodological approach and develops the relationship of narrative analysis to this study. The chapter will begin with discussion of my questions for research. My research focuses on the story of fair trade as it both *tells* readers about fair trade and *involves* readers in the work of fair trade organisations. Goodman argues the importance of the semiotic production of information in fair trade. I will argue that the narrative form of this information is essential in promoting the connection between consumer and producer. In this chapter, I will also outline my analytic research of Trade Aid's magazine, *Vital*. *Vital* is a regular publication produced by Trade Aid that shares producer stories, descriptions of products and production as well as providing commentary on trade practices, both fair and unfair.

In chapters five and six I will describe and discuss my narrative analysis of *Vital*. Chapter five presents my thematic analysis supported with excerpts and images from *Vital*. Chapter six ties this analysis to the theory outlined earlier and ultimately aims to identify some of the ways *Vital* meets the challenges facing fair trade organisations as the movement becomes increasingly active in mainstream markets.

In chapter seven I will connect this analysis back to the literature introduced in chapter three. Trade Aid promotes education and consumer involvement as integral aspects of the fair trade movement. This thesis will explore how Trade Aid achieves these educational goals through initiatives like *Vital*. I will also point to future research that would expand on my analysis by studying consumer responses and interpretations of the stories in *Vital*.

The following chapter will begin with a definition of fair trade and an outline of the development of the movement. This introduction to the movement will explore how fair trade works to transform the shortcomings described by Geoff White to "account for the needs of millions of small-scale producers" (Trade Aid 2007b:5). I base my argument

on my view that the work Trade Aid does in educating and campaigning is an integral part of what drives the fair trade movement. In order to continue to grow in market share, fair trade organisations must spread the message of social and economic justice and appeal to consumers as caring and connected global citizens.

Chapter Two: An Alternative Vision of Trade and Consumption

INTRODUCTION

The term *fair trade* refers to both a social movement and an economic approach to trade. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of fair trade by defining the movement, its historical development and the tension between these social and economic interests. My discussion is divided into three sections. The first two sections trace the historical development of fair trade internationally and locally here in New Zealand. I will introduce Trade Aid and the work the organisation does to promote fair trade in New Zealand. In the third section I will explore the challenges facing the fair trade movement as it continues to grow in market size and public awareness. As part of this discussion I will reflect on a range of interdisciplinary literature that explores the complex issues facing fair trade. I will begin by defining fair trade and the challenge it poses to international trade structures.

FAIR TRADE: DEFINITION AND ROOTS

What is Fair Trade?

The concept of fair trade is based on the “perceived failure of liberalized international trade to bring benefits to the most disenfranchised producers in developing countries” (Nicholls and Opal 2005:31). Nicholls and Opal identify six conditions that perpetuate poverty in developing countries: lack of access to markets, imperfect information, lack of access to financial markets, lack of access to credit, an inability to switch to other forms of income generation and weak legal systems and enforcement of laws (2005:18-19). At the heart of these conditions is a *lack* of access or support that would enable producers to compete in international markets. From this premise, the fair trade movement has developed with the aim of enabling producers in developing countries to access international markets and to trade under *fair* conditions.

The characteristics of fair trade are summarised by the widely accepted definition established by the collective of organisations FINE¹.

Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers - especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. (FINE 2001)

This definition refers to creating better trading conditions in an alternative approach to international trade. It draws attention to a need for an alternative to conventional international trade practices. Of particular significance to my research is the emphasis given to the consumer who *backs* the work of fair trade organisations and to the awareness raising activities of these organisations. Expanding upon this broad definition IFAT lists nine principles of fair trade. These nine principles, outlined below, reflect the diversity of the economic, social and environmental interests of the movement. The following principles define fair trade.

- (1) Benefiting the economically disadvantaged producers in developing countries
 - (2) Promoting fair trade organisations' transparency and accountability
 - (3) Capacity building for producer groups
 - (4) Promoting fair trade
 - (5) Empowering women through improving living conditions, education, and leadership training
 - (6) Observing child labour laws
 - (7) Ensuring a safe and dignified working environment
 - (8) Producing goods under environmentally friendly and sustainable conditions
 - (9) Paying producers a fair wage
- (IFAT 2007)

Fair trade is therefore a path towards sustainable development that focuses on those considered most disadvantaged by global trade. This is distinct from aid. The phrase “Trade not Aid” is found frequently in the literature on fair trade. Fair trade is often described as a more sustainable strategy for alleviating poverty in developing countries than aid projects as it empowers producers to earn an income rather than depend on aid (see Fridell 2004:Paul 2005). “Fair traders help people embark on their own path of

¹ This organisation is named for four of the major Fair Trade organisations in Europe: Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO), the Network of European Shops (NEWS!), the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT), and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA).

independent development rather than remain dependent upon exploitative relationships with capitalist enterprises of the charity of aid-relief organisations.” (Grimes 2000:16)

Historical Roots: Four Stages of Fair Trade

The literature on fair trade frequently traces the historical development of the movement from grassroots beginnings to present expansion into mainstream markets. My discussion is based on the four stages of development identified by Nicholls and Opal (2005). I will also support this framework with the work of other researchers on fair trade. While these stages provide a structure for my discussion, it is important to note that fair trade is not a single coordinated movement but refers to a broad range of like-minded organisations who share a belief in social and economic justice. Fair trade is thus described as “far from homogeneous, having evolved in different countries over different time periods, and reflecting local political, social and economic conditions” (Low and Davenport 2005b:144). The following discussion introduces the historic foundations of fair trade.

The origin of the movement was the post World War II relief effort. For example, the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) established in 1942 in the United Kingdom began importing products from developing countries to raise funds for war-ravaged Europe. Faith-based organisations also emerged at this time in North America. Mennonite and Brethren organisations, Ten Thousand Villages and SERRV International respectively, are credited as the oldest and largest fair trading organisations in North America (Grimes 2000:17). These organisations focused on developing markets for handcrafts made by producers in developing countries. Revenue was generated from the sale of craft goods in Western European and North American markets to support the charity work of these organisations (Nicholls and Opal 2005:20).

The second stage of development occurred during the 1960s and 1970s with the growth of alternative trading organisation (ATO's) defined as “‘social’ entrepreneurs using a business mindset to address social problems” (Nicholls and Opal 2005:20). These organisations began importing and retailing fair trade goods through catalogues and shops. Growth of the movement in the 1980s was accompanied by the formation of

major fair trade organisations who coordinated importing and retailing on a larger scale than early faith-based organisations (Raynolds and Long 2007).

Alternative trade organisation also refers to various movements grouped together by their *alternative* nature and challenge to the dominant approach to production and trade. Fair trade developed as part of this wider movement of ethical consumption reflecting a growing awareness of the connection between environmental and social issues and consumption. The organic food movement is a consumer response to environmental and health concerns and the perceived negative impacts of production on the planet and the consumer. Similar connections are made by the fair trade movement where the focus is on the impact of production and trade on the producer. “These initiatives originate in countries of the North and are fuelled by mounting concern that our modern state and corporate institutions are unable to guarantee the socially and environmentally sound production of consumer goods.” (Raynolds 2000:299) Similarities between organic and fair trade consumption processes will be further explored in chapter three. Insights from several researchers on organic food consumption will be applied to my research on fair trade.

In the 1980s, sales of fair trade handcrafts reached a “plateau” in part due to increased imports of inexpensive mass-produced goods and changing consumer tastes in the European and North American markets (Redfern and Snedker 2002:6). This slowing of growth coincided however with the expansion of certified commodities in the market. Nicholls and Opal’s third wave of fair trade growth is characterised by the development of fair trade product brands and the emergence of a labelling and certification system. This is of particular importance to the growth of fair trade commodities such as coffee and cocoa products. The Fair Trade Labelling Organisation (FLO) certifies these products. FLO represents global certification projects and oversees standards and licensing of fair trade organisations. Once certified, the FLO mark may be used to signal to the consumer the status of a product. Growth in certified commodities from 1998 to 2005 is recorded at 483 percent (Raynolds and Long 2007:25). European markets have traditionally achieved the highest sales, however, the North America market is increasing annually.

Coffee was the first product to be certified and remains the market leader in fair trade sales. Nearly all of the coffee grown in the world is the product of small-scale producers in developing countries. This is despite the world coffee market being controlled by a small number of transnational companies namely Kraft, Nestle, Sara Lee, Procter & Gamble and Tchibo (Raynolds and Long 2007:81). The first fair trade coffee label, Max Havelaar was launched in The Netherlands in 1988 (Lyon 2006:454). In New Zealand, there are several coffee roasters selling fair trade coffee and many cafes and restaurants serve fair trade coffee. Internationally and locally, other commodities are following the success of coffee. These include tea, cocoa and sugar and the recent introduction of fresh and dried fruits, rice, dried herbs and spices, wine and flowers.

Certified bananas are considered the next “wave of expansion” in fair trade sales (Raynolds 2007:63). Traditionally bananas are grown on large plantations controlled by a small group of transnational corporations: Dole, Chiquita and Del Monte.² The success of fair trade certified bananas could set a precedent for other fresh food products on the market. Fresh produce faces several challenges not faced by other commodities. Firstly, supermarkets tend to stock only one brand of each produce rather than several competing brands. This requires a major commitment from supermarkets at the outset to change brands and a commitment from producers to continually meet this demand (Raynolds 2007). Secondly, fresh produce depends on a short turnaround period from grower to consumer.

Certification provides concerned consumers with an identifiable mark that distinguishes fair trade products from other products. This is however complicated by the “proliferation of certifications, such as Rainforest Alliance and Utz Kapeh, which offer lower social standards than fair trade and lower environmental criteria than organic certification” (Bacon 2005:508). The development of fair trade-*lite* certifications, may lead to consumer confusion and a mistrust of these certifications in general. The problems associated with the development of these labels are discussed later in this chapter.

² See Raynolds (2007) for a detailed discussion on the banana market and political aspects of banana production.

The final stage of development described by Nicholls and Opal is the emergence of fair trade certified products in mainstream retail. Recent figures value the total fair trade market at US \$1.6 billion (Raynolds and Long 2007:20). While this is a relatively small share of global trade, fair trade sales continue to grow. This growth is in part due to a move from niche to mainstream markets making fair trade products more accessible. Most significantly in this development is an increasing presence of fair trade coffee along side other brands on supermarket shelves. I will discuss this stage further below as the most problematic in fair trade. While expanding market access through mainstream networks may lead to increased sales, fair trade as a movement is at risk of losing the political charge and campaign strength that has shaped it and built consumer trust in fair trade products.

The mainstream expansion of fair trade products gives testament to the power of consumer and activist demand. The emergence of fair trade lines of within major coffee brands such as Starbucks is the result of pressure from ATO's and consumers. On April 13 2000, Starbucks made agreements with TransFair USA to include fair trade certified coffee in its US range. This move, attributed to consumer and activist pressure organised by Global Exchange, marks a major step to fair trade become mainstream practice (Barrientos et al. 2007:56). Plans for a nation-wide protest against Starbucks on April 14 became a public celebration of this achievement instead.

The development of supermarket brand fair trade products also marks the integration of fair trade into mainstream retail networks. Data and research into this is largely from the United Kingdom and European markets. Figures from Barrientos and Smith's study of UK supermarket Co-op attribute 17 percent of total certified fair trade sales in the UK to the chain (2007:105). Supermarket availability has a significant impact on fair trade purchasing as supermarkets respond to growing demand by increasing the range of products offered.

This current stage of fair trade growth is however the most contentious to date. As fair trade products appear more often on supermarket shelves and by companies like Starbucks some argue that the movement faces increasing risk. I discuss this in a later section of this chapter along with issues to do with certification that challenge the future success of fair trade.

The Benefits of Fair Trade: Economic, Social and Environmental

The bottom line of fair trade is measured by the “tripartite slam-dunk” of economic, social and environmental standards (Goodman 2004:893). Among the nine IFAT principles, paying a fair wage is only one part of fair trade. Equally as important are ensuring social and environmental needs are met. Not only do communities benefit from higher returns on their labour but also from the development of long-term relationships, capacity building and ongoing training, and input into social development schemes, housing, healthcare and education.

For commodity producers, those who grow coffee and cocoa for example, producing for the fair trade market means an assured price above the market rate. Reynolds cites this premium at US\$1.75 above the world market price per box of bananas and coffee at a guaranteed \$0.05 per pound above the world price (2000:303-304). In markets prone to price fluctuations the premiums and minimum guaranteed prices for fair trade commodities has “meant the difference between survival and bankruptcy for many small-scale coffee growers” (Reynolds 2000:304). Provision is also made for meeting basic social needs of education, health and sanitation.

For handcraft producers, association with fair trade organisations creates access to markets otherwise difficult for many to access. Small scale and home based craft producers have relied in the past on domestic and tourist markets. As well as providing income for artisans, the fair trade market also helps to keep traditional craft production alive. Many of the skills and products have faced competition from modern mass production. Among the social benefits of fair trade is the revival of cultural heritage. As Leclair describes the “preservation of indigenous cultures and products is regarded as one of the most significant benefits of alternative trade, since artisans were being forced to abandon the production of such items, and focus on goods with a higher rate of return” (2002:956). For many producers, handcraft production allows them to access paid labour position alongside other unpaid labour commitments. Particularly for many women this means they may be able to earn an income while raising children and caring for a household without challenging the domestic divisions of labour.

The environmental impacts of production are also of concern to fair trade organisations. The IFAT principles referred to above also govern environmental practices. While fair trade does not go as far as the organic food movement in focusing on the environment, there is a strong commitment to promoting environmentally sound production practices in both food and handcrafts. Fair trade commodities are frequently co-certified with organic labels.

FAIR TRADE IN NEW ZEALAND: TRADE AID IMPORTERS LTD

This section will introduce Trade Aid and the work the organisation does in promoting fair trade in New Zealand. Trade Aid celebrated its 35th year in operation in 2007. Over the years it has become the most prominent fair trade organisation based in New Zealand and has played a vital role in promoting and developing the fair trade movement here.

The Trade Aid website describes the early formation of Trade Aid and the work of Vi and Richard Cottrell. “It was in 1969, when Vi and Richard Cottrell were in their early 30s, that they saw an advertisement for an adviser to a resettlement scheme for Tibetan refugees in northern India. They applied and were sent a cable that read simply: “proceed to India” (Trade Aid 2009a). The position involved finding overseas buyers for carpets produced by Tibetan refugees living in India. On returning to New Zealand, the Cottrell’s continued their support of Tibetan refugees by importing carpets to exhibit at a Christchurch art gallery. The exhibition was a success. “Within 15 minutes of opening, all the carpets were sold” (Trade Aid 2009a).

From this early involvement in trading with Tibetan refugees, the Cottrell’s joined a small group of other interested individuals to establish Trade Aid in 1972. The organisation was officially registered in 1973. The objective of the original organisation was to trade with “the underdeveloped generally and to trade with and encourage self-help organisations and aid programmes in particular” (Blundell 1998:13).

Trade Aid is made up of several parts that are responsible for the different operations of the organisation. Trade Aid is described as “Development Agency, Importer and Distributor, and Retailer” (Trade Aid 2009b). Trade Aid (NZ) Ltd is a registered

charitable organisation with public membership who oversees the “Vision, Aims and Objectives” of the Trade Aid Charter. Individual shops are each owned by a charitable trust governed by an elected body of local people. Trade Aid Importers Ltd is owned by Trade Aid (NZ) Ltd and is responsible for importing producer and educational and marketing materials as well as accounting and resources for shops. There is also the Development Committee who, among other things, administers funding from NZAID to producer partners. The Ethical Trust is also administered by a separate body that manages public investments made with the trust at no or low interest rates. The investment trust generates funding to invest in partner development. Together these entities co-ordinate the main driving force behind the fair trade movement in New Zealand. The shops and warehousing are run by both volunteer labour and paid staff.

Trade Aid currently trades with 76 producer groups throughout the world. The producers are described as the most disadvantaged amongst producers globally. The following passage from the *2006 Social Accounts* details some of the factors that disadvantage producers.

Overwhelmingly these partners/groups are women, living in remote areas or countries with very high unemployment with few or no job opportunities; women living in difficult circumstances in slum areas; producers suffering disabilities or disease; indigenous or minority peoples who are especially disadvantaged in their local context. (Trade Aid 2008d:39)

Since its early roots in handcrafts Trade Aid has remained dedicated to promoting handcraft production as the “first step out of extreme poverty” (Trade Aid 2007d). The product line has also expanded dramatically to include a range of food products. A significant proportion of this market is coffee. In 1999, Trade Aid began importing green coffee beans to be roasted in Christchurch. In 2007, over five hundred and eighty tonnes of green coffee beans were imported by Trade Aid (Trade Aid 2009a). Trade Aid reports that half of all the coffee roasters based in New Zealand are currently buying “at least a portion” of their green beans through Trade Aid (Trade Aid 2008d:10).

Since 2001, Trade Aid has received funding from NZAID, New Zealand International Aid and Development Agency. The *2005/6 Trade Aid Annual Report* reports \$117,875 in funding for that year (Trade Aid 2006d:2). In this capacity, Trade Aid partners with

the New Zealand government to undertake development projects in producer communities.

Trade Aid reports continual increases in sales. Figures recently published in the *2007/08 Annual Report* cite annual sales at over sixteen million New Zealand dollars. This is a substantial increase from 2004/05 sales which were under seven million (Trade Aid 2008e:6). Sales growth has allowed Trade Aid to pay a rebate to producers from profits. In 2007/8 financial year this rebate was an extra \$95,000 paid to producers above payments and funding received during the year (Trade Aid 2008d:10).

One of the goals of Trade Aid is to bring about change in the way international trade is conducted. Education is, therefore, an important aspect of Trade Aid's work. Promotional material is designed to educate consumers on the conditions effecting producers in international trade relationships. In the *2007 Annual Report* three educational initiatives aimed at promoting fair trade are outlined: the bi-monthly e-news publication, the website, www.tradeaid.org.nz, and the quarterly magazine, *Vital*. This magazine is the basis of my research. I will introduce it in detail in discussion of my research design in chapter four.

CHALLENGES OF FAIR TRADE MARKET GROWTH: SELLING PRODUCTS, SELLING ETHICS

The fair trade movement is based on both social activism that challenges global economic practices and a pragmatic trade based approach seeking improved market access for producers. The success of this movement depends largely upon the movement's ability to challenge the conventional market to not only promote market access for fair trade producers but also to effect change in the way trade is conducted on the whole. This involves transforming the entire life a product from production to distribution to consumption. Fridell describes a risk of becoming little more than an "island of justice in a sea of exploitation, or worse, being swallowed up by the sea" (2006:90). Balancing the idealism and practicalities of the movement raises several dilemmas for future growth. To focus on market growth and neglect the principles at the core of fair trade risks losing the qualities that distinguished fair trade products in the first place.

One of the main goals of fair trade organisations introduced above is to develop market access for marginalised producers. Despite successes in creating access for some producers, the relative share of fair trade in global markets remains small. In order to reach more producers, organisations must work to expand the market for goods and commodities produced under fair trade standards. Nurturing this market growth raises several paradoxes for organisations who must balance the inherent tension of being both “in and against it the market” (Taylor 2005:130).

The expansion of fair trade into mainstream markets also seems contradictory: to maintain the ethics of the movement while promoting enterprise and expansion. There is a risk of the ideals of fair trade being diluted by corporate cost minimising and a single economic bottom line. The availability of fair trade products in mainstream outlets is a step towards expanding market access. However, when major corporations offer fair trade products alongside conventional product lines, there is a risk of losing credibility and consumer trust (Raynolds 2002). The agreement of Starbucks to trade in a small percentage of fair trade certified coffee is an example of a corporation publicly attaching itself fair trade. However, Starbucks sources only a small percentage of its overall product from fair trade certified producers. The benefit of public perception of a socially responsible corporation mitigates any potential loss in corporate income.

The move towards mainstream retail has received mixed reviews. Some believe corporate adoption of fair trade is evidence of the success of fair trade in influencing the market. Webb (2007) is optimistic that the adoption of the language and standards of fair trade by major international corporations is evidence of the transformative power of consumer practice. However, this “clean-washing” of major corporations like Starbucks has stirred debate within the movement (Low and Davenport 2005a:503). Organisations responding to a push for corporate social responsibility may adopt some token aspects of fair trade in their business but fail to adhere to the ideology of the movement.

Fair trade organisations must also meet future growth in demand while avoiding large-scale plantation style production. Fair trade organisations working with marginalised producers generally partner with small-scale family and co-operative based producers. If demand continues to increase, will producers be able to meet demand without jeopardising the principles upon which the fair trade market is based in the first place?

Diluting the political message of fair trade undermines the unique value of products sold at a fair trade premium. A consumer unfamiliar with fair trade discourse may not see the value of purchasing a more expensive product if they are not aware of the differences between fair and unfair trade practices. Similarly, by reducing fair trade discourse to the single standard of payment at a *fair* price, the mainstream representation of fair trade is ignoring the unique combination qualities of fair trade consumption. It is not simply about price but also involved long-term relationship and support for producers in the form of prepayments and skill training along with other principles of fair trading. Without considering the full range of issues involved, there is a risk the co-option of consumer action by corporate profitability.

Geoff White, General Manager of Trade Aid, shares these concerns over the expansion of fair trade. In his introduction to the *2005/6 Annual Report*, White is optimistic of the recent growth in fair trade sales but also shares some apprehension at the development of fair trade.

We worry that fair trade is being reduced to a single concept of a fair price; that corporates are purchasing a tiny amount of their purchases as fair trade and then through PR and advertising campaigns ‘fair washing’ their businesses; and that the principles of fair trade are being compromised by minimum standards and the entry of player with little understanding of the concept. (Trade Aid 2006d:2)

Trade Aid has also responded to McDonald’s adoption of Rainforest Alliance certified coffee. Rainforest Alliance is described as meeting “a number of environmental criteria, but includes only minimal consideration for workers’ rights (essentially amounting to compliance with national minimum-wage laws in the producing country)” (Trade Aid 2009c). Trade Aid describes McDonald’s choice to sell Rainforest Alliance is based on business rather than a real interest in the principles of fair trade.

Rainforest Alliance coffee is cheaper than that bought through a high-bar sustainability-focused organisation like Trade Aid. McDonald’s knows there is demand for fair trade coffee but assume consumers won’t do their homework. Their logic goes like this: if we put a ‘sustainable’ label on our package, customers will be satisfied, so let’s choose the cheapest...Given that Trade Aid’s practice offers a better deal for both farmers and the earth, we believe that this combination is a recipe for true positive social change. (Trade Aid 2009c)

These issues developed from the inherent contradiction within fair trade being at once part of the market and an *alternative* to the market. The future of fair trade depends on

the ability of the organisations involved to balance this tension between *enterprise* and *ethics* (Goodman 2004). “While Fair Traders do offer a tangible market product, what they are essentially trying to sell is the norm that people in prosperous countries should factor global social justice into their buying decisions.” (Levi and Linton 2003:419) How can organisations effectively communicate the ethical and political message of fair trade to potential consumers? How do organisations promote the economic and non-economic value of trade to producers without alienating consumers? Fair trade discourse must communicate the ethical message and values to consumers to engage them both politically and economically.

CONCLUSION: CONNECTING PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

Fair trade sales thus depend upon consumers viewing fair trade principles as adding value to the products they buy. In other words, they are buying into the *ethic* as well as the *product*. This added value requires the consumer to look beyond the economic value of goods and commodities to the social and environmental costs often ignored in international trade. Fair trade organisations seek to bring the social and environmental aspects of trade onto equal par with the economic. The following passage from Nicholls and Opal describes, the connection between producers and consumers developing through fair trade.

...the phenomenal growth in demand for fair trade products over recent years suggests that consumers in developed countries are becoming more aware and sensitized to, the plight of citizens in the developing world. There would appear to be an increasing sense of *connectivity* between consumers in the North and producers in the South as the human effects of global trade are better understood and are more widely discussed. (Nicholls and Opal 2005:57 emphasis added)

Literature on fair trade frequently refers to this connection between producers and consumers. Raynolds describes alternative trade, including organic and fair trade movements as a “labeling project where consumers are given information about the social and environmental conditions under which commodities are produced and then asked to pay to support more sustainable production and trade” (2000:298). Raynolds and others are concerned with the construction of networks but give little attention to the kind of ‘information’ that motivates and moves consumers to action. Raynolds alludes to the significance of symbolic production in promoting alternative product

networks and “alternative marketing links” but she does not engage with the processes these alternative links involve (2000:306). I will outline this connection in the following chapter where the symbolic production of fair trade will be discussed.

This chapter has introduced fair trade, both internationally and locally in the work of Trade Aid in New Zealand. From this foundation I will explore some of the sociological issues surrounding fair trade. The importance of consumer involvement has also been introduced. This is developed in the following chapter. Fair trade is described as being “built on a particular expanding niche value-added market and a *nonmarket morality* populated by *reflexive* consumers” (Goodman 2004:904 emphasis added). In chapter three I will begin by outlining Goodman’s ideas on fair trade before developing further the concepts of this morality and reflexivity in fair trade consumption. This concept will be used to consider how fair trade connects with the consumer in order to sell both the business and the ethic of fair trading. As Nicholls and Opal describe, the promotion of fair trade depends on developing the consumers “issue literacy” as well as promoting products (2005:154). In the following chapter I will explore how this connection is promoted by fair trade organisations and the challenge of promoting both the business and ethic of fair trade.

Chapter Three: The Production and Representation of a Moral Economy

INTRODUCTION

Fair trade challenges the way trade relationships are approached. It was introduced in the previous chapter as an economic approach, social movement and development project aimed at challenging the inequality of global trade networks. Goodman describes fair trade as a shift in the “theatre and focus of development” (2004:298). By shifting the focus to trade and the theatre to everyday lifestyle politics of consumption, fair trade promotes a connection between consumers and producers based on a “drive to envision and create a moral economy of alternative development” (2004:893). Identifying the most significant aspect of this shift as the push for a *moral economy*, Goodman also describes fair trade as being “built through the connection of Southern livelihood struggles to ethically reflexive lifestyles and concerned shopping choice” (2004:893). My research explores how this connection is promoted by fair trade organisations through the telling of the story of fair trade as a transformative process. Goodman uses the term political ecology imaginary to refer to the way this message is communicated to consumers. It is described as something that “not only tells consumers how the commodity works, but most importantly, demonstrates the progressive effects of their act of consumption on the particular community that grew what they are eating” (2004:896).

In this chapter I will discuss theory and literature relevant to my research paying particular attention to the way fair trade organisations promote the ethics of fair trade to consumers. Goodman’s (2004) political ecology imaginary work will form a framework for this discussion. I will explore the idea of reflexivity and the ethics of fair trade as they relate to consumer practice. In the second section of this chapter I will outline three studies of representations in fair trade organisational materials. These studies raise several issues that will inform my analysis, particularly the representational issues involved in promoting the symbolic message, or ethics, of fair trade. The approach taken by each researcher and general points of relevance will be introduced. In the third part of this chapter I will point to my research as it will relate to this framework of theory.

THEORISING THE MORAL ECONOMY OF FAIR TRADE

I have chosen to focus on Goodman's approach as his work raises several points relating to sociological studies of consumption. While Goodman is interested in the "spatial dynamics of concern" (2004:903) from a geographical perspective, he raises interesting points about the changing social relationship between producers and consumers. We are both interested in the symbolic production of fair trade and the devices fair trade organisations use in promoting connection. Goodman introduces much of the literature that I review below. His interest lies in the reconfiguration of the spatial relationship between producers and consumers. The literature reviewed below explored how this relationship may be transformed.

Material and Symbolic Production of Fair Trade

Goodman separates the production of fair trade into two separate moments: material and semiotic. Material production occurs in the practical processes of creation through to distribution. Fair trade standards concerning work place conditions and wages govern material production. These standards were defined in the previous chapter. The symbolic meaning, the semiotic production Goodman refers to, is the ideological construction of products to embody the qualities of fairness and justice. This symbolic production occurs in the way fair trade as a movement, and products specifically, are represented to the consumer. As Watson describes "the first moment is what makes a fair trade product a *product*, whilst the second is what makes it specifically a *fair trade product*" (2007:273 emphasis original).

Fair trade requires both moments of production to promote the enterprise and ethics of the movement. Goodman teases them apart in his analysis to understand better how each works. Symbolic production is as vital to fair trade as the physical process of production. According to Goodman fair trade forms "morally-charged links" which are "forged semiotically through the discursive and visual narratives that saturate these foods with politicized and ethical meanings intended for extensive reading by consumers" (2004:893). My research focuses on this second moment of semiotic production, which I see as the way the consumer connects to the producer and is involved in the story of fair trade.

Goodman discusses the way this semiotic production is constructed through commodity fetish. Goodman defines the commodity fetish in classical terms where “the capitalist production of commodities veils the complex exploitative social and economic relationships that lie behind commodities” (2004:902). In fair trade this is extended to a “double fetish” that at once obscures and creates meaning in commodities. Goodman describes:

...it is the de-fetishizing, making transparent, for example, the production and consumption of fair trade coffee, where value is created... images call on established consumer knowledges and marketing iconography full of fetishized meanings around which Northern consumers can achieve solidarity by helping to save. (2004:902)

This idea of de-fetishising and re-fetishising fair trade products will be explored later in this chapter in the context of Caroline Wright’s (2004) study of CaféDirect advertising. The specific qualities attributed to fair trade products and the construction of ideas of fairness and justice will then be further developed in a later chapter.

Goodman describes the symbolic production of fair trade as occurring in two discursive fields. The first refers to product labels that “swaddle these commodities within the performing theater of narratives” (2004:898). Particularly for food commodities that are sold pre- packaged, this packaging becomes a billboard for the message of fair trade and is often used to describe the ethics of fair trading or personal details of producers. The second field refers to discourse produced by activist groups. This may take various forms including public campaigning and protests. Goodman gives the example of Global Exchange campaigning against Starbucks referred to in the previous chapter.

My research focuses on the symbolic production of meaning in the story of fair trade produced by a fair trade organisation. The symbolic meaning attached to fair trade products comes from the story of transformation in the lives of producers. This story tells the reader of the impacts of material production such as the benefits of a fair wage or the intangible benefits of building dignity. This is told through the narrative of fair trade. It is about empowering people to bring about change in their own lives and the lives of their families and communities. The symbolic production connects the consumer to this struggle by representing consumption as a moral expression.

Moral Economy

The idea of the moral economy was introduced in reference to Goodman's analysis. What does this term mean? It is described as concerning the "moral sentiments and norms that influence economic behaviour and how there are in turn influenced, compromised or overridden by economic forces" (Sayer 2003:341). Therefore, moral economy refers to the broad range of considerations that influence and motivate consumer action beyond purely economic considerations. This allows analytical space to explore the influence of other motivations on economic activities.

Fridell (2006) provided a historical overview of moral economy tracing the early use of the term to E. P. Thomson (1971) and the pre-capitalist economy of England. Producers at this time were compelled to maintain the supply of goods to the market rather than strategically withholding goods to increase market value. Fridell describes the power of the masses in maintaining this supply through public action or rioting whenever prices became unfair. Fair trade, according to Fridell, makes a stand for a moral economy as it "reasserts the notion of people's right to live by taking precedence over the flows of supply and demand" (2006:85-6). The moral economy of fair trade is as a refocusing of international trade on people over profits. It is a reversal of Thomson's pre-capitalist moral economy based on protecting the rights of the consumer and ensuring a fair price in line with subsistence. The basis of the principles of fair trade is the protection of the rights of the producer and a challenge to the capitalist focus on profit accumulation.

This focus on the moral aspects of trade counters what some consider a historical view of consumption as "intrinsically evil" (Miller 2001:227). Miller and others argue that consumption can also include interpersonal connections and emotional relationships of care. The rise and growth of alternative trade practices like organic and fair trade signify the role of measures beyond economic calculations in consumption.

The moral position of fair trade is based on concepts of social and economic justice. The lack of justice reduces a producer's ability to provide for their families or themselves. Fair trade networks support producers in livelihood struggles while challenging the global injustices of trade. Fair trade products sell at a price that supports the producer in

this struggle. The value of the product therefore is not measured simply in economic value to the consumer but the price premium factors in social and environmental values.

Reflexive Consumerism

The concept of a reflexive consumer regularly features in studies of fair trade. Lyon identifies this as one of the three arguments characterising recent research on fair trade.³ This discussion often begins with reference to Giddens (1991) and his understanding of self-identity as a reflexive process of modernity (see for example Lyon 2006: Adams and Raisborough 2008).

Lyon (2006) describes the political movement of fair trade as a combination of what Giddens (1991) refers to as life and emancipatory politics. Life politics refers to the way individuals act in constructing their “narratives of self-identity” (Giddens 1991). This involves the freedom of the individual to make choices that will shape the direction of their life. Emancipatory politics relates to the recognition of inequality and injustice and the ability to act against this. The combination of these in Lyon’s work refers to the negotiations of power and ethic in the identity formation of the consumer. If the subject actively shapes self-identity then there is scope for identities of resistance and marginality in relation to dominant social structures. This relates to the discussion of ethical consumption as it involves a degree of resistance to dominant consumption structures.

Opening up the scope of economic action to include non-economic motivations raises questions on the nature of consumer influences and how this translates into action. Goodman describes a “consumerist landscape” populated by a *reflexive consumer* (2004:895). This term was developed in reference to organic food consumption. (see DuPuis 2000: Guthman 2002). Organic food is also part of a wider alternative trade movement and shares with fair trade many of the symbolic processes that create alternative networks. In both movements, the view of consumption is as a process of

³ As well as reflexive consumer Lyon refers to, defetishization as “revealing the social and environmental conditions of production” and “equitable and participatory trade relationships” as characteristics of fair trade generally focused upon in recent research. (2006:452)

negotiation in which the consumer is actively involved rather than a passive recipient of a finished product.

DuPuis describes the reflexive organic food consumer as one who “listens to and evaluates claims made by groups organized around a particular food issue, such as GE foods, and evaluates his or her own activities based on what he or she feels is the legitimacy of these claims” (2000:289). Guthman also characterises organic food consumers as having a “broader sense of agency in the realm of consumption choices, reflected in knowledge-seeking, evaluation, and discernment” (2002:299). At the centre of each definition is the agency of the consumer who actively evaluates and determines their actions as a consumer.

By substituting poor wages or child labour for food issues identified with the organic movement, fair trade consumers can be described as part of a similar process of reflexive behaviour. Both movements have also developed labelling and certification standards designed to guide the consumer in action. As Reynolds describes, “Where organic certification is silent about conditions beyond the point of production, fair trade initiatives seek to make transparent the relations under which commodities are exchanged” (2000:298).

Organic food and fair trade studies have therefore repositioned consumption as an active process with social and environmental implications. Reynolds describes fair trade consumption as an “opportunity for consumers to identify themselves as socially and environmentally conscious individuals” (2002:415). Rather than framing consumption as a structural process whereby the market and society govern consumers, these movements re-construct the consumption as an active process. The concept of a reflexive consumer challenges the Marxian concept of power as located in production (Goodman and DuPuis 2002:7). The reflexive consumer is not shielded by the veil of commodity fetish in a Marxian sense but is informed and makes choices based in this knowledge. However, access to information and individual purchasing power limits the extent to which the consumer may act reflexively.

Fair trade aims to “rally and energize consumers to be morally reflexive” (Goodman 2004:896). This is complicated by the spatial barriers that separate consumers from

producers. The following section explores the spatial element of the moral connections involved in fair trade.

The Ethics of Care across Distance

Goodman describes fair trade as “necessarily global in scale and scope” (2004:906). This is true in the sense that fair trade is fundamentally about challenging inequality in *global* trade. It does so in a ways that attempt to “create an expansive ethics of care that specifically seeks to connect consumers and producers, and more generally the global North and South by overcoming and, in effect, shrinking, physical, psychological, and cultural distances (2004:906). This global network is vital to fair trade while also being “intimately bound up with debates over caring” (Bryant and Goodman 2004:349). Research from social geography informs this work and is valuable in considering the spatial nature of the relationship between distance and care. Referring to Smith’s (1998) work on the spatial dynamics of care Goodman claims “the commoditization and transport of this imaginary is crucial if not indispensable to the creation of the networks and their far-flung “ethics of care” (2004:894).

Consumers are separated from producers by spatial distance. Recognising that consumers may never see first hand the conditions of production or meet the producer there needs to be another way to make a connection. Watson explores the role of communicating these conditions to producers.

Can the intimacy of those livelihood struggles therefore genuinely be transmitted into the imaginative faculties of First World consumers? The answer to this question would seem to reduce to whether or not an individual needs to be physically present to see an event if that event is to be imbued with genuine moral significance for them. (2007:277)

Miller (2001) approaches consumption as a symbolic interaction that builds and maintains interpersonal relationships. Consumption, therefore, involves relationships of care such as a mother buying her child clothing or a boyfriend shopping for his girlfriend. Miller describes consumption as reflecting relationships with others, notably family and those immediately connected to the consumer. For fair trade consumption the question becomes whether this connection of caring can exist between distant strangers, the producer and the consumer, who share no connection beyond the product?

Goodman's discussion of fair trade is influenced by David Smith's "spatial scope of beneficence" (Smith 1998:17). Smith explores the spatial dynamic of ethical connection and the impact of distance on care. "Lack of knowledge could justify the exclusion from ethical consideration of unknown others, with whom geography denied the possibility of a relationship" (1998:18). Goodman adds to this that the right kind of "knowledge" might nurture the ethical consideration for distant others despite geographical barriers.

Smith discusses the spatial scope of care from Ancient to Modern times. He refers to Aristotle's teaching that Greeks should not enslave other Greeks but that it was morally acceptable to enslave "barbarians" (1998:18). Aristotle considered people of another language or culture *barbarians* in this context. Therefore, in the Aristotle's time, care extended only to those in immediate proximity. The development of technology and communication has transformed this connection between space and time, disembedding connections from physical proximity (see Giddens 1991). Modern information technology has transformed the landscape, bringing into reach what was previously outside the immediate scope of the individual. In contemporary spatial relationships, the connection between local and distant other becomes possible. For fair trade, the representations of producers make the distant other known to the consumer despite physical distances.

How does this relationship of care relate to issues of consumption? Consumption is a connection between producer and consumer. Classical economic thought describes this connection as based on the "impersonal rules of pecuniary transactions which came to dominate social relations hitherto conducted largely on the basis of reciprocity and trust among people familiar with one another" (Smith 1998:20). This is an image of trade devoid of human interaction with goods moving between anonymous parties. Smith's spatial dynamics of care allows for more than a globalisation of goods but also a global scope of care through shared knowledge.

How can fair trade create a connection when person-to-person contact is not possible? This is where the symbolic production of fair trade outlined by Goodman becomes very important. The emergence of "transnational consumer/labour networks" of consumers actively seeking to improve to the conditions of production displays consumer care for distant producers (Evans 2000:231). Such networks have the potential to re-focus

consumer action to encompass social and environmental factors along with economic elements. The ways in which this occurs will be explored later in this chapter. In the following section, I will connect the idea of a reflexive consumer to acts of global solidarity by tracing historical movements and positioning fair trade alongside recent consumer activism.

Global Solidarity

Fair trade is referred to above as part of a wider movement that uses consumption as a politically charged tool. As a movement connecting consumers to producer livelihood struggles, fair trade is “woven around the notion of solidarity” (Renard 1999:493). Consumer activism is part of a growing tide of what Evans (2000) terms “counter-hegemonic globalisation” which is orientated towards the well-being of producers, consumers and the environment rather than a focus on corporate profit. The historical understanding of consumer driven social movements explains in part the success of fair trade by demonstrating that non-economic factors also influence consumer action.

Taking campaigns against Nike as an example, Evans (2000) describes how consumers, when made aware of on the conditions of production, can exercise their power to influence change in corporate practices. During the late 1990s, public attention was drawn to working conditions of Nike factories operating in developing countries. Public awareness of low wages, child labour practices and unsafe work environments damaged Nike’s image and contributed to a downturn in corporate profit. Nike’s response was to adopt less harmful practices and policies.

The example of Nike is used to show that consumers can and do influence the chain of supply and that once informed they may also act in a way that reflects care for distant others. “Transmitting information is simple but crucial. Isolation is the capstone of the powerlessness of the dispossessed...*Widespread information is in itself a weapon.*” (Evans 2000:232 emphasis added). I explore the shape of this information later in my discussion of representation in the story of fair trade.

This chain of events from information to awareness to action reflects the connection Smith (1998) makes between knowledge and care outlined above. In the same way that

activists and consumers pressured Starbucks to include, albeit a small amount of fair trade products, consumers and protestors influenced a degree of change in Nike practices by demonstrating that the conditions of production were unacceptable. Evans describes this action as evoking “global norms” (2000:231). This promotes an international solidarity between distant beings brought together in a shared belief in the qualities of fairness and justice.

Campaigns against Nike are not an isolated example of consumer mobilisation. It is one example of consumers exercising negative purchasing action in light of perceived injustices. Consumer activism is traced to late eighteenth century British Abolitionists campaigns against the use of slavery in the sugar industry. The consumption of this commodity was seen as “tantamount to murder” (Jaffee et al. 2004:170). The connections between consumption and social justice are therefore not a recent phenomenon but have developed alongside changing patterns of consumption.

In the example Nike, an increased awareness of the conditions of production generated by activists and media created a connection between consumers in the North and producers in the South. Consumers were able to vocalise their care for the distant strangers at risk in manufacturing Nike products and influence Nike’s response of changing some practices. Therefore, the process of education, protest and change illustrates how consumer pressure can be a force for transforming trade. Negative purchasing behaviour like consumer boycotts puts pressure on corporations. Positive purchasing behaviour such as shopping for fair trade products allows consumers to act upon ethical beliefs in a way that reinforces trade practices based on fairness.⁴

This connection between politics and consumption demonstrates a “social and moral dimension” of trade in conceptualising the consumer as different from the “individualistic model, being embedded in social relations whose meaning is central to their lives” (Sayer 2003:353). Consumption is therefore a part of a wider negotiation of issues influenced by social factors as well as economic. fair trade is considered by many as an example of “the market impact of collective consumer agency” (Webb 2007:2.2).

⁴ For an extended discussion of negative and positive purchasing behaviour see Tallontire et al. (2001).

Fair trade is part of a broader spectrum of “conscientious consumption” (Raynolds and Long 2007:21). Reflexive consumer behaviour is expressed in different ways involving negative and positive purchasing actions. This intersection between individuals as consumers and as political activists and frames fair trade consumption in a wider spectrum of “positive political consumerism” (Webb 2007:2.1). The individual is therefore both a consumer and a political citizen. This politicisation of consumption leads to image of a consumer who is politically active and engaged rather than self-interested individuals.

REPRESENTATIONS OF FAIR TRADE

The connection between consumer and producer as constructed through the symbolic production of fair trade. It is articulated predominantly through various media publications of fair trade organisations. Several recent studies analyse the representations of fair trade in organisational materials. Each is interested in the way consumers read and decode the representations of fair trade and how this may translate to action. Taking varying perspectives on the political and transformative aspects of fair trade as movement in trade and social relationships, the studies raise some of the broader sociological issues I explore in my research.

Goodman’s (2004) interpretation of the political ecology imagery has influenced the way the material is approached. The following studies focus on the symbolic production of fair trade networks. I chose the three studies outlined here for the representational issues they raise regarding fair trade. They open up some of the sociological issues surrounding representational politics and the scope for a politicised consumer activism. Josée Johnston (2002) discusses the representation of consumption in fair trade materials accessing the potential of consumption as counter-hegemonic movement. Caroline Wright (2004) explores the politics of representation through CaféDirect advertising. The third study is Ann Le Mare’s (2007) exploration of fair trade discourse as narrative.

Josée Johnston: Fair Trade -A Counter-Hegemonic Movement?

Josée Johnston's (2002) study of fair trade as a counter-hegemonic movement is sympathetic yet critical of the movement's ability to challenge structural inequality. Using discourse analysis of fair trade organisational representations studies, Johnston's study focuses on North American fair trade organisations and the image they promote of consumerism. According to Johnston, the globalisation of finance, products, commodities and information is integral to the fair trade. Johnston is interested in how fair trade discourse constructs a connection between consumption and justice, questioning the way fair trade discourse promotes action.

Johnston's approach is cautious of the reflexivity thesis. She identifies two opposing views of the consumption and power in economic theory, one deterministic in the power attributed to the market in controlling consumers and the other accrediting an "exaggerated free will" to consumers (2002:39). Her approach is positioned in between these poles acknowledging both power and limits to the consumer. Goodman also recognises that the consumer is bound by external influences and "being a reflexive consumer denotes a particular position in terms of class, education, and/or level of existing knowledge"(2004:909). This recognises the multiple influences shaping consumer choice of which the reflexive process is part. The influence of class based politics in the reflexive process is further developed by Adams and Raisborough (2008) in their recently published paper on reflexivity and fair trade.

Johnston identifies three themes she finds concerning in fair trade representations. The first theme refers to consumer sovereignty and an emphasis on the freedom of consumers to exercise choice. This is problematic as it obscures the unequal distribution of power between consumer and producers by privileging consumer choice over producer need. Secondly, Johnston questions the political power of fair trade discourse to extend beyond the shopping trolley. Focusing on purchase behaviour limits the politics of fair trade to lifestyle choices that fail to challenge explicitly the regulations governing trade. The third theme looks critically at the valorisation of consumption as a development tool. Without questioning structural inequalities between consumer and producer, Johnston finds fair trade fails by not challenging consumers to consume less.

Consumers are told simply to consume differently. What is missing is the connection between consumption in the North and continuing underdevelopment.

The discourse of fairness is not therefore seen to extend beyond the surface to question to inequalities between consumer and producer. Johnston is concerned that a focus on consumer pleasure fails to address the limited benefits of fair trade realised by producers. While producers benefit from clean drinking water this never extends as far as to imagine the producer relaxing at Starbucks over a latte. What is considered normal behaviour for the consumer is far from the reality of the producer, even with the benefits of fair trade. It is therefore limited in challenging the deeper inequalities between consumer and producer.

Johnston is interested in the way fair trade discourse addresses the reader as a consumer and as a global citizen. The idea of global citizenship requires an active engagement with the politics of trade and development that Johnston finds lacking in the fair trade discourse studied. An emphasis on consumer sovereignty and the freedom of consumers to exercise choice obscures the inequality of power between consumer and producers by privileging consumer taste and fashion. Political action does not extend beyond the shopping trolley. Limiting political expression to lifestyle choices does not challenge inequalities in the structures of international trade.

Johnston (2008) has developed the relationship between consumer and citizen further in recent research on the Whole Foods Market⁵. She begins by defining “ideologies of consumerism (an ideal rooted in individual self-interest) and citizenship (an ideal rooted in collective responsibility to a social and ecological commons)” (2008:232). Although Johnston does not exclude the possibility of consumer and citizen co-existing, she does highlight the fact that “although citizenship does not require eliminating consumer choice, it does require that consumer choice is de-centred as the paramount, guiding value” (2008:250). Johnston suggests that a hybridisation of consumer-citizen may be developing “where shopping can serve as an entry point to larger political projects associated with citizenship” (2008:231). For fair trade the consumer-citizen model

⁵ Johnston (2008) describes Whole Foods Market as the largest ‘natural’ foods retailer globally with stores in the USA, Canada and the UK.

recognises the relative accessibility of shopping as an action compared to organised political action.

Despite her concerns, Johnston is cautiously optimistic of the potential for fair trade to become a “truly counter-hegemonic project” (2002:43). There is a potential for “radical education” (2002:53) of consumers that avoids slippage into the “neocolonial mail order experience” (2002:50) which further distorts the relationship of power between producer and consumer. This requires attention to issues surrounding inequality and injustice and engaging with the politics of fair trade. Johnston calls for more politically charged approach that engages more with the global citizen.

Caroline Wright: Commodity Fetishism in Fair Trade

Caroline Wright (2004) begins by quoting Billig claiming the “pleasures of consumerism would be routinely diminished by an awareness of the productive origins of consumer goods” (1999:313). From this position, Wright explores the challenge of maintaining pleasure in consumption while exposing the conditions of production. Wright focuses on commodity fetishism by questioning how far fair trade representations go to reveal the conditions of production. Wright challenges that while fair trade advertising unmask the conditions of production it also re-fetishises the producer and environment as commodities for the consumer’s pleasure therefore further fetishising producer and product.

Wright challenges what she sees as a focus on benefit to the consumer, including quality and uniqueness of product over the ethics of consumption and benefits to producers. Her study focuses on CaféDirect advertising appearing in *The Guardian* from 1999 to 2000. Wright argues that the advertising “only partially reveals the social relations behind production, exchange and consumption and in so doing (inadvertently?) renders the producers’ lives consumption items” (2004:666). She finds that the advertising re-fetishises the product with an alternative set of qualities focusing on benefit to the consumer.

Wright is concerned by “the configuration of links between minority world coffee drinkers and majority world coffee farmers” (2004:666). Similar to the problem

Johnston (2002) describes in focusing on consumption as a development tool, Wright reads the advertising as limiting consumer action to the demonstration of purchasing power. For the consumer the benefit comes not from exercising ethical concerns, but from the quality of product and the personal empowerment of making choices as a consumer. “Self-reward” is presented to the consumer as motivation for purchasing fair trade products above any ethical considerations (2004:669).

Wright goes on to explore the politics of representation in the advertisements. The consumer’s gaze is privileged and the producer becomes a commodity to consume along with the product. There is no reciprocal relationship, the producer does not know the consumer nor are they likely to enter the consumer’s environment. It is a one-sided relationship. While the producer is involved and the text refers to the conditions of production are only partially politicised and therefore a complete recognition of the producer is not achieved.

A brief connection to Nancy Fraser’s (1999) analysis of recognition and redistribution is made. Wright is concerned that the representations she studies fail to engage completely with the ethics of fair trade and therefore partial in recognition and redistribution. To fully recognise the injustice of trade is seen as a risk to consumer’s pleasure and Wright states this raises a “risk of consumer alienation” (2004:672) However, if the advertising represents partial images of a consumable producer and environment, then it does little to encourage recognition of the difference in identity, culture and livelihoods of producers. Protecting the pleasure of the consumer and thereby promoting consumption may work towards redistribution by selling products but not recognition in an effective way.

By refetishising coffee to promote the ethics of fair trade while protecting the pleasure of the consumer, Wright finds that CaféDirect sacrifices a complete recognition of the differences between producers and consumers. Wright questions whether this sacrifice is necessary in achieving the redistribution of wealth to producers. Can both redistribution and a complete recognition occur in partnership?

In Wright’s analysis, the focus of the product is on the quality it offers the consumer. She finds the advertising refers to benefits to the consumer from fair trade nearly twice

as frequently as benefits to the producer (2004:672). Wright argues that focusing on the value of fair trade products to the consumer as the main motivating factor in consumption pushes the ethical message to the sidelines and reflects an overemphasis on enterprise that jeopardises the ethical message. The focus again is on what the product offers the consumer with little reference to what the consumer has to offer in return.

Wright describes brief encounters where the “hardships of the ‘free’ market and the benefits fair trade brings” are described through the life stories of producers (2004:671). Narrative tells a story of transformation. Wright, however, is dismissive of the narrative strengths of the CaféDirect advertising describing it as “a typical ‘once upon a time’ narrative of arduousness and inequality that becomes a ‘happy ever after’ once consumers commit to fair trade” (2004:671). This narrative approach is developed further in the following section.

Anne Le Mare: The Narrative of Fair Trade

Anne Le Mare’s (2007) is less critical of the narrative construction of fair trade. Le Mare’s narrative analysis on UK based fair trade organisation Traidcraft focuses on organisational materials and interviews with Traidcraft staff. Le Mare describes Traidcraft as one of the most successful fair trade companies in the United Kingdom (2007:73). Le Mare considers how the individual stories of those involved in fair trade, producers, consumers and organisation staff and volunteer, construct an overall story of fair trade. She questions how this may challenge the structures governing trade, production and consumption. Her analysis is framed by Stuart Hall’s (1997) work on the circuit of culture which is used as a framework for analysing the construction of meaning and use of cultural items. Le Mare focuses upon the five “moments” of the circuit: representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation (2007:70). The moments of representation and consumption are of particular significance to my research.

Le Mare argues that in the narrative of fair trade, consumption is represented as a catalyst to overcoming “poverty, growing inequality, and environmental damage” (2007:90). Consumption is driven by the consumer and is therefore a positive force for

improving the lives of those otherwise discriminated against by mainstream markets characterised by “mass/unthinking/fashion-driven consumption” (2007:88). The image of the consumer as a knowing, thinking and engaged being appeals to the consumer’s sense of identity and empowerment.

Le Mare refers to story and narrative throughout her study of fair trade without explicitly defining how she is using the terms. The term narrative is used by Le Mare to refer to a coming together of the stories within fair trade that “inform both the social movement of Fair Trade and the practice of Fair Trade business relationships” (2007:69).

Le Mare is interested in fair trade as a position of identity. She develops several perspectives on the identities involved in fair trade. Individuals may position themselves as members of the movement, staff, volunteers, consumers or a combination of these. These identities are based on the two main messages described below.

First, that poverty in other parts of the world should concern those of us who are relatively well off and that we can do something about that poverty. Secondly, it is an identity position that involves action, usually the practical expression of political or religious belief. (2007:73)

Simultaneously, the producer’s view of involvement with fair trade is more likely to reflect the impact it has on their lives, receiving a fair wage and intangible qualities of respect and dignity. The consumer demonstrates their identification with the ethical message of fair trade through their shopping habits. The production of these different meanings and identities are complimentary to each other, adding to the wider story of fair trade. The multiple meanings of fair trade of all those involved are described by Le Mare as constructing a “meta-narrative...through the personal experience of producers, consumers and staff of trading organisations” (2007:69).

Le Mare argues that Wright’s critique of the representation of producers overlooks conventional media images of the developing world characterised by “difference, problems, crisis or the exotic” (2007:81). The image of producers in fair trade stories is acknowledged as partial, but Le Mare argues it goes beyond dominant images to focus on producers as skilled and active (2007:81). She also refers to representations produced *with* the producer from information they willingly provide. The words of an anonymous

Traidcraft producer are included who asks, “Portray me as a skilled man, not as a poor man.” (unnamed producer quoted in Le Mare 2007). As a project for recognition of the identity and struggles of producers, fair trade challenges many of the existing representations.

The representation not only makes the producer knowable to the consumer as Wright states, but also creates a commonality between producer and consumer. Le Mare describes how the narrative uses representations of difference and similarity to both distinguish products and promote a shared interest between producer and consumer. Basic conditions of fair wages, education and health care are important to both producer and consumer. The consumer can identify with the producers desire to be able to work towards such aspirations and the need to be fairly rewarded for labour and skill.

Le Mare is less dismissive than Wright and Johnston of consumption as a potentially powerful force for change. Action is one of the main messages in the narrative of fair trade. She describes fair trade as a departing from a classical economic view of consumption as a “negative influence on society as other identities are eroded by materialism” (2007:87). Consumption of fair trade products is alternatively represented as “creative and enabling” with scope to bring about social change (2007:87). Consumer action also serves to regulate the fair trade market. Whereas Johnston and Wright were both critical of attaching too much power to consumer demand, Le Mare views it as having the potential to help build the fair trade market as consumer can demand more stringent adherence to fair trade goals.

MOTIVATING ACTION THROUGH REPRESENTATION

Fair trade organisations must promote and sell the product and the message behind the movement. I introduced this tension in chapter two in discussion of the challenges facing fair trade. In Goodman’s words the “moral praxis is fraught with continual tension between the proclivity for both enterprise and ethics” (2004:904). Achieving this balance is problematic. The studies outlined above reveal how this tension emerges in representational issues. Whereas Johnston and Wright find the representations depict a focus on the needs of enterprise, Le Mare describes a more complimentary relationship. The ethical identity position reinforces and regulates fair trade.

Goodman argues that the commoditisation of fair trade products to reflect the values of fairness and justice are “*indispensable*” in the appeal to the consumer (2004:903 emphasis original). This is a combination of ethic and enterprise. Renard also argues the necessity of fair trade text in promoting a connection across spatial divides.

...providing re-worked knowledges through label text and activist discourses is indispensable to the creation of fair trade networks. Connections are made visible, and thus made real for consumers. fair trade consumers in New York, London, and San Francisco ‘see’, ‘experience’, and ‘act’ on the livelihood struggles of coffee producers in Southern Mexico, Nicaragua, and Tanzania. (1999:497)

Motivating consumers is often described as an essential step toward growing fair trade markets as the degree to which consumers are “sensitive to arguments for fair trade” will influence the level of success (Rief 2008:562). My research aims to use Goodman’s ideas as a framework to assess how the narrative of fair trade motivates the reader.

According to Nicholls and Opal “consumers buy fair trade products because they believe that their purchase means an improvement in the lives of Third World producers” (2005:201). Therefore the “demonstrable impact on poor producers” is necessary for consumer loyalty and future growth of fair trade markets (Goodman 2004:896). Goodman stresses the importance of this symbolic production of fair trade products as involving the consumer in a similar way.

Thus, what I am calling fair trade’s ‘political ecological imaginary’ not only tells consumers how the commodity works, but most importantly, demonstrates the progressive effects of their act of consumption on the particular community that grew what they are eating. It is this imaginary that attempts to rally and energize consumers to be morally reflexive...(Goodman 2004:896)

To enlist consumer support, fair trade organisations must convince the consumer that fair trade does transform the lives of producers. Evans (2000) describes the importance of communicating to consumers in the following extract.

Hegemonic globalization profits from being able to bring disparate world together-being able to place cutting-edge product technology in locations where the definition of subsistence is \$1.50 a day, and returning the products to societies of consumers for whom \$150.00 a day is still a working-class wage. To function politically, the trick needs to be obscured. The political jujitsu of counter-hegemonic globalization gains its leverage by making the connections visible, forcing affluent consumers to acknowledge that what are for them marginal gains are bought at the price of real misery, and forcing developed-country labor to face

the fact that it cannot defend its own living standards unless it helps Third World workers fight for improvements in theirs. (2000:237)

In order to make the connections between people, production and products visible, de-fetishisation is essential to the promotion of the ethics of fair trade. Promoting this ethic requires acknowledgment of the connection between the products we consume and the conditions of production. Fair trade organisations communicate the story of transformation in the lives and livelihoods of producers from marginalisation to positions of empowerment and the role the consumer plays in this. Constructed as an ethical position, this is an expression of the consumers' belief in social and economic justice. It is through telling of the story of fair trade that the symbolic meaning engages the consumer. Story in organisational discourse can motivate the reader. Ganz (2001) connects story and strategy in the study of social movements. Storytelling is a critical part of the way a social movement "constructs agency, shapes identity, and motivates action" (2001:3). In the following chapter, I will elaborate upon these ideas.

My research draws from Goodman's position on the importance of the symbolic production of fair trade. The use of narrative has been introduced as one of the devices in promoting a connection between producers and consumers. It will be explored in depth in the following chapters as a discursive device with the potential to engage the reader with fair trade and mobilising them as both a consumer and a global citizen in the struggle for social and economic justice.

Chapter 4: Narrative Research: Telling the Story of Fair Trade

INTRODUCTION

Fair trade has been described thus far as promoting a connection between producer and consumer or symbolically shortening the distance between the two (see Reynolds 2002: Shreck 2002). In my research, I am interested in the devices used to promote this connection by fair trade organisations. This chapter will provide an overview of the research design. I will begin by stating the research questions and then explain the method of analysis and my rationale for selecting the proposed course of study.

The aim of this research is to explore how the narrative of fair trade organisational texts creates a connection between consumer and producer. The use of personal story connects the reader and their involvement in fair trade to the transformation in the lives of producers. Trade Aid's regular publication *Vital* will form the basis of my research.

My research poses the following question. How does Trade Aid represent fair trade as an alternative to social and economic injustice by exposing the conditions of production *and* simultaneously promoting an alternative set of qualities in products? The concept of commodity fetish was introduced in the previous chapter in relation to Goodman (2004) and Wright (2004). Goodman (2004) describes this as integral to the symbolic production of fair trade and therefore equally as important as the material production of goods. It is what Goodman describes as "a slight twist on the double fetish" (2004:902) or the unveiling and re-commoditising with an alternative focus of value is the focus of my research. I am interested in the way fair trade organisations, through the construction of a story of fair trade, build a connection and draw the consumer in to the plot as an important actor.

In exploring this connection between consumers and producers, I ask how far does the representation of fair trade go in un-veiling the conditions of production? What are the qualities promoted? In general, my research explores how Trade Aid through *Vital* represents fair trade to the reader as both an approach to trade and an ethical point of view. Two questions will guide this research:

- 1) How does *Vital* promote ethical consumption?
- 2) How does the story of fair trade connect consumers to producers and motivate action?

A CASE STUDY OF FAIR TRADE NARRATIVE: TRADE AID AND VITAL

In chapter two I introduced Trade Aid's magazine, *Vital* as one of the organisation's key educational resources. The Trade Aid Annual Report 2006/07 describes *Vital* as:

an essential tool for providing in-depth stories about the impact of fair trade on our trading partners, deconstructing commonly held views on trade, introducing topical issues faced by our producers (child labour, AIDS, etc), a "trade watch" section and special feature on craft including cultural significance and traditional techniques. (Trade Aid 2007d:5)

Vital is available free of charge in Trade Aid stores, It is also mailed to subscribers and members and available online in PDF format. Copies are also sent to central libraries and recently to every high school in New Zealand. A copy of *Vital* is also sent to each producer organisation.

With a distribution of over two thousand copies, *Vital* has a considerable readership (Trade Aid 2008d:64). Originally produced quarterly, this was reduced to three times a year from 2006/7. Reader surveys were conducted as part of the 2005 and 2008 Social Accounts. The majority of the respondents responded that *Vital* influenced or reaffirmed their position as fair trade consumers. Over 90 per cent responded "definitely" or "usually" to the statement "*Vital* confirms that fair trade and my effort as a consumer can really make a difference to the lives of poor producers" (Trade Aid 2008d:65).

The survey found the majority of readers first encountered *Vital* in a Trade Aid shop. This suggests readers have some existing interest in fair trade when they first encounter the magazine. Regular readers more than likely acquire *Vital* by subscribing, downloading or picking up a copy in store. Therefore, I assume that the majority of readers will have some existing knowledge of fair trade when they read *Vital* or at least have been into a Trade Aid store.

Trade Aid produces and distributes *Vital*. Trade Aid staff write the articles predominantly though seldom attributing a specific author. The exceptions are the editorial introducing each issue and the guest articles. Supporting data from other organisations lends authority to the information. Organisation frequently referred to include Amnesty International, OXFAM, The International Labour Organisation and The United Nations. Generally, Trade Aid shares a sympathetic position on issues of social and economic justice with these organisations.

Trade Aid provides an interesting case study for several reasons. Trade Aid is the largest fair trade importer and retailer in New Zealand. Chapter two outlined the significant role the organisation has had in developing the fair trade movement in New Zealand. To date there has been little research focusing on the organization or fair trade generally in New Zealand. Therefore, looking at how Trade Aid promotes fair trade in New Zealand may provide insights for other emerging movements.

Trade Aid exemplifies the diversity of the fair trade movement. The research discussed in chapter two identifies an international move away from handcrafts and the ‘world shop’ approach towards commodities and mainstream retailing. Trade Aid’s dedication to handcraft producers may provide some insight into the limitations and benefits of maintaining this approach and the possibilities of promoting non-food related markets elsewhere.

My rationale for selecting *Vital* as the data for this study is also the practical research requirements. *Vital* is easily accessible. The issues analysed are available free of charge from the Trade Aid website. The ease of access for my research also reflects the accessibility of the information for the intended audience. Other educational tools of Trade Aid would also provide a valuable source of data; however, practical constraints of time and location diminish the researcher’s access to these educational tools of Trade Aid. While Trade Aid has several other educational initiatives in addition to *Vital*, I have focused on this publication for the reasons outlined above.

By focusing on *Vital* as the unit of analysis, this research also aims to access how fair trade discourse can extend the message of fair trade when not bound in the sense Goodman (2004) describes other devices. *Vital* remains bound in the sense that it is

restricted to a certain number of pages and in the frequency of publication however, there is wider scope for exploring complex ideas than the size of a product label. I am therefore interested in the potential of *Vital* to overcome some of the limitations identified in the previous chapter such as a lack of context or background to the issues effecting producers and their livelihoods.

NARRATIVE RESEARCH

My research focuses on *Vital* and the construction of the story of fair trade in the magazine. Before developing the methodology of this research a few general points on narrative will briefly introduce narrative analysis and its value to social movements. My research focuses on how the impacts of fair trade on the lives of producers are represented to the reader and how the reader is involved in these transformations. One of the ways that the producer appears in *Vital* is through narrative discourse. The personal producer narratives are entwined throughout the descriptive text. This text develops the historical context of poverty and marginalisation in developing countries. The individual stories in *Vital* combine to create a story of transformation in the lives of producers and growers.

What is narrative?

Definitions of narrative are varied. The roots of narrative inquiry are found in Aristotle's studies of Greek tragedy and develop through Russian formalism and French structuralism (Franzosi 1998). The common element of most definitions of narrative is the "temporal ordering of events...bound together by principles of logical coherence" (Franzosi 1998:520-521). The events "disrupt an initial state of equilibrium that sets in motion an inversion of situation, a change of fortunes" (1998:521). A story therefore conveys transformation from one state to another and the events that drive this action.

Riessman describes narrative, or the act of storytelling⁶, as a way individuals and groups "construct identities" (2008:8). Narrative research is therefore useful to my

⁶I use the terms narrative and story interchangeably throughout my discussion. Although Riessman describes a sociolinguistic distinction between the two, she also follows what she describes as a contemporary use of the two terms interchangeably (2008:6-7).

research in exploring how *Vital* constructs the identities of producers and consumers. Riessman describes the narrative analyst as interested in “how a speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning” (2008:11). In *Vital*, descriptive text is woven together with narratives and descriptions of producers and partner organisations. Voices are given space and events are related to the reader to support of the message of fair trade. In this case study, I will explore how Trade Aid communicates the message of fair trade through *Vital* and how this message motivates the reader to act.

How is narrative used in social movements like fair trade?

Narrative text is “packed with sociological information” (Franzosi 1998:519). For the purposes of my research, my interest lies in the role of narrative in the symbolic production of fair trade. Narrative and the processes of storytelling have a strategic role when used by social movements (Ganz 2001:Polletta 2006). The example of campaigning against Nike and sweatshop production referred to in discussion of global solidarity in chapter three is an example of the power of social movements to bring about change. Campaigns against exploitative working conditions of production challenge social injustices of the global market. Social movements have demonstrated the ability to impact upon consumer behaviour through campaigning. The question remains; how do social movements engage individuals to exercise their power as a consumer in a particular way?

Narrative can refer to a personal story of the individual, but as Riessman (2008) points out it can also be used by other groups and communities to construct identity. Riessman also draws attention to the social function of storytelling as a motivation in political work. For social movements story becomes an important tool in mobilising individuals to act according to collective belief. Storytelling serves to enlist and motivate individuals in social movements. One of the positive outcomes of narrative according to Riessman is when it can “mobilize others into action for progressive social change” (2008:9). Riessman does not develop this idea but points towards the use of individual stories in generating collective action in social movements (2008:73).

Polletta (2006) develops the connection between story and protest. Reflecting on various social movements including the civil rights movement and student protest during the 1960s in America, Polletta explores the way story can challenge authority. The use of story is a way to set the terms of collective action. Polletta details a connection between student protester stories during the 1960s and the emergence of a collective identity of student activism. These stories are described as turning “unfamiliar and potentially disturbing events into familiar epics of overcoming, with frightened students becoming triumphant heroes” (Polletta and Jasper 2001:291).

In a similar manner the stories told by producers tell the story of overcoming exploitative and marginalised positions in the global economy to an empowered position of sustainability. Narrative is seen as “central to social movements because it constructs agency, shapes identity, and motivates action” (Ganz 2001:2). For my research, I am interested in the construction of a moral identity whereby the reader is encouraged to connect their consumption to an ethical position based on social and economic justice. This moral position was introduced in chapter three. The way it is constructed will be explored through the following research.

Narrative Analysis

The field of narrative analysis is broad. Riessman describes it as a “veritable garden of cross-disciplinary hybrids (2008:14). Riessman outlines several approaches to narrative text analysis, three of which will inform my research. These are thematic analysis and to a lesser extent visual and structural analyses. A combination of the three will be used to understand the way that *Vital* constructs a particular story about fair trade and ethical consumption.

The focus of my research is thematic analysis. The analysis outlined in chapter five is primarily thematic with some supporting visual analysis. The visual analysis is designed to illustrate the representation of fair trade as distinct from exploitative practices. Structural analysis will inform my discussion in chapter six and will complement the thematic/visual approach. Drawing on a structural approach allows scope to comment on the way the story of fair trade is promoted in *Vital*, the stories that are included and the speakers who are given recognition.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis refers to “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun and Clarke 2006:79). Braun and Clark (2006) value this approach for its flexibility as an analytical tool. However they also describe it as problematic in its lack of coherent methodology. In this section I will provide general information on thematic analysis before relating this back to my research.

Thematic analysis is primarily concerned with *what* is being said in a text (Riessman 2008). Thematic analysis deals with content. The focus of my thematic research therefore *what* is said in *Vital*. The information collected is also influenced by an interpretive approach interested in the “*underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations - and ideologies - that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data” (Braun and Clarke 2006:84).

One of the exemplars of thematic research Riessman refers to is Cain’s (1991) study of narrative and identity formation in Alcoholics Anonymous. Cain studied the sequence of events in AA written documents and spoken narratives to develop the AA story of alcoholism. Cain identified recurring themes across the stories that inform the general identity of the AA alcoholic. Riessman refers to Cain’s construction of a “master narrative” that develops across the individual stories told (2008:68). Riessman attributes this term to Lyotard describing it as a “common pattern of embedded assumptions and also a common sequence of events” (2008:68).

In a similar approach to Cain my research is focuses on the master narrative constructed in *Vital*. This research intends to draw out the narrative from the text of *Vital* to explore the meta-narrative of fair trade as a transformative action in the lives of producers. I use the term meta-narrative, in a similar way to Le Mare (2007), to refer to the collective story of fair trade producer from the individual stories of producers and organisations. My thematic approach will identify themes occurring across the issues of *Vital* to construct an overall narrative of fair trade based on the multiple fragmented individual stories contained in the magazine. Whereas Riessman describes reoccurring episodes occurring across individual stories of alcoholics, promoting a group identity of AA

members, fair trade stories contain reoccurring events that describe a transformation in producer lives occurring because of their involvement with fair trade organisations.

Through my research I seek to understand how the consumer is involved in the narrative of fair trade and how the producers' lived experiences connect to the ethics of care. The moral economy of fair trade is based on this connection between the personal lives of producers and the impact that consumers have upon their lives. Making this connection explicit in consumer materials is an alternative approach to marketing that promotes the social and environmental qualities of products. Thematic analysis allows me to tease apart the reoccurring events and complicating actions that have marginalised producers in the past and are empowering them through fair trade.

Visual analysis

Visual analysis ties in with the thematic analysis of text. As Riessman describes, both forms of analysis use similar methods (2008:141). The focus of my research is the written material in *Vital*, however, analysis of the images in the magazine complements this study.

In her discussion of narrative research, Riessman describes the development of visual analysis. She describes early interest in photographic records by Gregory Bateson and Margret Mead as advancing anthropology (2008:142). Images were studied in the context of ethnographic analysis. The belief in realism of images meant that the image itself was not a unit of analysis but simply illustrated what was being studied. Images themselves came to analytical attention with the "narrative turn" (Riessman 2008:142). Interest in the images as containing stories developed and analysts became interested in the production and composition of images not for their realism but as a representation capable of telling a story similar to written text.

While Riessman describes visual analysis as continuing to "push the boundaries of narrative definition" (2008:163) it is included here to provide support to the thematic analysis of the written text in *Vital*. Images are found throughout *Vital* and they have a significant role in representing the story of fair trade to the reader.

In her discussion of visual analysis exemplars Riessman refers to the photographic study of Japanese interment camps during World War II by Elena Tajima Creef (2004). Creef used found images and government documents to construct a narrative of interment camp experiences and the impact of this on Japanese Americans. This counter-narrative to the dominant story that described Japanese Americans as a threat to national security, questioned the practice of interment camps in which Japanese-Americans were confined. The images Creef studied, frequently of children or schoolgirls, challenged this narrative by representing innocence rather than a threat to public safety.

Issues surrounding visual representation in fair trade were introduced in chapter three. In a similar way, Le Mare describes the representation of fair trade producers as skilled and active challenges to the dominant narrative stressing “difference, problems, crisis, or the exotic” (2007:81). Images are not without problems of representation. The politics of representation in images of fair trade products and producers was introduced in Wright’s analysis of CaféDirect images. Wright was critical of the way the producer is represented as exotic.

The images in *Vital* will be explored in terms of content and their portrayal of the themes identified in the analysis. Attention will be given to individual images as well as how the images develop themes in the way they are arranged across issues. The visual material will be described as part of the thematic analysis I will discuss in chapter five.

Structural analysis

Structural analysis complements the thematic study of written and visual data. According to Riessman’s (2008) distinction, structural analysis is concerned with *how* the narrative is constructed rather than *what* is said. This involves looking at the way the text is put together and the discursive tools used to promote the preferred reading of fair trade narrative. The narrative segments in *Vital* are nested within non-narrative text. Structural analysis will form a small part of my research to explore the way the narrative is promoted through this text. General descriptive text providing background and statistical data gives context to narrative events. My research is interested in the meta-narrative. This is the story of Trade Aid’s impact on the lives of producers.

Riessman cites the foundations of structural analysis in the work of William Labov (1972). Both Franzosi and Riessman cite Labov's model of six elements of narrative structure. Riessman outlines these as:

an abstract (summary and/or "point" of the story); orientation (to time place, characters, situation); complicating action (the event sequence or plot, usually with a crisis or turning point); evaluation (where the narrator steps back from the action to comment on meaning and communicate emotions - the "soul" of the narrative); resolution (the outcome of the plot); and a coda (ending of the story and bringing it back to the present) (2008:84)

Franzosi moves from narrative structure to describe a possible neglect of characterisation in narrative analysis (1998:523). Turning to the work of first Propp and then Greimas, Franzosi refers briefly to the structure of characterisations and the roles of different characters within a story. Different actants are described as helping or hindering the development of events (1998:523-4). These will be discussed in chapter six in discussion of the way the narrative is constructed to promote a particular perspective on the people and processes involved.

Polletta describes, "All stories have characters and a point of view or points of view from which the events in the story are experienced. Characters need not be human or even living. But we expect to experience the moral of the story through character's fates" (2006:9). The meta-narrative of fair trade contains several characters, which both hinder and help the cause. In my study of *Vital*, the perspective privileged is that of the producer and the impact of fair trade. This perspective is mediated through Trade Aid by the structuring of narrative fragments to promote the meta-narrative of fair trade. For my research, structural analysis allows scope to explore the way the thematic material is presented in *Vital* by looking at the connections made across the data as well as unpacking the specific themes identified within the data.

SAMPLING AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

My research focuses on three roles of in *Vital*: promoting an understanding of the issues surrounding fair trade, promoting a connection from consumers to the producers and products of fair trade and involving the reader as a consumer and citizen in the work of fair trade.

The narrative of *Vital* is “organised and packaged” (Riessman 2008:22). The editor already shapes the material. The magazine contains fragments of stories from a diverse collection of individual and collective producer groups. Together these construct the story of fair trade as it develops across distance from the producer to the reader in New Zealand. This meta-narrative is constructed from the multiple producer stories presented in *Vital*.

Sampling

Vital magazine is the focus of this analysis. The data corpus, defined by Braun and Clarke as “*all* data collected for a particular research project” (2006:79 emphasis original) consists of twenty-two issues dating from issue 3 in 2001 to issue 26 of 2008. Issues were downloaded from the Trade Aid website for the purposes of this research.⁷ Several of the earlier editions are not accessible online and therefore have not been included in the research. All of the issues available in this format were included in the research.

As the issues were downloaded, the analysis does not include the inserts that occasionally appear in *Vital*. For example, *Vital 18* from March 2006 includes two card inserts, one a membership application for Trade Aid New Zealand Incorporated Society and the other an “Action Card” requesting local supermarkets to provide fair trade coffee. The “Action Card” contains a pre-written request and contact details of Trade Aid with space for the reader to fill out their personal details and then place the card in the supermarket suggestion box. As these are not noted in the online issues, they are not included in the data. Only the data appearing on main pages is included in my research.

Analytical approach

My thematic analysis is theory-driven as my reading of recent research influences it. Goodman’s (2004) study of the symbolic production of fair trade was introduced in chapter three. His writing on representations of fair trade and the refetishising of

⁷ These are available free of charge at www.tradeaid.org.nz

products informs my research. In the following discussion, I will outline the process I used to develop from this framework to my study of *Vital*.

Goodman identifies four processes of the material and symbolic production of fair trade. These processes informed my early reading of *Vital*. The first process refers to trade relations in fair trade where social and economic distances are shortened to create a closer sense of connection. The second, promotes similarities between producers and consumers through universal meanings “about what it is to participate in a meaningful livelihood” (2004:906). Thirdly he refers to the importance of promoting knowledge about producers in creating a connection of care. “The discursive fields that act to re-work fair trade’s fetish inform consumers about the Others producing the commodities they ingest in order to bring about closer contact and enable the experiences of empathy, care, and responsibility” (2004:907). The fourth process refers to involving consumers as “laborers” in creating of fair trade networks. “The well-off ‘us’ (consumers) and poorer ‘them’ becomes a ‘we’ (participants in the same network) embedding the actions of both consumption and production in the creation and politics of fair trade.” (2004:907).

While Riessman’s (2008) discussion of narrative methods informs my general approach to narrative methods, Braun and Clarke’s (2006) article on thematic analysis was used as a practical guide in developing my research design. Braun and Clarke’s guidelines to thematic analysis were used to construct my research, in particular in the initial stages of deciding what shape the analysis would take. They discuss some of the questions I encountered in the early stages of this research and identify six phases in thematic analysis. These phases are described as:

familiarizing yourself with your data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report (2006:87).

The six phases were a guideline for my research. The first phase was conducted relatively quickly. Having been an occasional reader of *Vital*, I am already familiar with its layout and content. The second phase, generating initial codes, was a longer process of reading through each issue. Segments of text were organised under three broad headings. Under the first heading were listed references to *the international context of trade*. This included references to general trade practices, whether positioned as fair or

unfair. A strong contrast between fair and unfair trade practices and regulations was apparent. The second group of data referred to *personal details about producers*. This included any time a producer's words were used or reference made to a specific producer (organisation or individual), product or mode of production. The third heading referred to any *reference to the reader* made within the data. The reader is addressed directly and indirectly in different ways. All three of these broad themes occurred throughout the issues often embedded within each other. The coding was conducted manually, which was possible given the size of the data corpus.

The themes were developed with the theory in mind. As my research is interested in the way connection is promoted through an appeal to ethics and shared meanings these ideas also shaped the development of the themes. Once the data was organised into these three broad sets I was able to identify more detailed themes. These were identified in part through reference to research outlined in the previous chapter. The data was then coded according to these and exemplars from *Vital* were selected to best convey these. Often the segments of text fit under more than one theme and they were coded according to both.

The last three phases in Braun and Clarke's guide were conducted with a considerable amount of revision between the three rather than a sequential order. The final themes are outlined in the following chapters. In the next two chapters I will develop the final phase of producing the report and outline the thematic material. I will relate the material in *Vital* back to the ideas introduced in chapter three.

The development of themes involved continually moving back and forth between the data set, the themes and the analysis. The themes were refined throughout the analysis process to continually clarify and position the data in relation to the research questions. As my literature review was conducted prior to the analysis, this also informed the process. The text classified under each theme was of varying length. Often this is just a few words or adjectives used to describe something. Sometimes this involved larger extracts, particularly in the personal producer narratives that have a clear beginning and end. These were coded in their entirety. Attention was given to selecting examples from the text, both written and visual that best conveyed each theme. These examples are detailed in chapter five.

This analysis incorporates several tools from narrative analysis. Explicit and implicit character traits identified throughout the themes are outlined below. Explicit use of adjectives to describe the many parties involved in international trade is one approach. Negative and positive attributes of corporations, producer partners, local New Zealand partners and consumers are explored. Action also portrays implicit character qualities. Following Franzosi's (1998) explanation of character traits as having an evaluative function in narrative analysis, I included the use of positive and negative language describing people and processes in the coding. My discussion of these contrasting characterisations in the data is included in chapter six.

The thematic analysis of *Vital* allows for exploration of the reoccurring stories across the issues. The stories in *Vital* refer to a diverse collection of people and organisations that are brought together by their involvement in fair trade and the story of livelihood struggles. The thematic analysis allows the researcher to access the issues affecting producers around the globe bringing together geographically and culturally diverse experiences.

In the following chapter, I will provide a detailed discussion of this analysis according to the thematic issues identified here and provide examples from *Vital*. This will be followed with a discussion of the research in relation to the theory and literature reviewed in chapter three. In this discussion I will explore how the consumer/producer connection is promoted in *Vital* by looking at the way the story of fair trade involves both producer and consumer in the struggle for social and economic justice. As stated above, my research is guided by the question of how *Vital* constructs ethical consumption and how the story of fair trade motivates action from *Vital* readers.

Chapter Five: Connecting Consumers to Producers: The Story of Vital

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes my thematic analysis of *Vital*. The twelve themes discussed below are arranged in three sections. The first teases apart the contrasting images of fair and unfair trade. The negative connotations of exploitation and disempowerment in conventional trade are in contrast to the positive transformations of fair trade. From this general discussion of trade, I will focus on three elements of fair trade: producer, production and product. This will focus on personal representations and stories. In the third section I identify how *Vital* addresses the reader and involves them in the ethics of fair trade. The reader is addressed as both a consumer and citizen. The differences and similarities in these positions will be outlined further in this chapter.

FAIR AND UNFAIR TRADE PRACTICES

In order to understand the need for alternative trade, the reader must first understand what unjust trade means. *Vital* does this by telling the reader about the conditions of unfair trade practices in contrast to the image of fair trade. The conditions of production and the meaning to the producer are emphasised. Personal stories of producers tell the reader of hardship and exploitation under unfair trade practices. These are in contrast to the stories of transformation told by fair trade producer partners. Personal stories and photographic images give a human face to the grim statistics and descriptions found in the material. This material orientates the story providing a context for the transformation represented through fair trade.

What is unjust in international trade?

Vital provides the reader with an explanation of the need for fair trade by contrasting fair and unfair trade practices. Two themes are identified in this section. The first theme refers to the structures that marginalise producers. The second addresses the exploitation of labour in developing countries. Together the text and images described here tell the reader of the need for an alternative system. Material found throughout *Vital* provides

the background context to the conditions disadvantaging producers in developing countries. The following comparison explores the differences between *unfair* and *fair* trade practices in *Vital*.

Producers are marginalised by structural conditions

In every issue of *Vital* there is reference to the structural inequalities of international trade. Here structural inequality refers to the institutional and regulatory levels that manage trade across national borders. Trade liberalisation and deregulation means fewer rules on trade and production. Free trade is described as a “corporate assault on the world’s indigenous farming peoples and smallscale family farmers” (Trade Aid 2006b:4). Trade regulations are described as hypocritically advocating liberalisation while simultaneously protecting local industry. The language of “assault” characterises corporate powers as villains and governments as abetting this injustice. These characterisations will also be discussed later in chapter six in the structural analysis of the narrative.

Statistics are frequently used to support these claims. One example from *Vital* refers to the subsidisation of the European dairy industry “to the tune of 16 billion pounds a year - more than 1 pound per cow per day (half the world’s population live on less)” (Trade Aid 2008b:15). These figures are contrasted with other figures in *Vital* that describe up to seventy per cent of the population in urban Ghana as earning less than one dollar a day (Trade Aid 2002:7) or annual government spending on basic social services in Nicaragua at only \$26 per person (Trade Aid 2005a:10). This is an injustice when a European dairy cow attracts more government support in subsidies than other governments spend per citizen on healthcare, education and sanitation combined in Nicaragua. The image is not of a fair global market but one where producers in many countries struggle to meet basic needs before they can compete in a global market. They enter the market disadvantaged from the start.

Dr Rene E. Ofreneo, executive director of the Fair Trade Alliance in the Philippines, describes food shortages in the Philippines as a result of “policies pursued by the Government, with a strong dose of neo-liberal *advice* from the IMF and the World Bank (that) are contrary to the goals of food security and agricultural sovereignty.” (Ofreneo

in, Trade Aid 2008c:11 emphasis added). Trade liberalisation and a focus on export production have, according to Ofreneo, made the Philippines dependent on imported food making food increasingly expensive for the average family. Described elsewhere as “often a fast and slippery slope into poverty” deregulation is seen to further disadvantage already poor producers and in the example of the Philippines undermine basic human needs like food security (Trade Aid 2006b:4).

Other forms of regulation and control also marginalise producers. The patenting of plant material is described as “21st Century colonisation” as it excludes many growers from production by claiming ownership of genetic materials (Trade Aid 2002:3). Plants that have been grown for centuries in a region may be patented by outsiders who claim ownership threatening the livelihoods and subsistence production of many producers. Intellectual property rights asserted by US agribusinesses who claim ownership threaten varieties of rice traditionally grown in Thailand and India.⁸ Lacking financial support and excluded by literacy and language barriers many producers struggle to make a living let alone challenge such barriers.

The coffee industry is a focus throughout *Vital*. The slump in the price of coffee, set by the Wall Street commodity exchange, is blamed for the increasing poverty of coffee growers.⁹ A quote from author Den Cycon describes the nature of the coffee market. “Half an earth away in New York City, a room full of overcaffeinated young men...were shouting themselves hoarse bidding down the lifeblood of rural Ethiopia.” (Trade Aid 2008b:15) Coupled with the irony that many coffee producers lack the income to drink coffee themselves, there is a strong image of inequality between those with the power and money to consume luxury items and the producers who struggle to meet basic needs. The following description of life from the heart of Northern Nicaragua’s Arabica coffee growing region describes this contrast.

Most of Matagalpa’s locals won’t be enjoying a leisurely *latte* or business brunch short black. They don’t have the disposable income to buy something as frivolous and frothy as a cappuccino. With unemployment rates of seventy percent most locals are more concerned with the necessities of life. (Trade Aid 2003a:6)

⁸ See “Rice pirates- the race for the patent prize” in (Trade Aid 2005b:8-9) pp 8-9.

⁹ See “Craving a Coffee Fix” in (Trade Aid 2001a) p 2.

Vital calls for pressure on the World Bank and the IMF “so that their developmental policies prioritising the interests of transnational corporations over the working poor around the world will be re-evaluated and reversed” (Trade Aid 2001b:6).

Producers are exploited and enslaved by corporate production

“I was burnt with acid on lips and arms as I didn’t work as per the owner’s expectations. I stopped telling anybody or crying, because, if I did, I would get beaten more.” (Trade Aid 2008c:5) Narrative segments like this graphically bring life to descriptive text. In this example it is twelve year old Saurabh who speaks firsthand of abuse. The article describes horrific working conditions and the long-term physical effects on the children working here. Statistics appeal to the reader on a rational level, while narrative segments appeal to an emotional response. Describing the conditions of production, the article connects this labour to international fashion retailers including prominent jeweller, Daniel Swarovski. The text vividly connects the conditions of child slavery to Northern fashion.

Child slavery is a campaign focus of Trade Aid. There are many articles in *Vital* exposing the harsh reality of child slavery in developing countries. Figures from 2006 from the International Labour Organisation estimate a huge number of children working in dangerous conditions.

...218 million working children aged between five and 17. Of these, 74 million children under 15 years were deemed to be in hazardous work, and just over 8 million were in forced labour – in agriculture, industry, domestic work, armed conflict, or prostitution. (Trade Aid 2007a:4).

When the names of specific corporations appear in *Vital*, it is largely to do with their abuses of labour or environment. Nestlé appears in one third of the issues. This is most often in relation to a legal case between former child slave labourers and several of the big cocoa corporations before the courts in the United States including Nestlé, Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland. (Trade Aid 2006b) Three ex-child labourers represented by the International Labour Rights Fund sued the companies before a Los Angeles court. The case appears to have been inconclusive “as the “war on terrorism” takes precedence in US customs laws” (Trade Aid 2007b:11).

Images are used frequently in *Vital* to convey the messages of fair trade. They help show to the reader the conditions of labour. Image 1 appeared in *Vital* with the caption “young boy raking cocoa beans on drying rack, Soubré region of the Cote D’Ivoire”. Pictured is the unnamed boy, barely clothed and working alone, unable to reach the cocoa without a rake.



Image 1 (Trade Aid 2006a:11)



Image 2 (Trade Aid 2006a:10)

An image found in the same issue presents a different story of fair trade. Image 2 portrays several men working together and smiling as they turn the cocoa beans. Appearing in *Vital* with the caption “Farmers turning drying cocoa beans in the village of Agyemandiem, in Western Ghana”, the smiles and camaraderie of the image are in stark contrast to the frailty and toil pictured in Image 1.

There is a strong contrast between what is fair and unfair about trade. At the same time producers struggle to meet basic needs, corporate coffee retailers are reportedly “experiencing record profits” (Trade Aid 2001b:3). There is a clear message throughout *Vital* that producers are disadvantaged by the way trade is structured in a system aimed at maximising corporate profit. The stories in *Vital* show this profit comes at a cost for producers. The following section will outline what makes fair trade different from conventional trade practices.

How is Fair Trade Different?

The two themes in this section explore the conditions of fair trade that differ from those detailed above. Firstly, the basis of fair trade is a partnership. Going back to the definition of fair trade given in chapter two, this partnership is a key characteristic of

making trade fair. In the second theme, I explore representations of the benefits of fair trade in contrast to the images of unfair practices.

Fair Trade is a partnership of equals

Paul Myers, president of the International Fair Trade Association describes fair trade as simply “an exchange between equal partners: I will give you money for the beautiful piece of jewellery or the kilo of coffee which you will give me” (Trade Aid 2008b:11). This simple definition captures the nature of fair trade partnership based on equality and working together towards a shared vision.

Tran Tuyet Lan from Craftlink in Vietnam tells *Vital* that “Most fair trade buyers are fairer with their payments and they work *hand in hand* with the producers on product development” (Trade Aid 2007c:8 emphasis added). Working with producer partners may involved pre- payments, product design input and market information among other assistance.

Throughout *Vital* the words of trading partners are used to describe their relationship with Trade Aid. This narrative helps to profile the character of Trade Aid from the perspective of the producer. A quote from an unknown producer partner describes Trade Aid as “very honest and exemplary” (Trade Aid 2005d:7). The inclusion of evaluative statements from producers encourages the reader to trust the organisation and characterises Trade Aid as an organisation consumers can rely on to carry out fair trade principles.

Trade Aid also partners with other New Zealand organisations in order to grow the fair trade market and assist in development projects in producer communities. Geoff White describes Trade Aid as “committed to offering a helping hand to any business that wants to be involved and will be actively seeking new partnerships” (Trade Aid 2004a:2). The language used to describe conventional trade refers to competition and the need for producers to compete on a global market.¹⁰ The image in *Vital* on the other hand is of organisations and retailers working together to grow the fair trade market in New

¹⁰ See (Trade Aid 2008a) p. 4 and p. 10 and (Trade Aid 2001b) p.6

Zealand. Trade Aid also forms partnerships with other development agencies and has a close relationship with NZAID whose funding is described as “core to our operation” (Trade Aid 2004b:2). This funding enables Trade Aid to assist producers in capacity building projects.

The benefits of fair trade are observable

With traditional trading organisations artisans were getting 50c for something that was being sold for \$20.00 - the artisan was really at the bottom of the supply chain. So we thought, we can pay the artisan \$5.00 from a \$10.00 price tag and use the difference to support education and other social developments. (Trade Aid 2006c:7)

Fred Masinde, from the Ungu Society in Kenya describes the benefits of partnering with fair trade organisations. Throughout *Vital*, fair trade is described as transforming the lives of producers. Producers describe how payouts from fair trade organisations are improving their social and physical wellbeing. *Vital* frequently refers to healthcare, education, savings and loan schemes, sanitation, and clean water as the benefits of fair trade.

There is a strong contrast between fair and unfair practices. *Vital* describes, “Jewellery sold through fair trade networks tells a completely different story” (Trade Aid 2008c:6). Visual images, like those pictured below, show the contrast between working conditions.



“Young boys polishing gemstones in a workshop in a Muslim-run business in Jaipur, Rajasthan.”

Image 4 (Trade Aid 2008c:4)



“Threading beads for Tara Projects, India”

Image 3 (Trade Aid 2008c:6)

Although the gaze of the reader is met in both images, the tight framing and dim lighting of Image 3 sets an entirely different scene from the feeling of the light and space in Image 4. Images of children at work grinding gemstones or staring at the camera while huddled around machinery are dimly contrasted with the brightly dressed and cheerful appearance of women making jewellery for Tara Projects.

The personal stories of producers and the descriptions of production and products develop this visual contrast further. Through a deeper understanding of the negative conditions of some trade practices, the reader may be convinced of the need for an alternative approach. The following section explores the personal experiences of those involved in fair trade further developing the impact of fair trade on producer livelihoods.

PRODUCERS, PRODUCTION & PRODUCTS

Geoff White describes the use of producer narrative in *Vital*. “We also try to link the consumer to the producer – it’s not *our words* that they’re hearing, *it’s what our trading partners are saying*” (Trade Aid 2008b:6 emphasis added). The descriptions of producers and production continue to distance fair from unfair trade practices. This contrast helps to convey to the reader the qualities that distinguish fair trade products. These descriptions also tell the reader of the impact of fair trade on the lives of producers.

Personal stories and detailed descriptions portray the abstract idea of fairness through the lived experiences of producers. Providing this detail on the lives of producers, the places that they live and the struggles they face conveys to the reader the diversity of people involved in fair trade. The label ‘producer’ refers to a diverse group of people around the world united in a common struggle to provide for their families and meet basic human needs with the hope of overcoming the poverty afflicting many parts of the world.

Producers: self-reliant and not such a stranger

I began my thesis with a quote from Haricha Begum from Jute Works. I include it here again as it describes the experience of the producer in her own words. “My sorrows have all gone and my hope has been fulfilled. Many of us are very poor, but we can *change* our lives through income-generating works” (Trade Aid 2008a:9 emphasis added). Producer stories tell the reader of both the impacts of fair trade and the *empowerment* it brings, making both the producer and the impacts of fair trade known to the reader. In this section I will outline the material describing producers specifically and the impact of fair trade on daily lives.

Haricha Begum talks about producers changing their lives through the opportunity of fair trading. This is an image of hard working and capable people who given the chance will transform their own lives. The transformations in producer’s lives are attributed to an improved income however the impact is also described by intangible qualities. The moral economy was described in chapter three as encompassing non-economic qualities. The descriptions of producers and the impacts of fair trade in their lives demonstrate how this moral economy extends to producers as well as consumers. Trade is not described in terms of economics but in the human impact of that exchange. “Not only does fair trade and market linkage help people fill their bellies, it helps them build a voice.” (Trade Aid 2001b:6). It is therefore not simply a material or physical need but an issue of respect and dignity.

Empowering Producers: People are actively involved in improving their own wellbeing through fair trade

One of the principles of fair trade is to work with the most disadvantaged producers. Several specific groups are often identified in *Vital*; usually women, children and disabled. Information in *Vital* tells the reader about cultural discrimination against women and stigma attached to disabled. One article describes the work of the KKM (Kuru Kshetr Mandal) Handweaving Society in Nepal (Trade Aid 2007c:6-7). The Society was established to sell crafts made by leprosy victims in order to support themselves. The article contains a description of leprosy, the cause and symptoms of the disease. This information helps to inform the reader of the challenges facing producers

from both the physical symptoms of the disease and the social stigma attached to sufferers.

‘Empowerment’ features frequently in the stories as producers are described as caring for their own communities. Co-operatives are able to respond to disasters often more effectively than international and government agencies. The impact of the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004 is frequently referred to as a case where co-operatives and fair trade organisations were vital in providing timely assistance to affected areas. Gospel House Handcrafts was able to provide immediate assistance to communities in Sri Lanka (Trade Aid 2008c:13).

Dignity and respect are often referred to as benefits of fair trade in meeting the intangible needs of producers. Producers talk about the many impacts on their lives as a result of fair trade. The following excerpt is taken from an interview with Craftlink manager, Tran Tuyet Lan. It details the transformation in the lives of village women. The story starts out speaking of the hardship of life in the villages in Vietnam. It then refers to a chain of events which empowers the women.

In the past many of these village women sacrificed a lot. The men would stay at home and drink and sometimes use opium so the women would have to go out into the fields to work as well as care for children. Now men know that women can get an income from working at home in handcrafts so the men are going back into the fields. With this income the women feel empowered. They have more of a voice in the family and in society and they have more money to invest in education and health care. (Trade Aid 2007c:9)

Earning an income through handcraft production is described as transforming this downward spiral of poverty and drug abuse to empower women and motivate men to work the fields. The outcome brings more money for health and education.

We are in a group of ten and I am the team leader. We have to wake up as early as 5.00am to dig and then later make baskets. We make almost all types of baskets and rattles. I have benefited a lot from the (NAWOU) programme because I have managed to take my children to school, buy land and build a house. (Trade Aid 2005d:5)

The personal stories of producers also speak of the benefits brought by working with fair trade organisations. In the extract above, the reader is told of Daisy Nanteza’s “bleak” future since her husband died of AIDS leaving her to care for her five children

alone. Her words describe the transformation in her life after joining a fair trade organisation. She speaks of hard work but also the benefits of her labour for herself and her family.

Still distant but not such a stranger: Producers are people with similar concerns to consumers

Images and stories of individual producers represent partner organisations. An article on Gospel House Handcrafts included four images of producers at work that introduce producers like Kanchana, who is described as a “solo mother, (who) is able to provide for herself and her two-year-old son at a handpainting centre...” (Trade Aid 2008c:12). Visual images, like the Rivera family photo (image 5), convey the fact that entire families rely on income from production and that producers have responsibilities to their families and communities.



Image 5

“Santiago Rivera’s family. Fair trade means a better standard of living”(Trade Aid 2001b:6)

Producers are represented by their own stories that connect them to a place and to the products they produce. At the same time as promoting this connection, the differences between producer and reader are apparent. In the description of the environment, politics and struggles of producers, the distance to the reader in New Zealand persists. The geographical distance between producer and consumer is evident in the descriptions of landscapes described as remote or isolated. Producers are located in diverse countries, from craft makers in India, Peru and Vietnam to commodity producers in Ghana, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka to name just a few of the nations where producers live.

Often the story of the producer is told through a guest writer who has visited with producer groups.¹¹ Linda Broom's guest article describes her visit to Ghanaian cocoa producers and her personal experience in the area. The landscape is described as a beautiful country where "Mud houses are beautifully highlighted by the lush green vegetation..." (Trade Aid 2006a:10). Evoking images of the landscape and environment connects consumers to the place of a producer. Broom concludes with a description of Anna, a 65-year old widowed cocoa farmer. Anna is grateful for the income she receives through Kuapa Kokoo, the producer organisation. The reader is told how Anna has suffered from physically demanding work and in ability to seek medical treatment. This image of the producer toiling to produce cocoa for the consumer evokes empathy and care at the thought of a 65-year old woman continuing to struggle to make a living despite chronic pain.

The feeling of distance is shortened at the same time by an increasing familiarity as the reader learns more about these communities from issue to issue. The basic needs of the producer are universal qualities or basic *human* needs. Discussing Christmas as a time of gift giving Geoff White asks readers to remember others during this time. Giving a gift means something specific in New Zealand, but giving a fair trade gift also gives to the producers. "For children, fair trade offers financial security, food, clothing, medical care and education. In other words, it offers *what we take for granted* when we use the term 'childhood'." (Trade Aid 2005a:2 emphasis added) The basic qualities needed by producers include a fair wage in return for labour, income security, access to health care and education. Reading through *Vital*, different producer groups appear across several issues keeping the reader informed on the development of each organisation.

Production: skilful and traceable

The general conditions under which fair trade products are made and grown are contrasted in fair and unfair practices. Fair trade production must be free from exploitative or discriminating practices. *Vital* also tells the reader about the specific process involved in growing and making many of the products available through Trade Aid. Craftmaking refers to the production of handcrafts and textiles whereas growing

¹¹ See also Ewan Cameron "Coffee Call" in (Trade Aid 2007c) p. 10.

involves the cultivation of foodstuffs. Information on the production of products is often highly detailed following the process from the cultivation of raw materials through to finished product. The emphasis is on the skill and labour involved in each step and the traditional methods used.

Two issues are identified in this section. The first refers to the particular kind of skill that the production process involves that is emphasised in *Vital*: environmental sustainability and a link to traditional processes. Secondly is the idea of transparency in the production process – products can be traced back to the producer. This is in contrast to most consumer goods that hide the conditions of production. This commodity fetishism obscures the connection between producer and consumer. This was outlined in chapter three. The two themes outlined here demonstrate the re-fetishisation of fair trade products to reflect rather than obscure the process of production.

Production of fair trade products involves skilled production

Particularly in cultivation, there is a strong emphasis on the environmental sustainability of fair trade production. This is often promoted as intrinsically part of traditional production techniques that reflect local knowledge and limited reliance on chemical inputs. Where production methods deviate from traditions there are generally environmental reasons for the change.

Craft making is described as laborious, requiring skill and time. Returning from visiting producer partners, Geoff White writes “Their expertise and skill never fail to impress me. With the most basic tools, and often without electricity, they produce exquisite pieces of art” (Trade Aid 2006c:2). Production is done by hand, often using traditional techniques passed down through generations. There is a strong connection in production to the history of the people. In Andean weaving, technique date back centuries. Where production has changed for the fair trade market, it is done according to fair trade principles. Traditional production methods adversely affecting the environment are transformed into more sustainable practices. An example given in *Vital* is a move away from wood fired kilns for firing pottery (Trade Aid 2006c:5).

Images of craft making support this focus on the labour and skill that goes into a product. Image 6 shows a woman using a treadle loom to produce intricate weavings. She is identified as Maura Tejiendo from the organisation Aj Quen in Guatemala.



Image 6 (Trade Aid 2007a:8)

Production is a transparent process from raw material to finished product

While the geographical distance between producer and consumer is great, the details of production and distribution included in *Vital* involve the reader in the path of products from raw material to finished product. Information is provided on the artisans and trade organisations that produce market and distribute products overseas. Trade Aid is one organisation that purchases products from these organisations selling them through their network of stores in New Zealand.

An article on singing bowls in *Vital 25* is a good example of this traceability (Trade Aid 2008c:3). The article informs the reader that the bowls sold by Trade Aid were made by a group of 20 artisans in the village of Imadol in eastern Nepal. These artisans are organised in a group called Kasha. Kasha sells the bowls to Mahaguthi who markets and exports Nepali craft. It is from Mahaguthi that Trade Aid buys the bowls and through the organisation that the artisans receive assistance with production and social development assistance. This article tells the reader about the production process of sand-casting bowls and the intricate craftsmanship that goes into making each bowl. They are also able to trace the path that each bowl goes through before reaching the shelves of Trade Aid.

The traceability of products allows the reader to feel confident buying fair trade assured that production is free of child and exploitative labour. *Vital* traces the path of cocoa used in Trade Aid's hot chocolate from the Dominican Republic via Canada to New Zealand. (Trade Aid 2006a:8) The organic cocoa is produced by CONACADO (Confederación Nacional de Cacaocultores Dominicanos) and manufactured in Canada by La Siembra Co-op. The sugar used in the product comes from the Otisa Sugar Mill in Arroyos y Esteros in Paraguay.

Products: value-laden and transformed

Two themes recur throughout the representation of products. The first refers to the social and environmental values attributed to fair trade products. Valued as traditional goods made with locally sourced materials, the products reflect social and environmental interests. At the same time as celebrating this connection to tradition, there is also information on the transformation of products as they are adapted in design and production. A number of influences which will be explored below may cause this transformation.

Products are rich - imbued with social and environmental value

The products described in *Vital* are valued for their social and environmental qualities. These qualities reflect the cultural heritage of producers and a growing environmental awareness of both producer and consumer. Many of the issues of *Vital* begin with a description of a product. This typically contains an explanation of the cultural context of the product and an image of the product. For example, one article appearing along with an image of a stone statuette from Tara Projects in India describes the cultural significance and use of a Buddha's image in Buddhist communities. The reader is told how to display a Buddha in their home according to Buddhist practice. (Trade Aid 2007c:3) The reader is then able to associate the information from the article to a product in store. The story of the people and processes behind each product adds to the social and environmental value of fair trade goods. This is summed up by the title introducing Jute bags: "Grown by nature, sewn by hand" (Trade Aid 2008a:16). The value of the bag is clearly in the environmental properties and the simple handmade production.

Handcraft production is described as an “essential first step out of absolute poverty” (Trade Aid 2006c:4). One of the benefits of handcraft production identified in *Vital* is the preservation of traditional practices and the cultural production of goods. It also helps to preserve traditional crafts by creating a market for products beyond local demand. Handcraft production in particular is important as it empowers women who are able to produce from the home and supplement household income.

The production or cultivation of commodities is described in terms of environmental impacts. Coffee that is shade-grown and organic is highly valued. Often the words ‘organic’ and ‘sustainable’ describe this production. *Vital* explains that the value of shade grown coffee comes from the way it allows native plants and birds to co-exist along with coffee production whereas varieties grown in direct sun may grow faster but they require land clearing and high chemical inputs. Shade grown cultivation is also generally small-scale using local knowledge and labour to produce quality coffee.

Production is also described as traditional and small-scale, further differentiating fair trade from mass or factory driven production. The positive connotation attached to hand-made products is clearly in opposition to the negative association of industrial or factory manufacturing. “More and more people are coming to realise that, in an ever increasing plastic, mass produced world, there is an intrinsic value in products made by *skilled* artisans from *natural* materials.” (Trade Aid 2004c:2 emphasis added) This is compared to the “poor conditions, low wages and long hours of factory work” (Trade Aid 2004a:3). Large-scale manufacturing is represented as heavily polluting and chemical intensive. The social impacts of this include a flood of cheap manufactured goods into developed and developing countries threatening the livelihoods of small-scale artisan producers.

Attention is given to the raw materials used to create products and the environmental value they add to products. An article on ‘CORR - The Jute Works in Bangladesh’ in Issue 24 includes a column on the cultivation and harvesting of jute as well as a historical background to the use of jute. The environmental qualities of raw materials are valued. Jute is valued for its environmental properties whereas cotton is one of the heaviest users of pesticides and herbicides. Cotton appears problematic in other articles

as it is subsidised in the USA and Europe further disadvantaging growers in developing countries.



Image 7 (Trade Aid 2008a:6)



Image 8 (Trade Aid 2006a:3)

Other raw materials are also valued for their environmental impact. Recycled juice containers are transformed into bags in the Philippines by PREDA Foundation (see Trade Aid 2006a:3). The images above show the recycled containers ready for use and the finished product as it is available in Trade Aid stores.

Fair trade combines tradition and transformation to produce quality products

Traditional skills and styles are valued in *Vital*. Preserving the diversity of craft traditions is described “as vital to the survival of the earth as the redwood, the butterfly, the eagle, the whale, the hummingbird and the tiger” (Michael North and Paul Swider quoted in Trade Aid 2006c:5). At the same time, there is recognition of the need to make products marketable to distant consumers. Products must therefore balance tradition and transformation in order to promote both their cultural and economic values.

The description of products conveys an ongoing negotiation between tradition and transformation. On the one hand, *Vital* celebrates the role of fair trade in reviving traditional craftmaking. At the same time, the stories of products illustrate the transformation of products in response to foreign influences in order to appeal to international markets. Preserving tradition is one of several benefits identified in *Vital*, however, this is balanced with the need to meet consumer demand. There is an

awareness of a need to balance market demand and craft traditions in the article. Trade Aid's product development and buyer's assistant Hannah Page discusses this balance.

When I first started (this job) one of my biggest concerns was to ensure traditional designs were always used but after this trip I realised that their reality is sales. They want sales, they want to support the people who make their craft. Our producers are always excited about any feedback, any new ideas. (Trade Aid 2006c:9)

Producer stories also refer to the transformative impact of producing for an overseas market. One the major impacts come from demands for higher quality goods. Some have described the effect of this as making their products more competitive in local markets as well which has an added benefit.

Over the years our craftspeople have been obliged to improve quality to meet the expectations of overseas consumers. This has enabled them to sell their products in the Indian market, which has a growing middle and upper middle class with significant purchasing power. (Trade Aid 2005d:7)

Vital promotes tradition as a valuable quality of fair trade products. One of the values of producing traditional crafts for a new market is the revival of these skills. Many of the producer stories talk about the impact of production on the perception of traditional crafts. "A lot of younger women are now wearing their traditional clothes again; they're looking at their traditions with new respect. Older people are also getting more respect because they are teaching the younger people to help keep these traditions alive." (Trade Aid 2007c:9) By bringing a new sense of value to traditional crafts, fair trade can help preserve many of the skills and techniques threatened by mass-production.

There is also an understanding of transformation occurring over time through various processes. An example of this transformation is the historical influences on local craft traditions of Hispanic contact in South American. As another example of this transformation, Tibetan rugs have developed a new meaning or the producers who now live in exile from their homeland. Rug weaving has come to preserve a persecuted culture as well as provide income for Tibetans living in India.

Transformation in craft is not always a negative process. Traced back through the history of the producer, the product comes to symbolise the struggles people have endured. Chilean Arpilleras were once an expression of loss during decades under

dictatorship.¹² As times have changed in Chile and the artisans are able to make an income from their embroidery, the images reflect a hopeful future. To deny the transformation in traditional crafts is also to deny the changes that have gone on within societies and cultures. The experiences of producers therefore influence their work, the events of their lives coming through in the story of products.

THE CONSUMER AND THE GLOBAL CITIZEN

The previous sections have outlined what *Vital* tells the reader *about* fair trade. *Vital* also tells the reader to *act* to be part of the fair trade movement. *Vital* addresses the reader in two ways, as a global citizen and as an individual consumer. *Vital* tells the reader to exercise their purchasing power as a consumer to demand and support more fair trade products in New Zealand. To take action as a citizen involves petitioning national government and global bodies to fight structural inequality. The distinctions between the two are often blurred as consumption becomes a political action akin to voting but restricted to shopping trolley politics. These two fields of action are explored below.

Vital promotes involvement in campaigning and political engagement as well as a more subtle promotion of the role of consumer in purchasing goods as the foundation of Fair Trading. *Vital* promotes a connection between awareness and motivation. As is stated in several issues, *Vital* aims to increase fair trade sales by increasing the reader's awareness of both fair trade and the conditions surrounding trade. Fair trade discourse assumes the consumer is a reflexive being capable and free to make choices based on a range of information. This reflexive process assumes consumers will reflect on the material in *Vital* and consider this in making purchasing decisions. This means that it is assumed that the reader will use their purchasing power to act out values with which they personally and publicly identify with such as fairness and social justice.

¹² See "Picking up the Threads (Trade Aid 2006c) p.3.

Consumption is a powerful tool

The reader is called directly into action as a consumer. Fair trade organisations are described as “backed by consumers” (Trade Aid 2005b:3). There is a focus on individual action and choice in purchasing fair trade products. Two choices are presented to the consumer: to buy products regardless of the conditions of their production or to question these conditions and exercise the choice *not* to buy certain products. The first appears in *Vital* as tantamount to endorsing the exploitative practices identified above. Repeatedly the reader is presented with the choice to choose fair trade and therefore be “part of the solution” (Trade Aid 2001b:2) or to be “complicit in this inhumane exploitation of men, women and children” (Trade Aid 2007c:11).

The reader is addressed directly throughout *Vital*. The reader, signalled as “you” is offered several ways of being involved: eat, ask, identify, buy, help, tell, read, attend, taste, savour or see. These actions involve consumption of fair trade products and ideas as well as encouraging an active role to seek further information and to play a part in expanding the reach of information to friends and community. Whereas coffee was described as “frivolous and frothy” in the context of Nicaraguan producers who literally cannot afford to drink fruits of their own labour, for the fair trade consumer it becomes an act of solidarity and with unknown producers (Trade Aid 2003a:6). A daily cup of coffee connects the consumer to producer livelihood struggles. “Regardless of what the government does, the farmers will be more secure if more consumers choose Fair Trade coffee. *Over to you.*” (Trade Aid 2001b:5 emphasis added) In this statement buying fair trade coffee becomes more reliable than government assistance for producers. In this case, the government is unable to assist the producer effectively. Therefore, it falls upon the consumer to help the producer through the simple act of consumption.

The language of *Vital* invites the reader to connect with the material personally. The reader is asked to think about the products they purchase and the people who make them and to use their influence as consumers to expand fair trade markets. “*You* have the power to change the lives of millions of coffee farmers and their families. Start by asking for fair-trade coffee when you buy your daily cup...” (Trade Aid 2001a:2 emphasis added) The use of the pronoun “you” directly addressed the reader. “Our” is

also used to include the reader with the work Trade Aid does. Shopping becomes an expression of “our” moral choices (Trade Aid 2004c:2).

Connection is also made between consumption and the expression of care. The act of consumption becomes the action of the “*caring* New Zealanders” (Trade Aid 2001b:3 emphasis added). The ethic of care discussed in chapter three is therefore demonstrated through the act of consuming fair trade practices.

Purchasing goods is connection to creating a market for products. The reader is told that buying products made with child slavery encourages more production through free market principles of supply and demand.¹³ Thereby purchasing products becomes an endorsement of the conditions of production. A growing demand for cut gemstones creates more work for child labourers in India’s gemstone industry. Alternatively consumer demand can be a positive force when used to fight injustice. *Vital* attributes increasing sales of fair trade products to an increasing consumer awareness of the conditions of trade.¹⁴

Safie Minney, founder of fair trade organisation Global Village, talks about the role of educating the consumer on the conditions of production and trade to empower them to make informed shopping choices. According to Minney “Fair trade is as much about consumer empowerment as it is about producer empowerment” (Trade Aid 2008c:7). There is sense of power in the way consumers can choose to purchase a product or not. Empowerment is a term used frequently in reference to the impact of knowledge and information on the consumer. The consumer is considered empowered by the information presented in *Vital*.

Throughout *Vital*, reference is made to a moral dimension of trade. Geoff White describes economic participation as an expression of moral codes. “The disbursement of money is one of the most basic roles we play in any system of economics, and it is the clearest way that we express our actual moral choices.” (Trade Aid 2004c:2) In many ways, this statement reduces the reader to an economic player by positioning

¹³ See “All that glitters- the many advantages of fair trade jewellery” in (Trade Aid 2007b:4-5) pp.4-7.

¹⁴ See “Trading up-fair trade in the marketplace” in (Trade Aid 2006c) pp.4-5.

consumption, the pattern of disbursing money in the economy, as the most powerful expression of a moral identity.

Consumer empowerment is the focus of *Vital* 7. In his editorial introduction to the issue, Simon Gerathy states the objective is to “empower people to be able to make an informed, conscious choice with regard to their (purchasing) behaviour” (Trade Aid 2003b:2). The articles are aimed at informing the reader of the issues effecting fair trade and the role fair trade has in improving the living conditions of producers. As Gerathy writes, the aim is to inform the reader and “inspire” action. This issue is different from the usual layout; there are no producer or product stories. The articles contrast fair trade systems with the politics of international trade, free trade and export orientated growth.

This issue also includes the only article in all of the issues addressing over-consumption. The article introduces Buy Nothing Day. Described as “a day for society to examine the issue of over-consumption” (Trade Aid 2003b:7) some of the activities of activists on the day are detailed but there is no engagement with the politics of over-consumption. The focus of *Vital* is instead on promoting consumption but specifically fair trade consumption. Increasing fair trade sales are reported, such as the triumphant report of “Spain and New Zealand as showing the fastest growth rates in fair trade sales between 2002 and 2007” (Trade Aid 2008c:15).

Vital guides the consumer through their purchasing decisions. *Vital* refers to the FTO (Fair Trade Organization) Mark as a symbol of quality assurance for customers. The mark helps consumers “distinguish” fair trade organisations and products from others. According to an article in Issue 18, there are approximately 150 registered fair trade organisations in New Zealand. (Trade Aid 2006a:9). Following the FTO mark, assures the reader the products meet fair trade standards. The reader is told that by “paying a fair price for goods...the simple act of shopping can support initiatives that already take heed of the health of our natural world” (Trade Aid 2008a:7).

Less frequently found are examples of the producer speaking directly to the reader to convey the impact of fair trade consumption in their life. In the following segment, Eli Santana asks the reader to buy fair trade chocolate and tell the reader about the impact this has on the lives of cocoa producers.

Patronize fair trade chocolate. Through this we can send our children to school, through this we can live in good houses, through this we can take care of ourselves and our families, through this we can contribute to the development of the world. That is the message that I have for our friends in New Zealand. (Eli Santana quoted in Trade Aid 2006a:10)

Fair trade engages the action of a global citizen

There is no clear distinction in *Vital* between political and consumer action. Direct calls to action encourage the reader to choose fair trade products where available however the scope for political action is limited. The action described is organised by organisations like Trade Aid and Oxfam. For the individual, daily shopping choices are a simple way to express their belief in fairer trade. Buying fair trade products often referred to as “voting” frames consumption in political discourse.¹⁵ Consumer actions become politically meaningful when backed by informed choice.

Consumer action becomes political when expressed by such actions as petitioning local retailers. For example, the action card included in *Vital 18* that I referred to in chapter four addresses local coffee retailers. The reader is asked to sign their name and address to the letter asking for fair trade coffee and to drop the card in their local supermarket suggestion box. In an article titled “Trolley politics—shoppers go fair trade” consumer demand is described as a driving force for fair trade in supermarkets (Trade Aid 2004a:9). The reader is also told how to petition their local supermarkets. In this way, consumption becomes political action.

Vital also directs the reader to learn more both about political action and consumption. Movies, books or activities suggested in every issue relate to international trade and development. There is an assumption the reader wants to learn more. The rationale presented in *Vital*, is that by learning more about trade issues readers will demand more fair trade practices. Hence, it is a transformative process for the reader as well as producer.

The reader is often told about the politics of trade and the role of government in regulating trade. On several occasions, the reader is told about the action of the New

¹⁵ See “Cup finals” in (Trade Aid 2005a) p.11, “Slavery in the cocoa trade” in (Trade Aid 2004a) p.11 and “Trolley politics” in (Trade Aid 2004a) p.9.

Zealand government and how the government could improve the conditions of many of the world's poorest workers by simply banning the import of goods produced through child labour. As a global citizen, the reader is asked to think about the consequences of international trade on producers, to share some responsibility for current inequalities and to work for change. "Who made that sweatshirt? That soccer ball? That sweet slab of milk chocolate? Look behind the label and you may see a child sold – or stolen – into slavery." (Trade Aid 2007a:4)

This global citizenship is not always followed by an obvious call to action but *Vital* does encourage the reader to engage with a critical analysis of practices, both corporate and government. The reader is lead to question the proliferation of free trade deals and EPA's (Economic Partnership Agreements).¹⁶ *Vital* encourages the reader to be aware of the politics of international trade even when they are not affected directly by trade relationships. Commentary on G8 and APEC meetings informs the reader of the limited movement for fairer trade policies in international governance.¹⁷

The reader is addressed in a different way as a global citizen, than as an individual consumer. For the consumer the focus is on individual actions, shopping and consuming in an ethically reflexive way, whereas the global citizen is involved in collective action and political action is often done on our behalf via our elected government. Therefore, the national government does much of the action for the global citizen. The reader must therefore "put pressure" on the New Zealand government to advocate social justice in international trade (Trade Aid 2007c:2). Geoff White states that "New Zealand needs to play its part as a *global citizen* and make a statement to consumers and companies about the part we play in providing the demand for slaves to make cheap products" (Trade Aid 2007c:11 emphasis added).

This global citizenship comes with responsibility. This is found in the environmental issues discussed in *Vital* in particular. The reader is told that the highest green house gas emissions come from affluent countries, and yet it is the people in the poorest regions who are most vulnerable to climate change. In the aftermath of the December 26th

¹⁶ See Peter Conway "The Costs of Free Trade" in (Trade Aid 2007c) p.10 and "Hammering the Pacific: new trade agreements threaten the Pacific" in (Trade Aid 2005d) pp. 4-5.

¹⁷ See "the glitz, the glam and the G8" in (Trade Aid 2007c) p. 9 and "Hot Air" in (Trade Aid 2005c:9) p.11.

Boxing Day Tsunami, *Vital* called for readers to donate to one of the many New Zealand based relief organisations (Trade Aid 2005c:5). There is a message that responsibilities extend beyond national borders to a global scale where the rights of global citizens need protecting.

The reader is also encouraged to lobby for structural changes. Often this is by inviting the reader into Trade Aid store to sign a petition. Trade Aid is a founding member of The Jubilee Aotearoa Debt Action Network and involved in the postcard campaign petitioning the New Zealand Government push for debt cancellation for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries.¹⁸ Readers were asked to visit Trade Aid stores for postcards petitioning the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament (Trade Aid 2004a:2). Petitions organised by organisations with which Trade Aid has shared interests, such as OXFAM, are also mentioned in *Vital*. Campaigning for increasing aid commitments to the 0.7% Millennium goals features in several issues calling for New Zealand to increase annual aid contributions.¹⁹

Throughout *Vital*, Trade Aid's political sympathies are clear in the political commentaries on the New Zealand government. Several political parties are mentioned throughout the issues. For example, in acknowledging the support of political parties in petitioning the government against child slavery all but one party (identified as ACT) are thanked (Trade Aid 2007c:2). *Vital* takes issue in several places with the fact that while the New Zealand government does protect New Zealand children from slavery there is no provision in government to stop the importation of the products of slavery.

CONCLUSION

Vital promotes a connection between the reader and the producer and by telling the reader to act, involving them in the processes of fair trade. As Simon Gerathy writes, "It isn't hard to make the connection between production and consumption. Look at the label, ask about the people issues and planet issues surrounding those who made it, and make an informed choice" (Trade Aid 2001b:2). By focusing on specific people and

¹⁸ The petition is also referred to in "Make poverty history— a worldwide campaign to fight poverty" (Trade Aid 2007b) p.9.

¹⁹ See "Banned aid" in (Trade Aid 2005d) p. 11. and "The Glitz, the Glam and the G8" in (Trade Aid 2002) p.9.

products, *Vital* promotes a personalised and human image of fair trade. “Educating the consumer about who made the product and how is an important distinction between conventional and fair trade. It allows consumers to choose to avoid products made under exploitative conditions.” (Trade Aid 2004d:2)

This chapter has outlined my thematic analysis of *Vital*. I have identified the ways the reader is told about fair trade and how to act in relation to fair trade principles. These themes are based around three ideas: that there is a clear difference between fair and unfair trade practices, that producer are hardworking and skilled individuals with needs similar to our own and that people in developed countries have a role to play in this process as both consumers and global citizens.

Thematically, my research has shown how *Vital* constructs an image of fair trade as opposed to unfair practices. I have alluded to the image of the villain versus the helper in the contrasting images of exploitative and fair practices. This is expanded in the following chapter where I will discuss the structure of the meta-narrative of fair trade.

Representations of producer partners make the individuals, production and the products of fair trade known to the reader. This material goes against the idea of the commodity fetish obscuring the conditions of production from the consumer. I have shown how the *Vital* does the opposite by promoting a personal connection from the reader to the places and conditions of production and literally putting a face to the products sold by Trade Aid.

Lastly, the way the reader is addressed as consumer and citizen has been detailed. In discussing the duality of the reader’s role, it is clear that the boundaries between the two positions are blurred. The power of the consumer and the responsibility of the citizen are often indistinguishable in the material studied. Overall, the thematic analysis of written and visual data has explored the representation of fair trade across the individual stories told.

In the following chapter, I will discuss this analysis in relation to the theory outlined in chapter four. I will address how these themes develop a meta-narrative of fair trade and construct an ethic of fairness around production and consumption practices. Elements of

structural analysis introduced in chapter four will also be developed as I explore how these themes connect across the issues of *Vital* studied. I will also discuss the analysis conducted here in relation to the three studies outlined in chapter three. Relating the thematic analysis of my research to these studies, I will explore how *Vital* may be read as a challenge to these critiques. I will then connect this research back to the concept of the reflexive consumer.

*Chapter Six: The Meta-Narrative of Transformation and
The Reflexive Fair Trade Consumer*

INTRODUCTION

The story of fair trade as it is told in *Vital* connects the reader to the producer in a shared struggle for social and economic justice. It does so by directly involving the reader in the narrative. The characterisations and actions of those involved in this plot have been analysed in the previous chapter. In this chapter I will connect this analysis to the issues raised in chapter three where I introduced the concept of a moral economy. This is based on the idea that consumer motives are not purely economic but may also take on moral considerations. Fair trade is referred to as a “solidarity-seeking” movement (Bryant and Goodman 2004). I introduced global solidarity in chapter three as the mobilisation of consumers in developed countries. Global solidarity involves a broadening of the spatial dynamics of care. Questions have been raised on how what geographical barriers to caring for distant strangers may be overcome through the connecting narrative of fair trade. In this chapter, I will argue that the narrative of *Vital* creates a moral connection between consumer and producer. As part of this movement, the role of *Vital* is to *tell* the reader the story of the producer and *involve* them in the story as both consumer and global citizen.

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE FAIR TRADE NARRATIVE

The importance of the semiotic production of fair trade is discussed by Goodman (2004). It is through this production that the meaning of fair trade is attached to products and conveyed to the consumer. Goodman identifies two discursive fields through which this meaning is conveyed. These were introduced in chapter three as labels and activist discourse. My research has focused on the narrative nature of this representation in *Vital*. I will argue here that the particular construction of the narrative of fair trade as a causal sequence of events actively involves the consumer in the chain of events.

Consumer/producer solidarity requires “detailed dissemination of information to Northern consumers saying what fair trade is and why it is needed” (Bryant and Goodman 2004:358). I have approached *Vital* as a meta-narrative that connects the

fragments of individual stories to promote an overall image of fair trade. The meta-narrative of fair trade speaks about a transformation from powerlessness to empowerment. The story of life without fair trade tells about poor wages and in the more extreme examples of slavery and exploitation. Fair trade becomes a catalyst for change in the lives of producers. While not a panacea against poverty, the benefits of fair trade in the lives of producers are demonstrated throughout *Vital*. Through sustainable livelihoods producers are able support their families and provide their children with education and healthcare. Fair trade is therefore shown to help impoverished producers work towards a positive future.

Demonstrating the benefits of fair trade also involves making the “contrast to conventional trade clear” (Le Mare 2007:90). The negative image of some conventional trade structures and practices sets the stage for the reversal of fortunes as producers are shown to benefit from fair trade initiatives. *Vital* also demonstrates the differences in how fair trade organisations operate, ensuring that fair wages, safe working conditions, long term partnerships are maintained.

Producers are described throughout *Vital*. These descriptions are outlined in the thematic analysis of the previous chapter. Stories identify producers as people seeking the opportunity of a sustainable livelihood to support their families and communities. Producers are represented as small groups of hard working and skilled artisans and growers dedicated to developing both product quality and environmentally sound practices. The structural qualities of the narrative also guide the reader’s interpretation.

Franzosi’s (1998) explores several structural models of narrative that are useful to identifying the narrative features in *Vital*. Interpreting Greimas’ (1966) character archetypes, Franzosi describes the following basic narrative synopsis: “a subject (typically the hero) strives to win over an object (a beautiful princess) against the opposition of a villain but with the help of a friend or relative (helper) and the magic intervention of a sender” (1998:540). The story of fair trade can be interpreted through this model as the producer (subject) fighting for a livelihood (object) against structural inequality and exploitation (villain). The fair trade organisation (helper) connects the producer to the consumer (sender) who provides the economic support needed in the producers’ quest for social and economic justice.

Franzosi uses this model to study the narrative structure of advertising text. In conventional advertising however, the sender and helper take on the role of the product advertised. The focus is on what the product can do and the benefits it brings the consumer. Alternatively, the story of fair trade challenges this model by focusing on the benefit to producers. Consumer action is the driving force behind the transformation of fair trade. This model provides a basic framework for exploring the characterisation of those involved.

I have referred to fair trade as challenging social and economic injustice. The livelihood struggles of the producer are referred to in *Vital* in terms of the simple everyday needs of people. Producers talk about meeting basic needs as their goal. The producer struggles to meet basic needs that are largely taken for granted by the *Vital* reader in New Zealand. The impersonal villains of structural inequality and exploitation are described as unfairly keeping the producer from meeting these needs.

The *Vital* reader is an essential character in the story of fair trade. Goodman's subtitle "*Robin Hood comes to town, latte in hand*" aptly sums up much of the way the reader as a consumer becomes the hero of the story (2004:896 emphasis original). The reader is called upon as a consumer and a citizen to support the work of fair trade economically and politically. However, the boundaries between consumer and citizen are indistinct and political power is often simply equated with consumer action. This can be read as the "collapse of the distinction" between consumer and citizens identified by Johnston as the consumer-citizen hybrid (2008:230). The language used to describe this action is often political, equating the act of consuming to the act of voting. I will discuss this blurring consumer and citizen action in contrast to Johnston later in this chapter.

The narrative of fair trade challenges the consumer by implicating consumer demand in the ongoing exploitation of producers. However, the story always contains a chance of redemption through choosing alternative products, specifically fair trade products. In this way the consumer can become part of the solution, the helper, rather than part of the problem. Narrative therefore has a valuable role in involving the reader as an active part of the fair trade story. The development of the plot depends upon the reader taking up the role of consumer (economic role) and as a citizen (social/political role).

The actors in the story are characterised by what is included in *Vital* as well what is omitted. The words of producers and fair trade organisations are found throughout *Vital* whereas others are denied a voice. Governments and corporations are not given space to defend or explain their actions. They are not directly quoted, nor are individuals, particularly in corporations, often identified. This adds to the representation of these organisations as devoid of human identities. In contrast, individuals from producer partner organisations are often present in quotations or entire articles that emphasises their humanity. Other individuals and organisations that are given space in *Vital* are generally those with whom Trade Aid has a sympathetic relationship.

The reader's interpretation of *Vital* will be influenced by their background knowledge and experiences. *Vital* readers are assumed to have an existing interest in, or empathy with, the principles of fair trade and the work of Trade Aid. Given the distribution of the magazine it is most likely that the reader subscribes, downloads or obtains it in store. Therefore, the reader brings to the narrative existing ideas of social and economic justice. The stories in *Vital* develop these ideas and promote consumer action. As a consumer reading *Vital*, the message may strengthen their belief in fair trade and further their commitment to fair trade consumption.

Structurally, *Vital* pushes the boundaries of narrative analysis. Narrative is described as a temporal ordering of events typically composed of a beginning, middle and an end. The articles in *Vital* are often a glimpse in time at a producer group or product without a clear development of temporal sequence. However, narrative elements develop throughout the issues. At the beginning of the story; *Vital* describes the suffering of producer due to inequality and exploitation. In the middle of the story the transformation of fair trade is described at length. This is found in the rich descriptions of capacity building and development projects. Sorrow is transformed to hope for the future.

The ending of the story is the most elusive component. The continued process of transformation implies the story is still being told. The fight against poverty and injustices is yet to be won. The coda or ending of the story is not developed in the sense that there is no closure - rather fair trade is represented as a continual project where the final goal is not simply to have every poor person in developing countries producing

coffee and teapots. Fair trade is a process and a start whereby communities are able to lift themselves up out of poverty and break the cycles which lock future generations into this poverty through a lack of education and opportunity. Fair trade gives communities the opportunity to uplift themselves and build a future filled with hope for the next generations.

SPEAKING BACK TO THE CRITICS OF REPRESENTATIONS OF FAIR TRADE

In the following discussion I will consider the story of fair trade told in *Vital* in relation to the research introduced in chapter three. The studies by Johnston (2002), Wright (2004) and Le Mare (2007) outline the strengths and limitations of fair trade representations in promoting the ethical message of fair trade. I will examine these in relation to my own research on *Vital*. First, I will look at how the products, people and places of fair trade are portrayed and the problem of commodity fetishism. Wright is critical of the commodity fetishism of fair trade whereas I will argue with Goodman (2004) that this is a necessary part of the symbolic production of fair trade. Secondly, I will explore the pleasure of consumption as both motivating action and driving the market. This will be discussed in the context of empowerment - I will argue that *Vital* contains messages of both consumer *and* producer empowerment and represents them as compatible within the market of fair trade. In the third topic I will explore the image of consumption as a pleasurable pastime and begins to question the efficacy of consumption as a development tool. Lastly, to conclude this section speaking back to the three studies, I will discuss the potential of *Vital* as a tool for radical education.

Commodifying and Fetishising Fair Trade

In chapter three I introduced the commodity fetish (unveiling of the conditions of production) and the re-fetishising of fair trade products to embody an alternative set of qualities that are not intrinsic to them. This is particularly problematic for Wright, who finds for example, that coffee advertisements focus on the “naturalness” of the product connected to the landscape distinguishing the modern urban landscape of the consumer from a romanticised image of the rural producer (2004:672). Bryant and Goodman describe this de-fetishisation as integral to the process of fair trade recognition where

meaning is “created through the defetishizing of commodity cultures *precisely* to allow consumers, it is hoped, to make moral and economic connections to the producers” (Bryant and Goodman 2004:359 emphasis original). The representation of products encodes fair trade products with an alternative set of qualities. Rather than concealing the conditions of production, representations emphasis the connection to issues of social and economic justice. As Goodman describes, this fetishism enables fair trade organisations to connect products to the struggles of producers.

It is specifically the commoditization of fair trade that is the ‘form giving fire’ to the embedded moral economy and sentiments that are situated at the core of these commodity networks. Entry into the ‘magical’ form of the commodity, with its attached aesthetics, meanings, and materialities, allows these commodities to perform their ‘magic’ of alternative development. (2004:909)

The products described in *Vital* are therefore infused with qualities generated from association to the people who make them, the process through which they are created and conditions of this production. These qualities were identified in the thematic analysis of words and images outlined in the previous chapter. For example, products are considered the result of highly skilled processes that continued to use traditional techniques and designs. The impact on the lives of producers is also embedded in the product, the repeated equating of fair trade labour with education and healthcare for families is part of the construction of fairness and justice in the narrative.

Underscoring the physical qualities are the intangible qualities of justice and fairness which permeate the fair trade story and become embodied in the products. The demonstration of the impacts of fair trade upon the lives of producers also adds to the value of products. The equation of a product with a childhood education or healthcare gives value to a product beyond any material worth to the consumer. The value becomes the impact it has for the producer and their family. The product on the shelf of the Trade Aid shop becomes the embodiment of the ideas and ideals of fair trade. The question Wright asks is whether this commodification of the producer’s lives and spaces is necessary in the telling and selling of fair trade products. Is there a way of selling fair trade products without also selling the message in this way?

The representations used in the fair trade story are problematic. They are one-sided representations of producers for the consumer’s gaze, created by Northern agencies. In

so far as producers are involved in the construction of the representation there is scope for their voices to be heard. Caution should be taken however in the fragmented and disconnected way these voices are presented as there is a risk of representing producers as a homogeneous group who face an identical set of issues to which there is one solution. Within the meta-narrative of fair trade it is important not to lose sight of the myriad of individual backgrounds, stories and needs to be met.

The material in *Vital* allows scope for producers to talk about the meaning of products to them. Descriptions of the cultural significance of symbols, materials and skills in handcrafts are also found through the issues. Foremost for producers, selling products through fair trade networks means being paid a fair price. Le Mare (2007) raises questions of how far beyond this principle producers understand or are concerned with the ideas behind fair trade. While the intricacies of structural inequality may not be foremost in the minds of producers, there is a focus on the direct impacts of fair trade on their lives and communities. Le Mare finds that for producers, the meaning of fair trade focuses on the local impacts over a global movement for change. While the concept of a fair exchange, paying and receiving a fair price for a product is at the centre of the fair trade relationship, products mean different things to producers and consumers. For a producer the product is a source of income which may lead to education or healthcare. To the consumer, the product becomes a symbol of identifying with the ethics of fair trade as well as a product to consume, a cup of coffee or handcraft.

This is seen in *Vital* in the way the producers speak about their involvement with fair trade organization. Products take on a specific meaning for a producer that does not necessarily transfer to the consumer. For example, a PARC representative spoke about the meaning of products from Palestine carrying the label “Made in Palestine” and the significance this holds for Palestinian producers (Trade Aid 2008a:13). Part of the qualities embedded in the product becomes the empowerment of an identity. This idea of empowerment is further developed in the following pages.

*Empowering Consumer and Producer: “Fair trade is as much about consumer empowerment as it is about producer empowerment.”*²⁰

These words spoken by Safie Minney and discussed in chapter five and are retold here to introduce the idea of fair trade as a story of empowering both consumers and producers. In the narrative of producer’s lives poverty is maintained by structures that are largely out of their control. The steps to improving their wellbeing begin with overcoming powerlessness. This narrative of empowerment is found in the way communities are able to respond to disaster in a way that meets their needs. It is also demonstrated in the ability of those once exploited to rise up against those who once exploited them. The US court case, cited in the previous chapter, where three ex-child labourers trafficked into the cocoa industry took several multi-national corporations to court is testament to the empowerment of producers to stand up for their own rights. This is a recurrent theme throughout *Vital*. The narrative of producer empowerment may help to endure what Goodman describes as donor fatigue and a distrust of aid. By demonstrating that fair trade helps producers to help themselves, *Vital* promotes an image of sustainability.

Throughout *Vital* there is the understanding that an informed consumer can and will make ethical choices in their purchasing behavior. Providing knowledge on the implications of consumption and increasing the availability of products will promote the kind of moral economy referred to above in the same way that health concerns in the dairy industry lead to a growth in organic milk sales. Consumption is represented as a forum for consumer expression of an ethical identity and is therefore an empowerment of consumer action.

Consumer power can be expressed through both positive and negative behavior. The case of boycotting Nike products described earlier is an example of negative purchasing behavior where consumers withhold their purchasing from specific companies. *Vital* quotes figures from recent Nielsen Media Research finding that “33 per cent of New Zealanders avoid products from companies they believe have a poor impact on society and the environment at least once every six months” (Trade Aid 2007b:5). Fair trade is

²⁰ Safie Minney (*Trade Aid 2008c:7*)

presented as an opportunity for consumers to utilise positive purchasing behaviour to support rather than protest.

Wright (2004) and Johnston (2002) are both critical of the power ascribed to the consumer who through exercising purchasing power can enforce the whims of fashion on producers who must accommodate ever changing trends. This issue relates specifically to handcraft production rather than commodities. Reference is made throughout *Vital* to market trends and the demands of consumers. Producer stories tell of the benefits of improving production skills. An unknown producer in India describes this in the following excerpt from *Vital*.

Over the years our craftspeople have been obliged to improve quality to meet the expectations of overseas consumers. This has enabled them to sell their products in the Indian market, which has a growing middle and upper middle class with significant purchasing power. (Trade Aid 2005d:7)

This is a double sided issue. While on the one hand creating an international market for traditionally produced crafts puts pressure on producers to meet the demands of the consumer's ideas of style and fashion, creating international demand for handcrafted products also serves to support producers in dwindling local markets. As many of the researchers focusing on handcrafts and textiles have found, traditional crafts are under threat from the transformations in local markets. (see Korovkin 1998:Scrase 2003) When local demand for weaving other production skills is challenged by the availability of cheaper mass produced materials many of the artisan producer's livelihoods are threatened. Fair trade organisations by developing international market access have the potential to preserve and revive many craft traditions. (see for example Trade Aid 2007b:6-7)

Producer empowerment is especially significant to many of the groups involved as fair trade organisations focus on those most affected by disempowerment, minority groups. The empowerment of women is often referred to in *Vital*, as in many societies women are excluded from paid labour. Handcraft production is often done in the home, allowing women to undertake paid activities alongside domestic work. Goodman identifies these non-economic qualities as the "moralistic Robin Hood qualities of these networks also come to town in the trappings of an identity-based politics of recognition

looking to strengthen the cultural and political identities of many producing communities” (2004:898).

Wright concludes her analysis with a question drawing in Fraser’s (1999) model of recognition and redistribution, asking if a partial misrecognition of producers is a necessary for a redistribution of wealth. According to Goodman (2004) this is part of how the symbolic production of fair trade works. The ongoing commodification of fair trade goods is essential to the mission of fair trade as this is what distinguishes “fair” from “unfair” to the consumer. Without the co-production of meaning in a product, how is the consumer to know what fair trade means and justify what may be an extra cost? Is there not also a certain power in the way *Vital* gives space for producers to tell their story and explain the importance of fair trade to their livelihoods?

Wright (2004) argues that CaféDirect advertising perpetuates the misrecognition of producers. This misrecognition is described as continuing in the exoticising of landscape and people in the advertising she studied. On the other hand the empowerment of identities in producer communities can be described as recognition, perhaps a step towards fostering recognition on an international level. For PARC producers the ‘Made in Palestine’ label is an assertion of local identity at a time when Palestine is represented in the media in the sole context of conflict and terrorism.

This power of this recognition was alluded to in chapter five and the work of the KKM (Kuru Kshetr Mandal) Handweaving Society in Nepal selling crafts made by the victims of leprosy. By challenging the social stigma attached to sufferers the organisation works towards recognition of leprosy sufferers as more than victims, but as people capable of taking part in the wider community. This is recognition of the suffering of people through misrecognition of leprosy as a disease and the people it afflicts.

Another way to look at this involvement is the empowerment of communities through building the economic and psychological strength of a community. “The very fact that we have friends and markets in distant lands and the fact that we collectively own and control a large organisation has made high caste Hindus look upon us as dignified human beings.” (Trade Aid 2005d:10) This statement made by Ms Sankari Guha from The Equitable Market Association in Kolkata, India, describes the importance of this

feeling of connection from a group of people historically ostracised from society. Through fair trade relationships Dalit producers challenge their exclusion from mainstream economic society.

Wright is critical of a perceived privileging of the consumers gaze in the CaféDirect advertisements. While the images are designed for the consumer's gaze, I believe that to dismiss the representational properties of fair trade materials is myopic. In the example of *Vital*, producers receive a copy of every issue of *Vital*. Producers are also provided with market information to help them in understanding the New Zealand consumer. *Vital* is intended for an audience of potential and existing consumers and is therefore tailored in this direction. However, producers are capable in reversing this gaze through information channeled back via Trade Aid and occasional producer visits to New Zealand. Understanding that these are hindered by limited funding in producer organizations, they provide producers with knowledge of the New Zealand market and first hand knowledge of the work that Trade Aid does here.²¹

By framing producers as actively involved in their own livelihood struggles rather than passive recipients, the narrative connects producer and consumer as equals in the struggle for social and economic justice. Polletta (2006) warns against portraying subjects as victims in their story as this diminishes the scope of agency, a victim is seen as powerless, "acted upon rather than acting" (2006:114). By representing producers as helping themselves, *Vital* goes a long way in avoiding this kind of victim image and to promote an idea of producers working along with organisations and consumers towards a shared goal.

The Pleasure of Fair Trade Consumption

Fair trade representations have been criticised for not developing the concept of "fairness" and failing to address inequalities between producers and consumers. The consumer is not challenged beyond comfort, and "self-reward" is the motivation behind purchasing fair trade products above any ethical considerations (Wright 2004:669). In Wright's reading of the advertisements, the benefits to the producer are represented as

²¹ References to producer visits are found throughout *Vital*. See for example Issues 12 and 23

secondary to the products value to the consumer. Wright's research was driven by questioning what happens when the consumer's pleasure in consumption is challenged. This pleasure is potentially challenged by raising the consumer's awareness of the conditions of production. Wright finds the advertising of CaféDirect promotes consumer "self-gratification" over any real statement on global inequality (Wright 2004:678).

In response to Wright, my study explores whether the representations in *Vital* challenge the reader's pleasure in consumption. Does the focus on the moral imperatives of fair trade, provide an alternative source of pleasure for the consumer beyond the self-gratification of the act of consumption itself? As an expression of ethical values, perhaps through fair trade consumption is in itself a source of pleasure, something of a feel-good factor that Wright does not account for. In the idea of the global trade network where the consumer exists as an isolated individual, the feeling of "doing good" for someone far off may itself be a source of pleasure for many consumers.

At the same time, the material in *Vital* is potentially discomfoting to the reader. In exposing the conditions of production in many non-fair trade operations, the material in *Vital* is both disturbing and confronting. Recalling the stories of children burnt with acid by employers while slaving in India's gemstone industry challenges the reader's pleasure in consuming those glittery goods. By addressing the reader directly as an individual the story implicates consumption in these injustices. "Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?" (Trade Aid 2001b:2) Everyday habits of consumption are connected to social injustices. "We take it for granted. The daily cup – or two or three – of coffee. But the bad news is that this great pleasure in life is at the centre of a major social justice struggle." (Trade Aid 2001a:2) These statements clearly disrupt the pleasure in such products and connect the consumer's everyday action to a wider struggle for justice.

In contrast to this image, by exposing the roots of poverty as unfair practices, descriptions of the work of fair trade organisations becomes a source of pleasure for the reader who, as a fair trade consumer, feels a part of this process. The pleasure of consumption represented in *Vital* is not what the products can do for *you* but what *you* can do for the producer.

While the focus is on the benefits of fair trade to the producer rather than the value to the consumer, there remains an interest in the quality of products. The focus on quality of fair trade coffee was the basis of the CaféDirect campaign Wright critiqued. The issue of quality and taste is also discussed in *Vital* in relation to the New Zealand based coffee roasters. Whereas Wright seems to find quality and justice as incompatible, these qualities are seen to co-exist in *Vital*. Fair trade coffee in New Zealand is roasted by a growing number of local roasters, many of whom purchase green beans through Trade Aid Importers. *Vital* describes the increasing demand for fair trade locally as “putting more pressure on roasteries like Hummingbird to concoct new blends that have the right *taste* and that ensure fair trade *standards* are met” (Trade Aid 2007b:5 emphasis added). For the consumer the challenge is not really one about relinquishing quality in favor of ethics by changes in their lifestyle habits limited to choosing one brand over another. The connection between fair trade coffee as a quality coffee and a sustainable livelihood for producers allows “coffee drinkers (to) align their tastes to specialty coffee with their social justice values” (Bacon 2005:507).

Vital does not just talk about the value of coffee to the consumer in terms of taste and quality but makes a connection between the coffee “we” consume and the struggle faced by coffee producers. “Millions of coffee farmers and their families are living in chronic poverty because they can’t get a fair price for their product.” (Trade Aid 2001a:2) In this way *Vital* is making a connection between consumption as a cause of continued poverty. The cause of poverty is the lack of fair payment. Similar narrative clauses throughout *Vital* explain a causal relationship between poverty and unfair wages.

Quality assurance programs of handcraft producers are also referred to. Often this is in the context of help from Trade Aid in providing training to ensure that quality is being met. Some producers even express the desire to produce higher quality products that will sell for higher prices (Trade Aid 2007c:9). This was referred to in chapter five where I discussed the balance between traditional design and contemporary transformations.

While products are described in *Vital* as quality and value comparable to other products available to the consumer, fair trade products are also described as valued for their intangible qualities. The social and environmental premiums are factored into the cost

of fair trade products. The cost of paying a fair wage, providing education and healthcare and ensuring production is environmentally sustainable are represented in the narrative of *Vital* as part of the value of products.

An Opportunity for “Radical Education”

The final point I will consider in relation to the case studies is the challenge that the narrative of fair trade overemphasises the role of consumption in challenging social and economic injustice. Fair trade discourse is criticised by Johnston for lacking in political strength. The editorial comments introducing *Vital 19* refer to the negative effects of import duties on processed commodities, in this example chocolate that locks producers into the position of supplying raw material to developed nations who then process and manufacture and resale the commodity as a value added product. This highlights, albeit superficially how unfair trade practices lock developing countries into particular roles from which it is difficult to compete fully in the international market. The descriptive text in *Vital* helps to explain these complex concepts to the reader and give some historical background to many of the events that have lead to producers being in the marginal situation that fair trade aims to overcome.

Johnston was critical of fair trade’s valorization of consumption as a development tool. Fair trade is not an anti-consumerist movement but depends on consumers to support producers. Therefore it is indivisible from consumption and only makes sense as an approach to trade. To treat fair trade as a development program separable from a trade agenda is to lose sight of the basic principles of fair trade.

Johnston is very critical of a lack of challenge to consumption in general. *Vital* does not ask the reader to stop spending but to spend in a way that will bring the most benefit to producers. It is a difficult challenge of Johnston’s to address simply because fair trade remains essentially a trade relationship. Without consumers in the West buying products from producers in developing countries, how are producers to make money? Johnston does not advocate aid instead of trade but does seem to miss something of the message of fair trade as nurturing a sustainable path out of poverty. *Vital* does contain a challenge to the practices of consumption but it does so in a way that asks consumer to consume differently rather than less.

Johnston's conclusion offers hope for a more radical approach to educating consumers that develops a broader understanding of development issues. *Vital* does this in a unique way by providing the background context of issues. Critiques in *Vital* of DOHA talks and WTO meetings outline a need for structural change in the way development is approached by many of the international governing bodies. Trade Aid also recognises that consumption alone will not *transform* the structures that perpetuate poverty. Geoff White comments directly on this issue.

In spite of all the financial success we enjoy it is important to note that the trading injustices that plague this world will not be changed by purchases in the rich world. While it sends a timely message to those involved in international trade, and supports disadvantaged producers through income generation, it will only be through *changes to international trade rules* that we will see widespread improvements for those living in poverty. Trade Aid accepts its responsibility to play its part through campaigning and advocacy and is committed to working alongside others who share this goal. (Trade Aid 2007d:2 emphasis added)

The narrative of *Vital* plays a part in this advocacy by directing consumer action. The stories connect producers to the reader. Polletta (2006) refers to ways victim's stories can be used to make them into a sort of moral guide. In the way that Trade Aid mediates the stories of producers, the organisation takes on this role of moral guide who helps the reader traverse the ethic terrain of consumption. Ganz (2001) also refers to story telling as mapping moral terrain, providing the motivation for participants to act in according to moral guidelines. The individual narratives of producers therefore have a vital role in this radical education of consumers.

The discussion above has outlined some of the ways *Vital* seeks to connect consumption to the ethics of fair trade. The material represents this moral economy to the reader, promoting the ethical message of fair trade and through that the message of the market. The message to the consumer is that to be a fully developed fair trade consumer, must buy the product as well as buy into the ethical message. The strength of *Vital* is the way it constructs a narrative tying together livelihood struggles and consumption. And rather than conveying ethics through enterprise the message is of ethics first and market second.

NARRATIVE OF SOLIDARITY – CREATING AN IMAGINED COMMUNITY OF ‘FAIR TRADE CONSUMERS’

Goodman argues that fair trade organizations promote a connection between producers and consumer. By fostering a sense of knowing, the consumer is given a sense of who producers are, what impacts on their livelihoods and what can be done to improve their wellbeing. This research takes this idea and questions what kind of information Trade Aid uses to create this connection. In the case of *Vital* this is constructed as a narrative in which consumers and producers play a role in challenging social and economic injustice in trade.

At the basis of fair trade is the question, why it is considered acceptable for production far away to occur under conditions deemed unacceptable locally? If a New Zealand manufacturer is exposed as using child slavery or trafficking labour the news would be scandalous and followed by legal investigation. When international regulatory bodies fail to protect the basic human rights of producers in developing countries then it falls to consumers to take action. By taking away the demand for the product, there becomes no market for the cruelty. First the consumer must extend the limits of their care to include those beyond national borders.

The key to bringing together consumers and producers is to involve the consumer in the story of the producer. Smith writes on the spatial dimension of care “Knowledge of the operation of these processes, of how ‘we’ in the affluent parts of the world impact on the lives and environments of distant others, can lead to an extension of a sense of responsibility” (Smith 1998:21). It is easy to conclude that with the globalisation of goods connecting producers in developing nations with consumers in more affluent nations, the globalisation of information and knowledge is also possible and through this a global sense of responsibility and care. Just because production does not occur within “our” sight does not mean “we” are not responsible for what is done on “our” behalf. If consumer demand drives the market then consumer demand can be morally responsible for its consequences. The strength of consumer demand has long been heralded as the driving force in the market, but by the markets own logic then consumer demand has the power and the responsibility to act in an ethical manner.

Recent arguments that “what connection there is resides solely in the imagination of the consumer” (Watson 2007:271) may underestimate the connection producers have to markets and the imaginative relationships producers form with distant consumers. Again the problem is a lack of reciprocal relationship whereby the producer gains knowledge about the consumer and consumption of the products of their labour.

What is the moral choice expressed through fair trade? It is the construction of “fairness” as described throughout representations of fair trade in *Vital*; payment of fair wages, equal access to markets and support for disadvantaged workers, ensuring children are safe from exploitation, providing clean and healthy work and living environments. These qualities and others are contrasted throughout *Vital* with the images of unfair trade represented through slavery and exploitation.

Smith, in his discussion of the spatial dimensions of care outlines the relationship between emotion and reason in the quest for justice.

Only if ‘we’, in the privileged parts of the world, can empathize with less fortunate others elsewhere, and strongly enough to motivate much more equal provision of the means of caring, will something like a universal ethic of care have any chance of challenging the combination of ethical hedonism and resurgent parochial selfinterest into which much of the world appears to be sinking. (Smith 1998:36)

The concept of “fairness” has to do with empowering the producer in their own lives and giving them a fair return on their labour so that they may better their own community. As Goodman writes, these are considered “human universals in the creation of livelihoods that are both materially sufficient and meaningful” (2004:906). The campaign to end child slavery draws on many of the ideas on children and childhood. In New Zealand, it is taken for granted that children will attend school and be adequately taken for of by family and state. The image of young children grinding gemstones in a dark and dusty room goes against the idea of childhood.

Fair trade has been described here as an expression of global solidarity of consumers supporting producers. The symbols and labels of fair trade are interpreted in *Vital* as marks of solidarity. Again referring to statements by the representative from PARC describing how sale of Palestinian products through fair trade is seen by producers as a demonstration “that there are some people in other countries who are in solidarity with

them.” (Trade Aid 2008a:13). The IFAT fair trade mark is also referred to as a “voice of solidarity for those committed to the principles of fair and just trade” (Trade Aid 2006a:9).

The language in *Vital* is frequently used to refer to an imagined community of individuals in New Zealand sharing a common interest in fighting social and economic injustices. “We” often refers to the people of Trade Aid and the reader together, involving the reader in the work of the organization. The language of *Vital* promotes a sense of collective action. By frequently involving other New Zealand companies involved in fair trade, *Vital* promotes a sense of community, working together towards the same goal of social and economic justice.

THE REFLEXIVE CONSUMER AND THE PROBLEM OF PARTIALITY

Goodman describes how the representation of fair trade serves not only to tell consumers about products but it “demonstrates the progressive effects of their act of consumption on the particular community that grew what they are eating. It is this imaginary that attempts to rally and energize consumers to be morally reflexive...” (Goodman 2004:896). Le Mare describes the narrative of fair trade as containing two main messages: “that poverty in other parts of the world should concern those of us who are relatively well off and that we can do something about that poverty” and that “it is an identity position that involves action” (2007:73).

As a sociologically informed study, this research must negotiate the balance between the agency of the consumer and the structure of the market. On the one hand, the consumer has the power to influence the market through their demand. However, the consumer is not simply free to act in any way and is governed by economic and social factors that may inhibit as well as mobilise certain forms of action.

This process of reflexivity informing the actions of individual is inherently partial. Many of the successes of fair trade as a social movement depend on sustained partiality in the narrative of the fair trade consumer. It does not invite reflection on the nature of consumption in the North as this risks destabilising consumption as a political tool. Partiality and misrecognition may in fact be vital to the sustainability of fair trade. The

narrative of fair trade does uphold consumption as having an ethical value when enacted through fair trade networks.

It is important that the narrative of fair trade not naively rest upon the reflexive consumer theory that informs fair trade literature, including the work set out here. In recognizing that moral sentiments and social awareness have a motivating influence on consumer behaviour, it must also be recognized that there are other factors that compliment and contest these positions. Fair trade consumption is also dependent on access, affordability, issues of quality, style and taste. There are influenced by a various external factors including class as argued by Adams and Raisborough (2008) who regard middle-class guilt as a motivating factor for consumers beyond a strictly moral connection. They are cautionary of focusing on the reflexive consumer in fair trade arguing the predominance of middle-class fair trade consumers reflects a class-based influence on fair trade consumption.

The impact of fair trade on producers is also partial in the extent that it reaches a limited number of producers. Taking coffee production as an example, the narrative of coffee producers in *Vital* portrays the value of producing for a fair trade market over free trade. However, there is little comment made on the scope of the fair trade coffee market to benefit all coffee producers marginalized by the international coffee trade. Figures from Nicaragua refer to potential supply of eighty percent of coffee produced in the country as meeting specialty coffee (fair or organic) standards compared with the actual ten percent of coffee sold via these networks (Bacon 2005:507). Therefore the narrative of fair trade is based on a partial reconstruction of trade relationships which aims to redress many of the injustices of international trade without challenging the foundation of consumption.

The reflexive consumer is asked to connect their own consumption to conditions of social and economic justice without going so far as to question the inequalities between consumer in the North and those in the South, instead focusing on the South as producers. This is one of the main critiques of fair trade that is not broached in *Vital*: an apparent lack of engagement with North/South inequalities of consumption. *Vital* and Trade Aid need to address the efficacy of promoting development through consumption particularly at a time when the media is reporting international economic doom and

gloom. This raises the question of whether it is sustainable to base this model on continued consumption without addressing the act of consumption at the deeper level.

CONCLUSION

The construction of the story of fair trade is important in many ways to the successes of Trade Aid. Ganz describes the importance of story in social movements as it “constructs agency, shapes identity, and motivates action” (Ganz 2001:2). By telling the story of fair trade in a way that involves producers, consumers and alternative trade organisation the story serves as a connection between otherwise distant identities.

The collective narrative of producers who speak and are spoken for throughout *Vital* tells the reader of the transformative power of fair trade and the role simple everyday actions has in this transformation. The attention given to the personal stories of producers also helps to connect the reader to their everyday life and struggle. The focus on consumption as an everyday activity makes involvement in fair trade appear accessible to the consumer. At the same time there is a clear message that this action, purchasing fair trade products, has a real and direct impact on the lives of producers.

The narrative of fair trade in *Vital* creates a shared meaning of fairness and social and economic justice. It involves the reader in the construction and promotion of this meaning. The narrative is woven throughout a descriptive framework. Descriptive text lends authenticity to the story, nurturing a quantitative understanding of trade and economic justice. Transformation is presented as a process in which the consumer is actively involved. Each stage in this story builds a personal or emotional connection between a consumer in New Zealand and a far away producer. Through shared understanding *Vital* helps to connect the reader, and their everyday actions of consumption, to the producer and the everyday struggles of their existence.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In the introduction, I began with two extracts from *Vital* that express the positions of producers and consumers. These two stories tell the reader about the two ends of the fair trade relationship. Haricha Begum speaks about sorrow transformed to hope through fair trade. Geoff White talks about consumer involvement in this transformation. Both express the need for an alternative approach to trade that embraces the qualities of justice and fairness as well as economics. In this final chapter, I will briefly summarise the main findings of note and suggest further research that might throw light on the issues I have raised.

Studying fair trade offers an opportunity to look at production and consumption as they connect. Sociologists and other social scientists are interested in this relationship and in ethics of care/ethical consumption because it engages the complexity of consumption and opens up an alternative view of consumption rather than one of “the ‘pathologies’ of our societies” (Rief 2008:560). Some have found that the representations made by fair trade organisations further the *enterprise* over the *ethics* of fair trade. In my thesis, I have argued that the representations in *Vital* promote a unique connection between the reader and the ethics of fair trade.

Narrative analysis offers a different approach to discourse analysis in exploring representational issues and the way representations engage the reader as part of the story. Rief describes recent sociological interest in consumption as coming from “the context of globalization and new social movements struggling for global justice and, second, through the reconfiguration of citizenship in neoliberal and third way policies” (2008:561). My study of fair trade develops from this context.

The sociology of consumption is interested in the “symbolic and communicative qualities that help express and mediate social relations, structures and divisions” (Rief 2008:562). This relates to the symbolic or semiotic production of fair trade (Goodman, 2004). Symbolic production promotes the moral economy of fair trade by connecting consumer to producer in a relationship of care. It is through this symbolic production that the consumer gains awareness of the conditions surrounding the production and distribution of goods. By connecting purchasing behaviour and global responsibility

towards those who produce the things we buy, the narrative of fair trade constructs consumption as a caring action altruistically motivated.

I have explored this connection through several themes identified in the magazine *Vital*. The material coded under these themes can be described as have two functions: telling the reader *about* fair trade and telling them how to *act* as part of the fair trade movement. This is the why and how of fair trade. By telling the reader *about* fair trade *Vital* tells the reader *why* fair trade is needed and the impact it has on the lives of producers. Encouraging the reader to *act* involves them as part of the story and tells them *how* to be involved. The first motivates and the second directs. Both are necessary to engage the reader to act as a reflexive consumer and global citizen.

The first set of themes outlined in chapter five explored the contrast between fair and unfair trade practices. Throughout *Vital* there is a reoccurring sense of lack that characterises the conditions of underdevelopment and marginalisation in developing countries. This includes a “lack of education” that keeps children “condemned to a future of hard labour and low incomes” (Trade Aid 2006a:10), the “lack (of) access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation” that results in 3,900 children dying every day (Trade Aid 2005a:9) and a “lack of global responsibility” (Trade Aid 2004c:8). These statements describe a lack of infrastructure, freedom, or access and a lack of basic human needs. These conditions echo those identified by Nicholls and Opal (2005) in chapter two. The failure to meet these needs perpetuates a cycle of poverty. This is contrasted in the text and images describing fair trade producer partners benefiting from their relationship with Trade Aid.

The second group of themes explored the representations of producers and the production of products. Attention focused on the impact of buying fair trade and making the producer *known* to the consumer. Representations of producers, production and products make the people and processes known. The sense of connection that stems from this knowing allows for the relationship of care as outlined in chapter three. Smith describes how a “lack of knowledge could justify the exclusion from ethical consideration of unknown others” (1998:18) The personal producer stories and narratives in *Vital* break down these barriers by making the distant other known.

Whereas Wright (2004) argues this *knowing* of producers is problematic as it commodifies the producer, I have argued that this is essential to promoting connection and therefore a vital part of Trade Aid's success. The twist of the commodity fetish at once unveils the conditions of production to the consumer to appeal on a moral level and at the same time re-fetishises products to embody the qualities of fair trade. Hence buying fair trade coffee becomes more than a simple product choice, but an act of social solidarity.

The third group of themes identified the way *Vital* speaks directly to the reader as a consumer and as a global citizen. *Vital* tells the reader to act in certain ways. The reader is engaged as a part of the story of fair trade through purchasing behaviour and through political action as a global citizen. The boundaries between these two roles are not clearly defined in the narrative of fair trade. Consumer behaviour becomes politicised action.

In chapter three I introduced a history of consumer movements including Evans (2000) and his study of consumption as a counter-hegemonic movement. In the example given of activist and consumer campaigns against Nike, consumers were described as acting in solidarity with producers. This counter-hegemonic consumer action reflects a blurring between consumer/citizen identities in the consumer-citizen hybrid described by Johnston (2008).

The mobilisation of consumers reflects the action of a reflexive consumer. The reflexive consumer concept suggests the consumer is empowered to act with agency to make choices about their purchasing behaviour. The consumer informed on the issues of trade finds value in buying fair trade goods. The role of organisations like Trade Aid is to motivate that reflexive process in the consumer. The construction of a narrative that tells the reader about fair trade while also involving the reader in the action of the story is vital.

Recent discussions of the limitations of the reflexive consumer thesis raise questions for future study. Adams and Raisborough (2008) caution against over attributing agency to the fair trade consumer. They describe fair trade as "fertile territory to explore the dynamic intersections of reflexivity, ethics, consumption and identity" (2008:1166).

They are however cautious not to under account for the influence of class based politics that also shape consumer purchasing behaviour. While the narrative of fair trade promoted by organisations like Trade Aid represents the consumer as acting free of structures, there is scope for research on how consumers in New Zealand negotiate the tension between ethics and other factors such as cost and availability.

Future study would benefit from research on audience interpretations of *Vital*. Comprehensive analysis of reader interpretations of the stories would give an idea of consumer experiences in New Zealand that would be useful to fair trade organisations. Producer narratives contain a vast amount of information pertinent to fair trade research. Paul's (2005) analysis of research methods looking at fair trade as a development strategy identifies interviewing as an important tool in understanding the non-monetary impacts of fair trade on producer communities. This is useful in creating a "before-and-after comparison group" and plotting changes (Paul 2005:142). Narrative analysis is therefore a significant tool in assessing fair trade projects not simply in conveying transformation to the consumer but also for those interested in evaluating the impacts of fair trade.

As every fair trade organisation operates differently it is difficult to make general statements on how they represent fair trade. However, I believe my research has a role in understanding the representation of fair trade in New Zealand. As fair trade products become increasingly available in mainstream markets there is a need for organisations like Trade Aid to maintain the ethical message. Goodman calls for fair trade to "continue to become more politically and economically threatening" (2004:910). Consumption continues to occupy a position of privilege in the story of fair trade but there is scope for developing the role of the global citizen. As a tool for furthering the mission of Trade Aid, *Vital* could engage the reader politically. Effective use of *Vital* to engage the reader in political action should be explored. It falls upon these organisations to ensure the ethical message is heard and to look to imaginative ways of conveying that message. While some argue the focus on paying a fair price for goods dilutes this message, the narrative of *Vital* maintains its complexity. There is still much work to do, however, as the market continues to grow and develop.

In the end one must weigh the need to sell the product against the need to promote the ethical message of fair trade. Without the ethics of fair trade, it is just trade and without maintaining ethical practices, there is no justification for premium pricing. The two, enterprise and ethic, are intertwined and although they are dissected in analysis in practice organizations must never lose sight of this connection.

The stories of fair trade invite academic analysis at the same time as they challenge the luxury of academic debate in light of the real life everyday struggles for survival facing so many people living in poverty. In the end, it is about creating an opportunity for producers to engage fairly on the international market. I began this research with a quote from Jute Works producer Haricha Begum who spoke about transformation through fair trade from sorrow to hope. I will close with a statement of an unnamed elderly woman from Bangladesh quoted in *Vital*. “Your nice words are fine but I’m really more interested in whether you have more orders for us. I have to take my children out of school because we have no work and no income to pay the fees.” (Trade Aid 2004b:2) This statement returns the debate to the simple fact that for many people in this world reality is the day to day struggle to meet basic needs and if choosing one brand of coffee over another makes a difference then it should be a simple choice to make.

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