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**Reading Tea Leaves:
The Impact of Mainstreaming Fair Trade**

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Glossary of Terms

FLO	Fairtrade Labeling Organization
FT	Fair Trade
GA	General Assembly
GNFL	Gorkha National Liberation Front
INR	Indian Rupee
JB	Joint Body
LI	Labeling Initiative
SP	Social Premium- an additional sum of money above the Fair Trade minimum price, which is paid directly to producer groups by importers
WFTO	World Fair Trade Organization

Abstract

In a world with ever-increasing claims of corporate social responsibility, it is difficult to separate actual commitment from marketing. This difficulty is especially pronounced in Fair Trade where companies promise a wide range of development objectives, from increased income to empowerment, with questionable motivations. Through case studies of tea plantations in India, this paper explores how Fair Trade commitments are actuated in producer communities. I argue that Fair Trade structures do not perform as intended but are conduits through which a variety of power relations interact to produce outcomes that are not intended by any one actor.

1. Introduction

Despite the global recession, consumers worldwide spent an estimated 4 billion dollars on Fair Trade (FT) products in 2008 with sales of FT tea increasing most notably by 112% (Fair Trade Foundation, 2009). Such remarkable growth demonstrates that, contrary to traditional economic thought, consumers do not always seek the lowest price but are willing to pay slightly more to ensure developmental ends for producers on the other side of the supply chain. However, in the past decade, corporate actors, lured by the success of the FT brand, have pulled the movement away from its roots in alternative, small-farmer production towards a larger-scale corporate model. This shift has been coupled with both criticism and praise; some organizations contend that FT's expansion has diluted its developmental impact while others point to an increase in the reach and profitability of the FT brand. This paper aims to evaluate the evolution of FT from its founding ideology through case studies of FT tea plantations in India in order to determine whether this mainstream version of FT is still achieving its stated social and political objectives.

FT tea represents a mainstream version of FT because it was certified relatively recently (2007) and, unlike original FT products such as coffee, it allows plantations and other mainstream

actors to gain certification. An understanding of its developmental impact is important to ensure the credibility of the brand. Otherwise, consumers could lose faith in the system altogether endangering the progress that FT has made thus far and threatening to exacerbate the circumstances of thousands of producers affected by FT. While there has been a large body of evaluative work on FT, it has focused on coffee, bananas and coco in Latin America and Africa (Utting 2007; Rice, 2000; Douglas et al 2006; Smith 2007, Lamb, 2008) and has neglected studies of Asia and of tea. In this paper, research was undertaken in eight tea communities in North (Darjeeling) and South (Nilgiris) India to fill this research gap and to provide a better picture of the realities in tea fields. The findings illustrate that FT does not function as is intended but is modified by a diverse set of power relations operating within the FT structure and resulting in a set of outcomes that are not fully intended by any one actor.

This dissertation is organized into 7 Chapters. After an introduction, Chapter 2 explores the controversy associated with FT's entrance into mainstream markets as is exemplified by the decision to permit the certification of tea plantations. Chapters 3 through 5 compare the stated goals of FT with its observable outcomes in this new mainstream plantation setting in order to gauge the impact on producer welfare. This comparison includes an exploration of how the historical context of power relations within tea plantations inadvertently shapes the outcome of FT projects. Chapter 6 explores the impact of FT's Northern-centric ideology on the functioning of FT systems in plantations and Chapter 7 concludes.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Belief in the ability of trade to improve living standards across the globe is a cornerstone of economic theory which dates back to Adam Smith (1776) and David Ricardo (1817). The modern FT movement is predicated on this fundamental belief in the welfare enhancing powers of trade. However, trade is not universally positive; it is an arena wherein a diverse set of power relations interact to create both winners and losers. While classic intellectuals such as Hobbes (1651) and Weber (1904) theorized power to be an instrument of coercion based on a state's monopoly over the legitimate use of force, understanding power dynamics in FT requires a

more complex understanding of 'post liberal' power involving agency and principles of cooperation (Hutchens 2009, 115). For example, FT is predicated on the power of the consumer to reveal their political preference through the market by purchasing FT products.

Power is one of the most elusive ideas in social science with an infinite number of interpretations. Throughout the analysis, this paper considers the interaction of power within the FT framework borrowing in part from Foucault (1977) and James Ferguson (1990). From this perspective, the strength of the cooperation, or collective action, embodied in FT networks exploits the narrative of the marginalized producer with such skill as to effectively challenge entrenched agribusiness institutions by creating power around an alternative discourse (Hutchens 2009, 129). Unfortunately, this study finds that the power imbedded in the narrative of the producer is not only exploited to challenge agribusiness. Rather, FT has created spaces in which a complex array of power relations interact creating outcomes which are not necessarily intended by any one actor. Such interactions can partly explain the very different reality found in Indian tea fields as compared to that which is portrayed to consumers purchasing FT tea in supermarket aisles.

1.2 Methodology

Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted over a three month period in five FT and four Non-FT tea plantations in the West Bengal and Tamil Nadu regions of India. A native of Darjeeling¹ also conducted interviews of tea pluckers based on a questionnaire in attempt to control for bias introduced by the presence of a foreign interviewer. For comparison, one week was spent in tea plantations in Nepal where FT has not yet been introduced. Similarly, a week was spent in the Herkulu tea plantation in Tanzania. Herkulu is owned by the Bombay Burma Trading Group whose Indian tea holdings are also reviewed in this report. In addition, a month was spent interviewing FT professionals in the U.S. and Britain.

¹ Interviewer requests to remain anonymous

2. Mainstreaming

The FT which emerged in the late 20th Century from charity and radical solidarity movements in Latin America is very different from the FT practiced in tea fields in India today. Tea only became officially certified relatively recently with the FT minimum price formally established in 2008; consequently, it has undergone a very different process than its coffee counterpart. Tea is certified by the Fair Trade Labeling Organization (FLO) which is an organization representing twenty labeling initiatives (LI) in twenty-one countries- including TransFair in the US and Fairtrade Foundation in the UK- and is responsible for setting international FT standards and for certifying products (FLO, 2009). Today, FT is an alternative discourse *within* conventional markets; it is available in small cooperative stores and large discount supermarkets alike. The expansion of FT is particularly notable in the United Kingdom where supermarkets have created their “own-brand” FT labels. For example, Tesco launched its own-brand FT tea line in 2004 (Barrientos and Dolan 2006, 10). Consumers trust FLO’s FT brand as representative of a specific set of values and therefore the brand has a high marketing value; however, this does not necessarily guarantee its accountability to producers.

FT has not entered mainstream markets without controversy; fundamentally, there is a competition within FT between two different discourses. The mainstream market-based discourse represented by FLO contends that FT can outgrow its niche market to create a greater impact. Conversely, the alternative discourse embodied by the World FT Organization (WFTO) remains true to the original ideology of FT. The WFTO argues that, while FT may be able to get slightly higher prices to producers through mainstream channels, it risks the future of the movement by sacrificing other crucial social aspects of FT ideology that challenge existing power structures (WFTO 2009). Such FT purists warn that the social goals of FT are subverted by the commercial interests of supermarkets and other large corporations who engage in a race to the bottom for the cheapest FT product (Oxfam 2004). For example, the World Development Movement has been among the critics asserting that mainstreaming FT is an attempt by large corporations to “cash in” on a growing market rather than a sincere effort to reform their business model (WDM, 2005 cited in Barrientos and Dolan 2006, 18).

Mr. Banerjee, manager and owner of the Makaibari tea estate in Darjeeling, believes that mainstream actors are focused on expanding the FT model to such an extent that it has led to the dilution of its standards and a general inability to replicate the model effectively. He recounts,

When a label becomes mainstream, it's on expansion mode and when that happens, the mission objectives blur. Minimum standards of qualification if met satisfy the agencies, resulting in dilution at all stages (Moore, 2008k).

Yet, Mr. Banerjee is quick to add, "Having said that, at least a FLO certified estate is thinking in terms of social development criteria, which is a step towards conversion from colonial hierarchical management to partnerships."

Evolutionary economics postulate that as alternative organizations experience growth, they slowly evolve to reflect dominant bodies of knowledge (Ramazzoti 2001 cited in Hutchens 2009, 149). Such ideological and managerial evolution creates conformity as the organization is driven by a need to gain resources for growth and survival thereby hindering its ability to react to new information with innovation and flexibility (McGrath and MacMillan 2000, 112). Such an evolution is visible within the FT tea movement's drive to certify plantations. FLO's revenue structure is based on licensing fees which are calculated as a percentage of a trader's market share. Therefore, companies that sell the greatest quantities of FT tea contribute the most to FLO's budget and have the greatest influence in FLO's decision-making. Such a structure reduces the likelihood that FLO will challenge the status quo. While FT activists originally acquired market power through networks of many small and diffuse actors, today FLO's basis of market power comes from conforming to the prevailing market norms of mainstream actors such as Starbucks and Tesco (Hutchens 2009, 201). These mainstream actors demand that FT moves away from its original commitment to small-scale peripheral farmers in favor of larger plantations who can guarantee volume and reliability.

Advocates of mainstream FT argue that restricting plantations from certification would restrict the growth of the FT brand because the scale and nature of tea production necessitates a plantation structure to meet the demands of conventional traders. However, similar arguments

about the impossibility of creating small scale cooperatives were prevalent when FT was first forged in the coffee sector. Ben Corey-Moran, Director of Coffee and Coffee Development for Thanksgiving Coffee, recounted how “in the beginning, people said you couldn’t organize coffee into cooperatives because it’s too large, you cannot organize farmers, they are unreliable and the supply chain is too complicated to trace. But we did. Now, they are using the same argument for tea” (Moore, 2009a). This quotation demonstrates that FT’s ideological platform has been diluted from its original concentrated commitment to small scale coffee producers to its current mainstream incarnation of plantation systems despite the feasibility of remaining true to small scale cooperatives.

Equal Exchange

Equal Exchange and its partner tea cooperatives prove that a cooperative structure is a viable, if not ideal, option for FT tea production. Equal Exchange is a unique tea company that is itself structured as a cooperative with employees owning shares and nominating and electing the Board of Directors; workers themselves hold six of the nine Director positions. Equal Exchange was the first for-profit FT company in the U.S. and was founded on the platform of building long-term trade partnerships that foster mutually beneficial relations between farmers and consumers (Equal Exchange, 2009). Today, the company has not swayed from this original platform.

Equal Exchange sells “small farmer” tea based on a partnership with Tea Promoters of India (TPI) which is a Darjeeling-based company that manages alternative tea operations and helps small tea farmers gain access to the market and a fair price for their tea. One such partner in Darjeeling is the Sanjukta Cooperative which was one of the first small farming initiatives in Darjeeling. The cooperative members live on land that was abandoned by a tea plantation in the 1950s and have since been able to produce a thriving business. One producer on the Sanjukat Cooperative explained the freedom that the cooperative provided him “we are both the workers and the owners. We have benefits, we don’t have oppressors” (Equal Exchange, 2009). Another producer expressed

pride in her ownership stake, “before we did not know the value of our tea. Now, we have a good economic situation” (Equal Exchange, 2009).

Unlike tea pluckers in plantations, these workers express feelings of ownership and pride in their work. They are also much more connected to the buyers of their tea and are able to engage in two-way trading relationships- a central goal of FT.

2.1 Plantations; antithetical to FT ideology

One of the most central tenants of FT is ‘empowerment’ which is based on ideas of autonomy over one’s own life and ownership of one’s own work with the ability to engage in entrepreneurship and collaboration with other actors in the supply chain. However, most plantations operate as small fiefdoms which offer little, if any, opportunities for empowerment. This section will examine the structure and history of tea plantations in order to gauge their ability to host FT initiatives and achieve FT objectives.

The hierarchical structure of plantations hinders the realization of FT goals from the outset. While FT is predicated on collaboration at all levels of the production process, the majority of plantation owners live in Calcutta or other distant cities and only visit their tea fields once or twice a year. Therefore, most tea pluckers would not be able to identify the owner of their land, never mind engage in dialog with him. Tea pluckers are similarly separated from plantation management despite the fact that managers reside on plantation grounds. The typical dwelling of a plantation manger is a relic of colonial oppression as it was most likely built for a British owner during the era of colonization. These imposing dwellings are often surrounded by high protective gates, a few guard dogs and geese (that are known to act as a natural alarm system). Such protective measures are evidence of the hostile relations between plantation managers and workers - hardly the amicable environment necessary to foster FT cooperation.

Below the manager’s house, a sea of emerald green tea bushes span out in waves of small hills sloping down the mountainous terrain as far as the eye can see. Throughout the 1,600 acres of tea bushes, over a hundred huts cluster in villages (usually about eight villages within the

grounds of each plantation). Most of the tea plucking families who inhabit these villages have lived on the plantation for five generations yet are still not entitled to ownership of their house or land. This lack of property rights is one of the many contentious issues between plantation managers and workers. Yet despite the uneasy relationship with management, tea pluckers rely on management for every daily necessity including food, water, roads, fuel, and education. Such a structure negates any hope that tea pluckers can access the power or autonomy that is so crucial to the achievement of FT objectives.

FLO stipulates that a central aim of FT is to “facilitate long-term trading partnerships and enable greater producer control over the trading process,” (Fairtrade Labeling Organization, 2009) yet tea pluckers in a plantation setting have little control over their day to day work. At the end of each day, their day’s plucking is weighted and taken by management. Most of the tea pluckers I spoke with did not know where the tea went once it left the processing factory. For example, when asked where her tea pluckings go and at what price they are sold for, Anu Rai, a tea plucker on a FT estate, responded: “Our work is to pluck leaves and send it to the tea factory. I don’t know what happens to it or where it gets sold. How can a tea garden labor like me know at what price the tea sells? Workers don’t know that” (Moore, 2008c).

Upward mobility, another central precept of FT, is almost unheard of in tea plantations. Workers’ knowledge of the tea industry generally ends at the weigh station and they are not taught about other aspects of the supply chain. If their children become tea pluckers they have no hope of improving their position on the plantation. In his article in the *Darjeeling Times*, 11 November 2008 Upendra lamented his position in the ‘plantation class,’ “Our people toil day and night in the tea gardens, to make profit for somebody who does not even know where exactly Darjeeling is; depending on his/her mood the owner shuts down the garden, rendering hundreds of people jobless, with no money to feed their family . . . our people commit suicide as they are unable to see their family dying because of hunger.” While FT is supposed to be about personal autonomy and direct relationships between all actors in the supply chain, plantations are imbued with a power imbalance that renders such a relationship untenable. FT

may improve the power of the plantation manager within the supply chain, but it does little to empower the workers.

Therefore, while proponents argue that the certification of FT plantations provides an opportunity to expand the reach of equitable trade, it is clear that plantations are by nature inequitable. FT certification cannot singlehandedly correct the historical power imbalance inherent in the plantation structure (Equal Exchange, 2009). One of the primary goals of FT is to diffuse power; however, plantations are by definition hierarchical and linked to entrenched power relations dating back to the colonial era. These power relations shape the application of FT and will be the subject of the next section.

3. The Colonial Legacy of Power Relations within a Plantation

Ferguson (1990) and Foucault (1979) speak of an effect which occurs when development projects, (such as FT), are implemented and the intentions of the project's "planners," (such as FLO and other FT groups), are subverted by a complex interaction of power. The result of such an interaction is side effects or "instrument-effects" which "are at one and the same time instruments of what 'turns out' to be an exercise of power" (Ferguson 1990, 255). By certifying plantations, FLO gains market share using the narrative of the marginalized tea plucker, however this has the "instrumental effect" of reinforcing and validating age-old power inequities that are adversative to the interests of tea pluckers.

While the original FT movement dared to confront the politics of power structures in coffee production, today's mainstream FT movement shies away from addressing politics in tea production and instead attempts to implement technical developmental measures. One such technical measure is the "Joint Body" (JB) which is a committee of workers' representatives and management representatives responsible for managing the social premium (see glossary of terms for definition). According to FLO, the JB "must be development and empowerment oriented, and guided by principles of democratic participation, cooperation, equality and transparency. The principle "one person one vote" must be followed" (FLO, 2007). A constitution and a quota for the minimum number of women representatives are other

formalities which FLO requires to be included in the JB. While such a structure may effectively disperse power in a cooperative setting, simply implanting this democratic structure within the context of a plantation is not effective because it ignores the unique historical circumstances of the region. In other words, implanting the technical structures of the JB and ignoring the power relations results in unintended consequences or “instrumental effects.” To understand such instrumental effects one must first understand the power relations in context.

3.1 Colonial History of Darjeeling

Darjeeling was colonized by the British in the 19th Century when the British East India Company found that the cool climate of Darjeeling provided much needed respite from the heat and malarial conditions of the plains. At the time of colonization, Darjeeling was a ground of contestation between the Indian Raja of Sikkim and the Gorkhas of Nepal. The British East India Company was engaged in skirmishes against the Nepalese throughout the entire length of ‘its’ northern frontier (O’Malley 1907, 19). War broke out in 1814 and was resolved in 1815 when the British East India Company conquered the entire contested area confirming its holdings by signing the Treaty of Sugauli with Nepal. The British instated the Raja of Sikkim to power in 1817 but later the Raja of Sikkim gifted Darjeeling back to the British East India Company for "enabling servants of the government suffering from sickness to avail of its advantage" (Versey, 2008). After India gained independence in 1947, the British turned their Darjeeling tea plantations over to Indian elite.

Today, 160 years after the British superintendent of Darjeeling planted the first seed, there are about 90 plantations in Darjeeling producing around ten million kilos of tea a year (Tea Research Association, 2008). The plantations are still owned by Indian elite and the vast majority of workers are of Nepalese origin but refer to themselves as Gorkha to separate themselves from the state of Nepal. The term Gorkha includes all three original inhabitants of Darjeeling: the Nepali, Lepcha and Bhutia. Centuries after the Treaty of Sugauli and the departure of the British, the battle between Gorkhas and Indians remains animated. Gorkhas are calling for a separate state of Gorkhaland autonomous from the Bengal region in which

Darjeeling is currently situated. This initiative, led by the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), came to a head in the 1980s when the GNLF issued an aggressive demand for statehood and a violent uprising ensued in which 1,200 people lost their lives and the Indian Army was called in to restore order. Today the struggle for independence rages on with many Gorkhas refusing to pay state taxes (including electricity and phone bills) and changing their license plate numbers from WB (West Bengal) to GL (Gorkhaland). As this paper is being written, Reuters (Jun 18) is reporting the Gorkhas have ordered an indefinite general strike in the region causing an estimated loss of \$2.3 million a day from the loss of tourist receipts and tea profits.

4. Instrumental Effect of Fair Trade

The historical power struggles between Indians and Gorkhas play out within the FT structures at Upajau, a FT tea Estate in Darjeeling. Mr. Malu, the plantation manager, attributes the failure of FT structures to distrust between managers and workers caused by a legacy of mistreatment by the British as well as by the Indian oligarchies that replaced the British. By requiring Indian managers and Gorkha workers to cooperate using 'democratic' JB policies, FT regulations fail to consider the political implications of such a divisive historical context. Even with the application of a democratically-based FT framework, power relations surface in FT institutions which run counter to the FT mandate. The direction and pace with which FT is able to implement change is determined by how these power relationships are organized, who shapes them, and who controls their evolution.

4.1 Instrumental Effect: Defiance

Braithwaite (2009, 290) describes defiance as a behavior actors use when consciously rejecting or questioning structures of authority. According to Braithwaite, defiance is a deliberate process signifying that individuals have thought about their position and intend to convey to authorities and peers that they reject the rules of authority. When an institution no longer effectively serves those it was set out to help and instead dominates individual lives and causes harm, defiance by social actors is necessary to change the institution (ibid, 149). On the Upaju Estate, the defiance of tea pluckers against FT structures demonstrates that FT is not serving

the interests of the pluckers and therefore is not corresponding to the ideological goals on which it was founded.

The JB is tasked with using FT premium money to accomplish projects on the workers' behalf and in cooperation with the management. Yet, in Upaju, these projects are rarely accomplished successfully because it is difficult for workers and management to collaborate effectively. Workers are skeptical of anything handed down by management and will commonly misuse or destroy such items. Exasperated, Mr. Malu, described multiple examples of problems he experienced when attempting to implement the JB system. For example, the JB purchased metal pipes for the community to improve infrastructure. They later found that all the pipes were either sold or simply destroyed. The JB also purchased flatware for the community to use in dining areas but, to Mr. Malu's surprise, the workers refused to use the new flatware claiming that different castes should not touch the same flatware; in the past there has been no evidence of a caste system amongst the plantation workers who intermarry freely and share many other common goods. Similarly, the JB bought the community gas cylinders to improve their access to fuel. Within a week the majority of these cylinders were sold.

The JB at the Upaju estate also purchased cows for some workers and gave money designated specifically for the purchase of cows to other workers. Mr. Malu stated that such an investment of FT funds would provide milk for worker families, as well as generate extra income from milk sales. However, most workers subverted the plan either by selling the cows or by purchasing small cows and using the extra money for personal benefit. Those who complied with the milk program became angry that those who did not comply were left unpunished and Mr. Malu found himself in the middle of a firestorm.

Mr. Gopal Somani, manager of the Sundair estate, a non-FT estate in Darjeeling is not surprised that the workers act against JB projects. He doubts whether the social premium of FT estates benefits the workers more than the managers:

About 18 years back FT entered into the tea industry. But in Darjeeling only a few gardens are FT because what I find is that it is not improving the status of the

workers. Yes, the owners may get money and some cheap popularity but the cause has not been fulfilled so it is not successful. The Europeans are giving the money but it is not going to the proper person. This FT is not fair (Moore, 2008f).

Mr. Somani argues that programs initiated in estates 'for the benefit of the workers' are often programs that the manager and would initiate regardless of FT. For example, in the annual FT audit, FT managers, such as Mr. Malu, may show an inspector cows which have been given 'for the benefit of the workers.' However, Mr. Somani points out that it is to the benefit of every estate manager to have cows on his land because they provide much-coveted fertilizer. "I am not a FT estate," says Mr. Somani "but I give all my workers a cow with the agreement that, the milk is yours, the dung is mine (Moore, 2008f). After interviewing many of the tea pluckers in FT estates, it became apparent that many pluckers do not even want to own cows. One plucker on the Upaju estate described the cow as his biggest hardship: "I am thinking of getting rid of the cow. A milk collector collects milk from us at INR 7 per liter and sells in nearby town at INR 12-14 per liter. It's not fair nor worth the effort" (Moore, 2008a). Such examples demonstrate not only that the social premium money at the Upaju and other Estates is not effectively contributing to the empowerment of tea pluckers, but also that pluckers are actively reacting against the initiatives of the JB.

JB members are supposed to be elected by a 'General Assembly' of their peers based on their ability to represent the needs of their community. However, most pluckers who are selected to become members of the JB tend to be favored by the plantation management and therefore, are viewed by their peers as allies of the adversary. At the Upaju estate, the chairman of the JB committee is the manager of the plantation and the treasurer is also from the office staff. The management then selects one person from every village on the plantation (of which there are eight) to be a committee member. Mr. Malu elaborates on the structure of the Upaju JB:

We created [the JB] because TransFair does not know the people because these people are very difficult to control here the people who are not members of the committee wanted to create the problem. So we chose the people from each village and they are the member of the TransFair committee. So we change the people also sometimes when they retire or whatever. So now we have a system to select the people we give them the responsibility, so you select one gentleman people who can guide to the

committee our interest to educate the villagers and utilize the money and come with the good idea how to improve their life standard, how to increase their efficiency, their productivity. I have given them idea to make a bread product because here the people like biscuits and bread so I have given them idea to make a small bakery in the village so that it is cheap for them and they are also getting a job. We have this idea but there was a problem to implement this (Moore, 2008h).

The pluckers' view of the JB as complicit with plantation management makes it incredibly difficult for JB members to gain the necessary support, or "enrollment", to implement effective projects (Latour 1986, 15). Latour (1986), like Foucault, assumes that power is created by widespread participation. Latour views power as "enrolment" meaning that to have power one must command the respect of a substantial constituency; those with power are those with a capacity to enroll others (Hutchens 2009, 201). In this context, JB members must be leaders and command the respect of their communities in order for the FT system to function properly. However, in Darjeeling, the leaders of tea plucking communities tend to be union leaders who are revered because they fight openly with plantation management and are seen to defend Gorkha identity. Gopal Thapa, a plucker on a FT estate, illustrates the enrolment capacity of unions; Gopal had never heard of the JB but he described how union leaders are viewed as the true representatives of the pluckers and "press for the needs of us workers, like wage hikes and house repair support" (Moore, 2008g).

The management in Darjeeling feels that they must control who is elected as a JB member due to the political atmosphere Mr. Malu explains,

The political leaders do not like our social programs. We want to increase worker efficiency we want to improve their life; we want to educate them so we put on social dramas about how drugs and alcohol affect the family. Then the political union leaders accuse us of misusing the FT money. These union leaders are trouble causers so they must not be in the JB (Moore, 2008h).

From the above statements, it becomes apparent that the JB at the Upaju estate is controlled by the management and is not democratically organized as FLO designates. Mr. Malu's frequent mention of improving efficiency and productivity, (none of which are the goals of FT), demonstrates that the JB is used to promote the interests of management. However, this

misuse of the JB is not necessarily an intentional conspiracy on the plantation managers part, as Ferguson (1990) states, “if unintended effects of a project end up having political uses, even seeming to be “instruments” of some larger political deployment, this is not any kind of conspiracy; it really does just happen to be the way things work out” (Ferguson 1990; 256).

While it may not be decidedly malicious, the JB acts to expand the power of plantation managers by allowing them to frame political discourse. Managers frame political unions as ‘violent’ and ‘uncivilized’ and the JB as ‘civilized’ and ‘democratic.’ Theorists such as Foucault (1979), view this ability to construct and monopolize the evolution of discourse as the essential tool of domination. By marginalizing the issues of the unions, FT structures have limited decision-making to relatively non-controversial matters discussed in the JB, (such as whether new desks for the school or new benches at bus stations should be built) notwithstanding the real power conflicts within the community. Bachrach and Baratz (1970, 9) refer to this as “nondecision-making” which is a less obvious form of power responsible for determining what is on the agenda; “nondecision-making” limits the scope of actual decision-making to “safe” issues by altering the institutions and procedures of a community. The JB structure thus also has the instrumental effect of “nondecision-making;” it has allowed managers to exclude union leaders from the discourse and has lead to the expansion and entrenchment of the power of the plantation elite almost imperceptibly.

While nondecision-making explains how the FT discourse is monopolized, it still does not fully explain why the JB’s democratic structure, built on ideas of participation and collaboration, fails to accomplish the ideological goal of reigning in self-interest and leveling power relations. Lefebvre (1991) elucidates this quandary in his argument that space is not simply a neutral container waiting to be filled but that it is a dynamic social product of control, domination and power (Gaventa 2006, 4). Simply participating in the institutional discourse of FT is meaningless without a marked change in power relationships. Participation in the JB may add a more democratic face to existing conditions and the illusion of inclusion but it does not influence the underlying structural relations that ultimately decide whose knowledge prevails and therefore, who has power. In this way, the JB also has the instrumental effect of re-legitimizing the status

quo without providing an authentic space for participation and change. One plucker's description of his interaction with the JB at the Makaibari Estate illustrates how real change is difficult to achieve within the confines of the JB,

"It was some 5 - 6 years ago that I heard a JB was formed. I think funds from countries outside come from welfare and in order to utilize it JB is formed. JB is a committee consisting of tea garden workers and the manager of the garden. I was called once to attend a meeting when it was formed. I had proposed that JB should also have members who are non-tea garden workers. There was no response to it. Instead I was never invited to attend their meeting again" (Moore, 2008b).

Rather than increasing pluckers' freedoms and autonomy, mainstream FT has preserved pluckers' existing range of possibilities and opportunities within the conventional market. Moreover, by framing the discourse around ethicality, FT has validated tea pluckers' current position within plantation hierarchies without reforming it; such validation sufficiently soothes consumers' conscience making potential for future reform increasingly difficult. This mainstream version has stifled the voice of more radical FT and weakened the evolutionary strength and potential of the movement in the future.

4.2 Instrumental Effect: Identity

Braithwaite (2009) theorizes that politics is more than just a sequence of power-plays in the competition over limited resources, but that politics is also a contest over the identity of a group- a contest in which identities are both an outcome and a starting point. In this line of thinking, one could view tea pluckers' resistance against FT structures as a rejection of the identity formed for them through colonization (as is embodied in the plantation structure) in favor of an autonomous Gorkha identity articulated by union leaders in their call for Gorkhaland. Defiance against the JB structure may signify that the JB has taken on an instrumental or alternative meaning as an arena where pluckers can protest their subservient position, a space of contention between Indian elites and Gorkha workers. Some activists would support this battle for Gorkha identity as the only true means for change on the basis that real

participation can only begin locally, in the arenas of everyday life where people are able to resist power and to construct their own voices (Gaventa 2006, 169).

As Dani Rodrik (2004) has concluded from his econometric studies, institutions cannot simply be transplanted in foreign circumstances but often must develop organically. Therefore, the technical implementation of the democratic JB structures does not in itself guarantee that its aims will be accomplished; the JB structure operates in the midst of complex power relation and has had the instrumental effect of providing an arena in which these power relations interact.

5. Monitoring

Another technical aspect of FT, and one of its biggest challenges, is the monitoring of FT practices. FT is infamous for 'snapshot' and 'checkbox' audits which focus on superficial compliance of upper management rather than on genuine improvement of workers' rights (Barrientos and Dolan 2006, 75). The paternalistic nature of these audits calls into question FLO's claim that it works in "partnership" and "collaboration" with producers (FLO, 2009).

Inspectors visit each FT estate only once a year and their visits are pre-announced which allows managers to prepare for the audit and to select the most favorable workers to be interviewed. Such audits tend to find visible violations, such as health and safety violations, but are inadequate to identify more complex and less obvious issues, such as inequality. The pluckers are rarely informed of the purpose of the audit and if they participate at all, it is usually only in the form of a short interview. Mr. Somani provides examples of how auditors are easily misled:

Let's say that you come from the U.S. and I tell you that I have given the workers warm clothing and blankets, you will be happy because it is a cold environment. However, under the plantation act, I am already supposed to provide blankets. That's why I use the world subtle when I say that the difference between fair and non-FT gardens is subtle (Moore, 2008f).

Mr. Somani's assessment could be correct due to the lack of accountability on the part of plantations; FLO's monitoring system is insufficient and can do little to control compliance with

its regulations. The audits are of questionable integrity as the estates are audited and given certification by FLO-Cert which claims to be an independent auditor but is owned by FLO. Therefore, if FLO –Cert finds serious problems it may not be revealed due to the fact that FLO has a financial interest in keeping such issues from consumers in order to maintain the credibility of the brand.

While it must be recognized that auditing is an enormously difficult and expensive task, there are alternative approaches that may be more effective as well as more aligned with FT ideology than FLO's current approach of policing standards from the other end of the supply chain. Some business use a collaborative approach which aims to develop standards with the suppliers and communities involved. This approach challenges the traditional market view of managing a supply chain and requires a boarder perspective on ethical trade (Barrientos and Dolan 2006, 132). Unfortunately, as discussed in the next section, FLO has not been receptive to initiatives which would put more monitoring and labeling power in the hands of local FT practitioners.

6. Neo-colonialism

The conceptualization and development of FT has been centered in the North and largely lacked Southern participation and influence. While Foucaultvian theorists may view this as an unintended outcome of power relations, dependency theorist would perceive this reality as typical of developed nations who have a collective interest in promoting dependency from the 'periphery' (Frank, 1966). Such theorist may argue that FT is an unnecessary infringement on the autonomy of Indians who have already created a comprehensive labor code- the Plantation Labor Act.

The Plantation Labor Act is a thirty-page document established by the Indian government in the 1950s which guarantees rights to plantation workers that go above and beyond those guaranteed by FT. In the average tea plucking community, around four differently affiliated political unions monitor the implementation of this Act and fight for its enforcement while generally disregarding the FT regulations which they view as less important (Moore, 2008).

Some critics of FT question whether Northern-centric FT regulations can achieve goals of empowerment and participation beyond what can be achieved through domestic regulation.

While FT is based on the principle of participation, it is still contingent on gaining access to and control over knowledge that has already been codified by the British, Indian plantation owners, and Western NGOs. Tea pluckers themselves had little part in creating FT structures and so simply by engaging in FT, pluckers are already subject to the power of elites who shaped its creation by deciding which identities, discourses and interests could be included and which would be excluded (Gaventa 2006, 7). According to Gaventa (2006) “power, in its more insidious forms, may be internalized in terms of one’s values, self-esteem, and identities such that voices in visible places are but echoes of what the power holders who shaped those places want to hear” (ibid). Empowerment is not only about the right to participate effectively in a given space, but it is also about the right to define and shape that space; tea pluckers were denied such an opportunity (ibid).

Apart from political unions, there is another domestic movement amongst certain plantation management and other stakeholders (including Indian consumers), to improve the circumstances of tea plantation workers. Unfortunately, this movement is given little voice within the FT community. The struggle of Indian nationals to participate and contribute to improving the lot of tea pluckers exists in Darjeeling but is especially pronounced in Southern India where many of the power and identity struggles of Darjeeling are absent. Whether FT, as an outside force, achieves improvements above and beyond what the Indian state and civil society achieve on its own or whether FT’s standardize model impedes the advancement of domestic movements is the topic of the next sections.

6.1 Darjeeling

As we have seen thus far, FT in Darjeeling rarely functions according to its stated ideals due to a mainstream plantation approach which fails to address underlying power relations. Mr. Somani challenges anyone to find a difference between Fair and non-FT estates and, while this

challenge is met with difficulty, it can be achieved. However, whether this difference is a result of FT or a result of a pre-existing ethos on the plantation is questionable.

Over the past decade, the Makaibari estate has enjoyed much publicity for its FT practices ranging from a full page article in the New York Times to featured stories on the FLO and Transfair websites. What is most unique about this estate is that Rajah Banerjee, the owner, lives on the premises and is involved in its everyday management. This is exceptional because, as was noted earlier, the majority of Darjeeling estate owners reside in the distant city of Calcutta only visiting their estates annually. Another exceptional feature of the Makaibari estate is that many of the estate's tea pluckers believe that the JB is effective and has used the social premium for their benefit.

The Makaibari JB is composed of 14 members with two members belonging to each of the seven villages on the estate. The list of successfully implemented social programs is exhaustive. For example, Makaibari has created a computer center, a scholarship program, a scheme providing electricity, a bio-gas project for fuel as well as for profit-generation, and a credit program. One of the most innovative projects at Makaibari is the home stay program. Workers prepare a small bedroom and allow tourists to reside within their houses. This provides income for workers and educates foreigners about plantation life and the benefits of social programs.

However, the successful empowerment of workers at the Makaibari estate has more to do with the vision of the Makaibari community than with the success of FT regulations. Unlike other Darjeeling plantations, the workers at Makaibari effortlessly organize into the JB structure for three main reasons. Firstly, the progressive outlook of the Banerjee family has created a culture where workers are able to collaborate more comfortably with the management than on other Darjeeling estates where the colonial hierarchical structure remains prominent. Secondly, Makaibari is one of the smallest plantations in Darjeeling and therefore is able to function with much greater individual participation. Lastly, and most importantly, TransFair modeled the construction of its standards after the Makaibari estate. In 1992, FT representatives visited the estate to learn how to encourage plantations to evolve into independent, grassroots,

entrepreneurial communities. A democratic structure, similar to the JB, formed organically within plucker communities at Makaibari and was used by TransFair to design the JB. According to the estate owner/manager Mr. Banerjee,

Based on their findings at Makaibari, TransFair formed their initial draft for the tea producer's criteria which had been ongoing at Makaibari since 1920 when I joined the estate. Thus, we were the pioneer members of FLO. We are not interested in copying we are in it for evolving dynamically and holistically as a community (Moore, 2008k).

Therefore, the statement on TransFair's website that claims: "The FT price has enabled workers at Makaibari Tea Estate to establish various social and productive programs," (Transfair, 2008) is only a half-truth. Firstly, the Makaibari estate was engaged in these programs before TransFair's advent of FT regulations. Secondly, only a portion of the programs are funded by the social premium money; Tazo's CHAI project and the Makaibari Estate contribute the majority of funds to these projects.

However, even this exemplar estate does not fully align with FT ideology; its social vision only goes as far as the owner is willing to take it and the underlying power structure remains unchallenged. While some workers interviewed on the Makaibari estate knew what the JB was, few understood the meaning of FT. When asked if he had ever seen a representative from FLO, Nikhil Singh recounted, "Foreigners used to come to our village during the early days. People said they were FLO people. They roam around our village; take photos and saw the bio-gas unit" (Moore, 2008j). This statement demonstrates that the relationship between FLO and producers, a central tenant of FT, is still lacking even within the most exemplarily FT estate. Similarly, none of the Makaibari workers knew where their tea was sold or for what price demonstrating little transparency and involvement in direct trade. Therefore, while the JB does appear to be affecting some positive change and enacting some democratic principles, the power relationships within the supply chain have not been altered significantly. As Rodney North of Equal Exchange notes "FT was not created to be merely a kinder, gentler form of commerce that raised wages while leaving the basic structures of control unchanged. To do so would be to accept the status quo and the inequitable distribution of land, power and ownership" (Moore, 2009b).

6.2 Southern India; is FT needed?

While visitors of the Nilgiri region in South India will notice a varied spectrum of practices amongst plantations, traditionally, plantations in South India are reputed to operate with a higher level of regard for workers' rights than those in Northern India. Many interviewees attributed this difference to the fact that Southern India does not have the conflict-ridden colonial history or the associated identity struggle that exists in Darjeeling (both plantation management and workers are of Indian origin) (Moore, 2008).

In South India, many plantations exist which have cultivated a progressive vision for workers rights, sustainability, and social responsibility. Two such plantations reviewed in this study include the Chamraj and Mudis estates. The management of these estates choose to provide workers with amenities and opportunities that are much further-reaching than that required by either the Plantation Labor Act or FT. Upon meeting the management and workers of these estates, one may wonder what function FT serves for estates that already hold the ideals of social responsibility paramount.

6.21 Chamraj Estate

Situated in the Blue Mountain range of Nilgiris, The Chamraj estate, (owned by the United Nilgiri Tea Estates Co) was the first tea estate to be certified FT. The estate's commitment to empowerment and social service reaches far beyond the standards of FT. The management at the Chamraj estate believes that a true commitment to social responsibility requires action that extends beyond the plantation to the entire community as a whole. The management practices this belief by extending company programs and facilities to plantation laborers and to the general public alike.

The most apparent demonstration of this philosophy is embodied in the two orphanages housed on plantation grounds - one for boys and one for girls. Only two of the orphans are from the estate while the rest are from villages across Tamil Nadu. The orphans are given impeccable care and education without cost to them. The plantation also caters to the surrounding community by providing medical services to over 30,000 underprivileged patients

every year in addition to the worker population. The estate hospital offers sixty beds and modern equipment including a laboratory, ultra-sound, X-ray, ECG and O.T. facilities.

The Chamraj Estate School furthers the plantation's commitment to the community by educating 1,400 children of which 40% are children from the neighboring villages who are not associated with the plantation. The primary, high school, and junior college education is free for every child in the estate. The children have the choice of either English or Tamil as the medium of education. The school is equipped with 40 computers and has the highest pass rate in the district with 80% of students passing each year. Each year, over forty children from the plantation are sponsored for higher education. The children of the management attend the Chamraj school *with* the children of the laborers- an unprecedented occurrence in tea plantations where manager's children are usually driven to better schools outside the plantation. The upward mobility at Chamraj is also unprecedented as children of tea pluckers commonly rise in the ranks of plantation management. Monie, the factory manager exemplifies this upward mobility; his father and mother were both laborers on the tea plantation, he was educated by the schools of the plantation, went to university, and today is a manager (Moore, 2008i).

6.22 Mudis Estate

Another progressive estate, the Mudis Estate, is located in the Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu, Southern India. The Mudis Estate is owned by the Bombay Burma Trading Company (BBTC) which is India's oldest publicly quoted company created in 1863. It was set up by the Wallace Brothers but its equity was held jointly by Indian merchants and the Wallace Brothers. Unlike the FT estates in Darjeeling, tension between managers and workers is not palpable on the Mudis estate. The JB consists of five women and five men who are tasked with representing the 4,500 estate workers and dispersing the premium in their name. The JB members meet in a specially built meeting house where they engage in lively debate with women members contributing especially vociferously. The members enthusiastically share the long list of programs which they have successfully instituted including: benches and desks for the high

school, an impressively equipped hospital and school, life and accident insurance for workers and an assistance program for handicap members of the community. Of all the projects, the JB seems most proud of the scholarship program which has sent over one thousand students to schools of higher education since the program's inception in 2001. The scholarship money is generated from the interest received from the \$62,000 of Fair Trade funds invested in the bank (Moore, 2008).

The manager of the estate, Mr. Bipin Krishna strongly believes in the ideology of FT stating that FT has "furthered the vision of the company and has brought us together" meaning that FT has both encouraged progressive practices in the plantation and fostered a stronger connection between plantations and consumers (as is evident by the fact that I have journeyed across the ocean and up the hills to learn about the Mudis plantation). Mr. Krishna chairs the Indian FT Commission- a FT initiative formed by Indian plantation management to improve and advance FT. Unfortunately, the commission has been largely ignored by FLO and the commercial FT movement in general causing Mr. Krishna to grow frustrated that Indians do not have more ability to shape FT domestically. While some FT standards were modeled after these progressive estates, FT's Northern operatives only afford a token amount of participation to domestic actors.

Plantation management and workers have little control over the FT regulations that govern their plantation. In 2007, FLO introduced general FT standards for Hired Labor and submitted the document to the management of FT plantations for feedback (it was not submitted to plantation workers). Mr. Krishna was enthusiastic to respond with feedback about how some of the FT regulations are incompatible with the reality in his fields. For example, FLO stipulates that employment cannot be given only under the condition that the spouse works in the same establishment (Moore, 2008d). Mr. Krishna was hoping to bring to the attention of FLO that, due to the special circumstance of tea plantations where workers are provided with free housing, plantations must make certain requirements concerning the number of family members who must work in order to inhabit a plantation house. Otherwise, the plantation

would have to build a new house for each individual laborer, a feat that is not possible due to financial, as well as land, restrictions.

Mr. Chaturvedi, the Estates' assistant manager, also hoped to provide feedback. Mr. Chaturvedi had a long list of FT regulations which he believed created more harm than good. For example, FT regulations require that workers be provided with raincoats. The regulation also stipulates specifically that these raincoats be kept in 'a neutral' location and not be brought home with the workers in case they are coated with pesticide residue. As simple as this regulation appears, Mr. Chaturvedi points out many practical reasons why this regulation is not effective.

“When we give workers a raincoat they feel that they have ownership rights to it, requiring them to give it back at the end of the day is difficult. We have had many cases of raincoat theft. Similarly, when a worker is given the raincoat to take home, he will tend to it, cleaning it, drying it off, excreta. Yet, when workers are required to give them back, they are not tended to. Creating a 'neutral' storage place for the raincoats, keeping them from theft, tending to them, and arguing with workers over ownership almost makes it not worth working on rainy days” (Moore, 2008e).

Despite the fact that Mr. Krishna and Mr. Chaturvedi spent much time and effort formulating a response to FLO's Hired Labor document, they were disappointed to find that their feedback was not responded to nor were any of their recommendations adopted.

In the end, what makes the difference for worker empowerment is not that a plantation is certified FT but that the estate management is committed to liberate and not exploit its workers. If there is no such commitment amongst managers, the estate may still be certified FT but the social conditions will be indistinguishable from every other plantation. TransFair's claim that “FT Certification empowers farmers and farm workers to lift themselves out of poverty” (Transfair, 2008) is therefore debatable. Without FT, the Maklabri, Mudis and Chamraj plantations would still operate with the same level of regard for workers rights albeit with potentially less publicity from the West.

Unfortunately, even the publicity gained from FT does not contribute a substantial economic benefit to FT plantations. Like many plantations in the region, the BBTC has been facing a deficit for six years. In the Kerala region of India, (where this plantation is located), 24 gardens have

shut down in the past year alone. The FT system has not yet been successful enough to provide the BBTC's Mudis estate with enough revenue to carry out social development projects, currently the estate itself is funding such projects. As the company continues to operate at a loss, the future looks grim and simply 'furthering the vision' of plantations may not be enough to help these workers. Mr. Chatuvedi explains "the company may not be here in a few years. And I guarantee that the next company to take over this land will not be Fair Trade!"

Plantations in Darjeeling face a similar dilemma. In 2008, the Upajau estate earned only \$500-\$600 from FT because the management decided to focus on quality, where they are most competitive, rather than on quantity. This choice meant that the Upajau estate received minimal premium money. Transfair (2008) states that, "by receiving a fair price, FT producers can avoid cost-cutting practices that sacrifice quality." Yet, this is not true in areas such as Darjeeling. FLO determines the amount of premium received by each estate based on the quantity of tea sold; irrespective of quality each estate is awarded USD 0.50 per kg of tea. Darjeeling has a niche in high quality tea and therefore, most plantations tend to focus on quality thereby sacrificing quantity (the two are mutually exclusive). Consequently, Darjeeling receives very small amounts of premium money. Similarly, the minimum price is irrelevant because the prices of the high quality tea are so far above FLO's minimum price. Such a dilemma demonstrates that FT structures, such as the premium, have not been properly tailored to the unique circumstances of Darjeeling. As Mr. Banerjee states, "FT is applying a cookie-cutter model to development of communities with very specific needs" (Moore, 2008k). While those in favor of mainstreaming FT would argue that this dilemma can be solved by incorporating larger tea companies into the FT model, others would counter that a better solution would be to break down plantations into cooperatives. In this line of thinking, cooperatives with smaller workforces and more direct relationships with buyers can better plan and utilize the FT money.

7. Conclusion

FT creates new avenues of power within the traditional channels of a tea plantation. While the outcome is not controlled by any one actor, the impact affects the lives of thousands of the most vulnerable people in the world. In some cases, FT can encourage a vision of social responsibility, provide funds to the JB, or create a dialog between producers and consumers. However, as this paper has demonstrated, agendas can also regress as much as they can progress. The large corporations that dominate traditional global markets are now gaining increasing power over FT markets thereby threatening to control the very industry that formed in opposition to their economic hegemony. This raises somber questions about who is ultimately deriving the most benefit from FT certification.

The greatest danger for producers may ultimately be that mismanagement or abuse of FT criteria could create doubt among consumers causing them to give up on FT initiatives altogether. Such a defeat would undermine the progress of thousands of FT activists, from college students in the US and UK to cooperative members in Tanzania, who have struggled tirelessly to bring equity and transparency to international trade. Therefore, it is crucial at this juncture that FT is reevaluated in order to sustain the progress of the movement and ensure that the system is accomplishing its developmental goals to the best of its ability.

While recommendations for reform are not within the prevue of this paper, it is important to suggest some potential ways forward. Firstly, FT systems must be designed with greater complexity; rather than the current simplistic technical regulations, FT must recognize power dynamics. One way to begin this complex task would be to research and understand the different needs of communities rather than implementing a 'one size fits all' model across communities in different countries or regions. Secondly, in order to protect FT's brand value, consumers must be able to distinguish between a company such as Equal Exchange that is fully committed to FT and one such as Tesco which creates suspicion in the minds of consumers. One way this could be achieved is by creating a label or website which allows consumers to differentiate between tea produced in cooperatives and tea in plantations or companies that

have fully committed their entire product line to FT verse those that do some FT business yet, are far from committed. Thirdly, monitoring methods must be improved and the option of a consensual monitoring approach should be explored further. Finally, control of the FT system must be placed more squarely in the hands of domestic bodies. FT has progressed rapidly in the past 20 years and if it is able to recover its innovative and radical commitment to development we may soon find ourselves in a world where FT is no longer needed.

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