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**THE ETHICS OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION
GOVERNANCE: EXPLORING THE CULTURAL ECONOMIES
OF 'ALTERNATIVE' RETAILING**

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Abstract

This paper explores the mingling of space, place, and ethics in the constitution of a cultural economy of 'alternative' retail sites; retailing space and the consequences it has in the construction of the ethical relationalities of sustainable consumption and lifestyles has remained relatively unexplored. It does so through comparative investigation of *charity shops* and *world-shops*. The first concern here is to assess the role of Oxfam charity shops and world-shops as retail outlets that promote an 'expansive relational ethic' that works to develop more sustainable consumption. That role is seen to engender material and discursive ambiguities that complicate ethical appeal – especially for Oxfam shops. The second concern is to explore the '*imagineering*' of an ethically charged sense of place in these retail spaces where used and/or fair trade goods are sold. Moral geographies are here created through a complex network of connections and disconnections among spaces and places of production, consumption, and retailing. This analysis then prompts a series of reflections designed to assess the broader import of 'alternative' retail spaces fostering the geographies of sustainable lifestyles. Here, the concern is to probe whether a 'retail of moral difference' can be discerned. The paper concludes by suggesting that future research ought to consider in greater depth how complex ethical fields underpinning 'alternative' retailing may lead to new challenges and opportunities for the governance and 'planning' for more sustainable consumption and lifestyles.

We came [to volunteer at an Oxfam charity shop] after the tsunami—we really wanted to do something. We do an afternoon a week. It's really rewarding—you can see the link between this and Oxfam's work—see this price tag: “£13.99 sends 56 jumpers to Africa”. ... Supporting Oxfam is definitely a lifetime commitment.

(Oxfam volunteer quoted in *Retail Therapy* section of *Inside Oxfam* [Oxfam, 2006a])

... And the performance I have been surrounded by is full of colours: the soft ones of Senegalese batik tissues, the bright ones of the desert sand, the ones of black and white smiles of new friends that come from distant lands, those lively and rebellious of South American staples...

An ensemble of a thousand smells—scents of lands that suddenly get painted in my mind... Of hands that testify an honest labour... Of faces that show a joy which comes from the inside, not afraid of the obstacles along the way... Of eyes tired but full of hope, that while looking indignant at the umpteenth injustice committed somewhere in the world, are already searching for new ways to make it a better place to live in...

It has been beautiful but weird, because the more than the images I'm filling my soul with, the more I'm getting carrying away, what enriches me constantly, is the sensation of joining a flux of life, of lives indeed. So, in the end I think that this is the real richness, the most precious one, the one that should live inside everyone who is concerned with fair trade; the same one I discovered in some of the people I now feel grateful for having worked with. People who made me understand, with no need of any words, how big the value hidden behind simple operations; people that showed me how a box of coffee can turn into the invaluable sign of an invaluable human relationship. In a word, people that made me feel a widespread sense of harmony with the world.

(Italian worldshop volunteer speaking about her experiences [NEWS, 2004, page 3])

It is increasingly evident that the most mundane consumption choices have implications around the globe, and consumers are exhorted to choose responsibly and embrace the political participation opportunities offered with every shopping trip. ... By combining improvements to the mainstream policy strategy with explicit support for a diversity of alternative approaches which build new social and economic institutions for consumption, governments could harness the energies of ecological citizens to make significant strides along the road to sustainability.

(Seyfang, 2006, 304)

Introduction

Many now take seriously sustainable and ethical consumption as well as its implications for how we understand contemporary spatial relations of consumer society and their bid in creating more sustainable lifestyles (e.g. Harrison et al, 2005; Popke, 2006; Seyfang, 2006). Thus, for instance, Barnett et al (2005, page 25) seek to fashion

an argument about the relationships between consumption, ethics and political action that starts from the assumption that there is no good reason to suppose that spatial distance necessarily diminishes either a felt responsibility or practical capacity to care for others.

At the same time, though, here and elsewhere (Leyshon et al, 2003; Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Littler, 2009; but cf. Malpass et al, 2007), the complex role of *place* in constructing the material and discursive bases of sustainable consumption tends to be glossed. As Bryant and Goodman (2004) and Goodman (2004) argue, the deployment of place in transnational ethical consumption networks—notably in the '*imagined*' (Routledge, 1997) descriptions of producer-based ecologies—is fundamental to the space-shrinking relational ethics underpinning them¹. Such deployment in the form of local and regional labelling schemes and provisioning figures greatly in the flourishing ethically-inflected local food movements in the UK and US (e.g. DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Morgan et al, 2006; Selfa and Qazi,

¹ For alternative interpretations, see Vural (2008), Lyon (2006) and Wright (2004).

2005). Thus, the politics of ‘caring at a distance’ that Barnett et al (2005; see also Smith, 1998) link to ethical consumption is often realised in producer-consumer networks that encompass and blur place(s) through connections across space.

Specifically, researchers have yet to explore in any real detail the ‘place’ of retail—and that particularly of ‘alternative’ retail—in the creation and practices of sustainable consumption and lifestyles. Related work has focused on ‘political shopping’ and ‘political consumerism’ (Clarke et al, 2007; Micheletti, 2003; Sassatelli, 2006; see also Seyfang, 2006 and *Cultural Studies*, 2008) which explores the politics of consumer choice and that of shopping practice in the contexts of more sustainable and ethical consumption. Rather, in this and other writings specific to sustainable consumption and lifestyles (Hinton and Goodman, forthcoming, Jackson, 2006; Princen et al, 2002), the crucial role of the retail environment and its discourses in developing relationships between these spaces, consumers and their choices for more sustainable consumption remains unexamined. In addition, the ethical/moral characteristics of these relations and the potential ambiguities—given the drive for more consumption but simply of a different kind and coincident globalisation of production/consumption networks—inherent in their material and discursive networks remain equally unexamined. Thus, we would argue that ‘planning’ for and governing sustainable consumption and lifestyles—be it at the scale of UK government sustainability policy or that of the everyday purchases of consumers—needs to consider the complexities and complications of the ethics of sustainable consumption as practiced in retail settings. Indeed, even so-called ‘post’ consumers need somewhere to shop and taking a first cut, as we do here, on two particular places of alternative retail and the sorts of (non)ambiguous ethics and behaviours they might create is one important and timely way to begin. In this way, we hope the conceptual discussions in this paper add some grounded substance to the recent contributions in this journal on more sustainable consumption (Barrett et al, 2005; Collins and Fairchild, 2007; Spaargaren, 2000), sustainable knowledge and eco-labelling (Grunwald, 2007; Lidskog et al, 2005; Mcdermott et al, 2007), the governance of sustainability (Marsden, 2006; Meadowcroft, 2007; Walker and Shove, 2007) as well as the current discussions emanating from this special issue on the practices of sustainable lifestyles.

To these ends, this paper explores the intermingling of space, place, and ethics in the constitution of a cultural economy of alternative retailing. It does so through comparative investigation of *charity shops* (specifically those of the NGO Oxfam), and *world-shops* (also labelled ‘one world shops’) independent stores located in the North that sell fair trade goods often produced in the South. The first concern here is to assess the role of Oxfam charity shops and world-shops as retail outlets that promote an ‘expansive relational ethic’ (Goodman 2004) of alternative consumption. That role is seen to engender material and discursive ambiguities that complicate ethical appeal – especially for Oxfam shops. The second concern is to explore the ‘*imagineering*’ of an ethically charged sense of place in these retail spaces where used and/or fair trade goods are sold. Moral geographies are here created through a complex network of connections and disconnections among spaces and places of production, consumption, and retailing. This analysis then prompts a series of reflections designed to assess the broader import of ‘alternative’ retail spaces. Here, the concern is to probe whether a ‘retail of moral difference’ can be discerned. The paper concludes by suggesting that future research ought to consider in greater depth how complex ethical fields underpinning ‘alternative’ retailing may lead to new challenges and opportunities for the governance and ‘planning’ for more sustainable consumption and lifestyles.

In doing so, this paper seeks to build on diverse literatures including those relating to 'second-hand cultures' (Crewe et al, 2003; Gregson and Crewe, 2003; Gregson et al, 2000, 2002a,b), the new retail geography (Wrigley and Lowe, 1996, 2002; Wrigley and Marston, 2002; Lowe, 2002), moral geographies of socio-political change (Bryant, 2005; Bryant and Jarsosz, 2004; Cloke, 2002; Lee and Smith, 2004; Popke, 2003; Sayer and Storper, 1997; Smith, 2000; Valentine, 2003), charity and worldshop retail management (Horne, 1998; Parsons, 2002; Nichols, 2002) and, of course, sustainable and ethical consumption more generally (e.g. Jackson, 2006; Clarke et al, 2007). In contrast to work on micro-geographies of performance at charity shops (e.g. Gregson et al, 2002a, b; Parsons, 2006) and associated professional development (e.g. Broadbridge and Parsons, 2003), we look to extend that portion of Gregson and Crewe's (2003, pages 111-172) work concerned with shifting commodity cultures (Jackson 1999) and biographies (Cook and Crang, 1996; Cook et al, 1998; Kopytoff, 1986) of goods sold in these shops and their coincident commodity chains/systems (e.g. Yakovleva, 2007; Yakovleva and Flynn (2004)). Taking Oxfam as one instance of charity retail, we explore how its shops are sites that are ripe with material and discursive ambiguity. In constructing an alternative, sustainable consumption place, Oxfam produces moralized discourses that infuse the practice of (re)selling items (including those once produced under dubious conditions) and the sale of fair trade products. Focussing on contradictions in such *ethical fields*, we consider how the fair trade slogan 'a better deal for producers' rubs up against Oxfam's implied notion of 'a better deal for the consumer' in the provisioning of brands sometimes produced with sweatshop labour. Here, then, we contrast what we term a *second-hand ethics* of re-sell with a *first-hand ethics* of fair trade new-sell that define, at least in part, contemporary ethics in Oxfam shops.

We extend this analysis of ethical fields shaped by first- and second-hand ethics² by examining previously little studied 'worldshops' – so named by the Network of European Worldshops (NEWS). Selling only fair trade commodities, and instrumental today as a retail vehicle of the fair trade movement, we explore the first-hand moral economies and geographies created in this retail space. We also consider how the ethical field of the worldshop compares with that of Oxfam charity shops in constituting alternative retailing.

While somewhat critical at times of Oxfam charity shops and worldshops, we nonetheless salute their aim of making a difference by helping the poor through equitable exchange, notably between North and South, in the construction of more sustainable lifestyles. Still, such normative agreement must not blind us to the need to explore ambiguities surrounding alternative retail, especially in today's neo-liberal commercial context. There is a critique here, then, of how the promotion of a commercial 'alternative' can be compromised through material and discursive practices that simply legitimate the social value of consumerism (Mulligan, 2007). And yet, when charity shops and worldshops are placed in wider social movement contexts, they might equally be seen to serve a useful 'propaganda' function for activists who need to demonstrate that there 'is an alternative' (however imperfect) to mainstream models promoted under neo-liberalism. Asking how charity and world-shops would construct moral geographies that differ from mainstream retailing is hence a fruitful place to start.

² This framing of the ethics of 'alternative' retailing is mainly useful here insofar as it facilitates our discussion of the material and discursive role of used and fair trade goods in these retail sites.

Locating ethics in alternative retailing

Writers who advocate a ‘new retail geography’ underline that exploring inter-related spaces of retailing and consumption means taking “cultural and economic geographies seriously” (Lowe, 2002, page 5). A number of studies on ‘alternative’ spaces of retailing and consumption attempt to do just that³, and nowhere is this more true than in helping understand the processes of sustainable consumption and lifestyle creation through shopping and retail spaces. Much of this research focuses on the UK charity shop, notably work by Gregson, Crewe, and Brooks. These scholars address there the “connection between retailers and in-store geographies” in discourses of ‘emplaced’ talk and practice (Gregson et al, 2002a, 1663), ethnographies of shopping (Gregson et al, 2002b) and narratives of consumption and the body (Gregson et al, 2000). Such work, plus research on car-boot sales and ‘retro-retailing’, culminates in *Second-hand Cultures* (Gregson and Crewe, 2003) where ‘marginal’ and alternative spaces of the charity shop are considered in detail.

A clear message to emerge from such work is that the meanings that people attach to the practices of ‘alternative’ and ‘charity’ shopping are decidedly ambiguous. As Goss (2004, page 374) points out, Gregson et al’s ethnographies reveal that charity-related consumption is less about moral economies of being ‘alternative’ and more about everyday activities that are “structured primarily by dominant discourses of thrift and value, or taste and distinction” (see also Gregson and Crewe, 2003, pages 10-12).⁴

Allied work in retail management and non-profit studies also contributes to the ethnography of charity retail. The focus here is on evolving organizational and managerial traits of the charity shop *qua* business: the performance of volunteering (Parsons, 2006), shop ‘branding’ (Girod, 2005), the changing business climate (Horne, 1998; Horne and Broadbridge, 1995; Parsons, 2002, 2004a) and ‘professionalization’ of the workforce (Broadbridge and Parsons, 2003, 2004; Parsons, 2004b; Parsons and Broadbridge, 2004). This research reveals how these traits generate ambiguity both in diverse day-to-day management operations and more widely with respect to the spread of upmarket goods (and hence prices) there.

If ethical concerns are not far from the surface in work on the shifting nature of *how* the ‘charity business’ (Lloyd, 1993) works, there is a parallel interest in the ethics of *what* this sector produces in the way of items ‘fit’ for consumption. Here, that business can be seen to collide with the fair-trade movement that is itself searching for new ways of getting across its products and message (Nichols, 2002). True, the charity sector and the fair-trade movement are both seeking to promote progressive moral geographies based on ‘caring at a distance’ (Smith, 2000). Yet we suggest these institutions are nonetheless embedded in ethical fields shaped by ambiguity – a situation occasioned by their placement in a wider context where capitalist concerns are pre-eminent and actors are differentially empowered (Bryant, 2005; Miller, 2001; Smith, 2000; Sayer and Storper, 1997). Thus, to what extent and in what ways do alternative retailing (and consumption) practices mimic those in the mainstream sector? If they do, how far is an ethic of being ‘alternative’ eroded? How might complex ethical negotiations in alternative retail and consumption be understood?

To address such questions, we find it helpful to distinguish here between *first-hand ethics* and *second-hand ethics* in analysing alternative retail. First-hand ethics relates to the practice of

³ On ‘alternative economic spaces’ see Leyshon et al (2003) and Princen et al (2002); an excellent related review is Hughes (2005).

⁴ However, this is an overly selective reading by Goss of their work and hence fails to acknowledge fully the extent to which they so indeed address the ambiguities of ‘alternativeness’ in charity shops.

selling (new) fair trade products and involves a holistic approach to production, sale and consumption based on normative rules of what is fair and equitable. This encompasses everything from transparent commodity chains to consumer education, from publication of codes of practice to direct cooperation with producers. In contrast, second-hand ethics relates to the practice of selling (typically) used donated goods and involves a disjointed approach to their production, sale and consumption. Here, there are no clear normative rules that unite production, sale and consumption – given that the alternative retailer does not control production. There is thus the potential for ethical vulnerability here as inconsistencies may arise between the ethics of production (‘embedded’ in the donations that are sold) and the ethics that the organisation may wish to promote in society generally.

On the one hand, then, there is the ethical field encompassing discourses and activities of the charity sector as a whole —geographies of care that inform each charity. Examples here include helping vulnerable children in the North (e.g. Bernardos), the poor of the South (e.g. Oxfam) or both (e.g. Save the Children). On the other hand, there is the sale in charity shops of ethically ambiguous clothes and toys, many produced under suspect labour and ecological conditions (Hale, 2000; Hale and Shaw, 2001; Klein, 2000; see also *Antipode*, 2004). While the sweat and bodily secretions of previous owners can be washed off clothes re-sold in charity shops (Gregson and Crewe, 2003, 155-163; Gregson et al, 2000), it is much harder to wash out the permanent ethical ‘imprint’ of the sweated labour that was instrumental in the production of such clothing in the first place.

The situation is further complicated when we look at charity shops operated by Oxfam, one of the most successful charity ‘brands’ in the UK and beyond. Oxfam began life as the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, a group initially dedicated to campaigning for food and medicine for civilians trapped in Greece during the Second World War (Oxfam, 1999). Subsequently, the organisation continued famine relief and poverty alleviation work, but has gone global working now in more than 70 countries around the world. It has also broadened the sorts of work that it does, as even a cursory glance through the *Inside Oxfam* magazine reveals (e.g. Oxfam, 2006a). Thus, it is notably involved in political lobbying, consumer education, high street retailing, music festivals, general fundraising, disaster relief, community development, environmental conservation, and disease treatment. It has become a leading international NGO, recognised around the world with a powerful network of national organisations. In the UK, Oxfam’s income in 2005-6 was £310.5 million while expenditure was £298 million; its charity shops contributed around 24% of total income in that year, down from about one-third of total income over the past five years (Oxfam, 2006b). More than this, Oxfam’s charity shops are the visible ‘face’ of the NGO in the UK with more than 800 shops staffed by 20,000 volunteers. These shops constitute a vivid reminder of Oxfam’s global fight against poverty and social injustice, including steps it takes to support alternative futures for the poor through fair trade (e.g. Oxfam, 2007c).

Given this purpose, it is hardly surprising that, prominently displayed amongst the racks of donated items, can be found an array of fair trade goods. While no longer selling own-brand fair trade products, Oxfam does sell greeting cards from Global Crafts, soccer balls from the Play Fair Sports Company, Geobars from Traidcraft, and ubiquitous coffee, tea, and cocoa from Cafédirect (a company Oxfam helped to set up). That the first-hand ethics of fair trade

sit side-by-side with the second-hand ethics of used goods is not lost on Oxfam. Indeed, their ‘ethical purchasing’ policy⁵ recognizes that

[t]he globalisation of trade means that many of the goods on sale in the UK have been produced by people who experience dangerous or discriminatory working conditions.

How the places and spaces of production, consumption and charity play out in the discursive and material practices of Oxfam shops is treated further below.

Some of the ambiguities associated with first-hand and second-hand ethics can be seen when we contrast the ethical field of the Oxfam shop with that of the retail space of worldshops. Affiliated to the Network of European Worldshops (NEWS), there are some 2,500 stores in over 13 countries in Europe that are exclusive retailers of fairly traded ‘cultural products’ (Littrell and Dickson, 1999) such as crafts and textiles, as well as fair trade staples like coffee, chocolate, tea, nuts, and dried fruits. Worldshops also have a growing presence in the US and Canada through advocacy by the Mennonite fair trade organization known as Ten Thousand Villages that has upwards of 180 stores. Overall, ‘worldshops are the windows of Fair Trade to the wider world, influencing the choices people make as they do their everyday shopping’ (NEWS, 2007d).

Worldshops have been wrongly overlooked as an important focus of study in their own right – as increasingly significant players in alternative retailing. As with fair trade in general, they are dedicated spaces of intention seeking to connect consumers with producers across a host of commodities. Here, and building on Lowe’s (2002, page 6) aphorism that ‘[g]oods are substantiated through [retail] place and [retail] place makes consumption meaningful’, we explore how worldshops attempt to distinguish themselves as ethically-based retail practices through exclusive provisioning of fair trade goods.

We now turn to an evaluation of the processes and ambiguities associated with first-hand and second-hand ethics manifested in the retailing practices of charity shops and worldshops.

Transparency and ethics in caring at a distance

The moral geographies of Oxfam charity shops and worldshops reflect ‘expansive relational ethics’ (Goodman, 2004). Both retailers promote the care of distant others: Oxfam through development work and fair trade sales, and worldshops through their exclusive stocking of fair trade items. Key here is transparency in retailing as well as copious amounts of consumer information. Yet how this process unfolds is another matter, as the two retailers reveal similarities and differences in practice.

⁵ The full policy: ‘Oxfam strives to purchase goods and services which are produced and delivered under conditions which do not involve abuse or exploitation, and which have the least negative impact on the environment. These principles form the basis of Oxfam’s Ethical Purchasing policy. The globalisation of trade means that many of the goods on sale in the UK have been produced by people who experience dangerous or discriminatory working conditions. The companies which produce or package the goods for sale in Oxfam shops are committed to meeting the following Code of Conduct, both in their own companies and in their supply chains: employment is freely chosen, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected, working conditions are safe and hygienic, there is no exploitation of children, living wages are paid, working hours are not excessive, no discrimination is practised, regular employment is provided, no harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed’ (Oxfam, 2007a).

Oxfam's ambiguous ethical fields

Walk through the door of any Oxfam charity shop and you are struck by the sheer amount of information provided to consumers. This variation on the 'network' and 'information' society (e.g. Castells, 2000; Wittel, 2001; Hughes, 2000) constructs ethically-charged connections relating consumers to the world's poor through brochures, posters, product labels and sales tags. The production of transparent and useful knowledge is different, however, for used goods and fair-trade goods. For the latter, there is an emphatic commitment to 'non-charity' and an associated crystal clear vision back along the commodity chain to producers and the political economy of production. For example, the brochure for the Fairtrade Foundation's 'Make Fairtrade Your Habit' campaign, not only lets farmers and others speak for themselves but also provides vibrant images of (always) smiling producers engaged in fair trade practices (see **Figure 1: Making Fairtrade images and discourses your habit**). In another brochure, meanwhile, a 'bright future' is promised for people in the South who will be able 'to set up small businesses and work their way out of poverty' (see **Figure 2: Oxfam: A bright future for fair trade**). A first-hand ethics comes shining through here in the attempt to connect places of production and consumption.

In contrast, *used* clothing (and other used items) for sale in these same shops reflects a second-hand ethics that prompts a different sort of representation by the organisation. Given that the fetish is intact in these items—production processes are hidden, after all, from consumers—Oxfam alters the direction and purpose of its moral lens. Here, the 'transparent' vision on offer is *forward* oriented – that is, towards distant and needy others who, it is stated, are the primary beneficiaries of money received as a result of consumer purchases. To this end, 'imagined' sales tags are attached to many used items (see **Figure 3: Oxfam shop sales tags**). There are three things we need to note about these tags. First, they make the point that Oxfam is carefully targeting the *kinds of people* that it assists – the poorest of the poor. For example, the tag on one item of children's clothing proclaims: "£5.99 buys new clothes for a street kid in Ethiopia". There is a black and white photograph of six street children, smiling in new clothing presumably paid for out of funds generated in the shops. Second, the sales tags emphasise that Oxfam is carefully targeting the *types of assistance* it provides in order to maximise benefit to recipients. Thus, one tag suggests that "£7.99 buys cement to line a well in Mozambique", while "£1.99 helps to run a tree nursery in Bangladesh"—both practices vital to community welfare, as the accompanying photographs aim to illustrate. Third, the tags stress that Oxfam has 'global reach' in as much as it works with poor people around the world, albeit with a concentration in the poorest countries. The tags link assistance to *specific* places such as Mozambique, Ethiopia, Vietnam or Bangladesh – the better to underline the practical and tangible nature of this NGO's interventions.

In this way, consumers are invited to learn about and reflect on the plight of those less fortunate than themselves even as they are reminded that consumption in the shop is no ordinary exchange. Rather, it is an exchange (unlike in fair trade schemes) that is linked to forward-directed knowledge as to who benefits from Oxfam work – that is, of course, funded in part by the purchase of that well-worn (if 'hip') pair of jeans. Yet buying these items is simultaneously ordinary in that knowledge about the conditions of production remains sealed firmly from view, as with any conventional consumer product. As such, transparency *backwards* along the commodity chain is conspicuously absent – serving thereby to conveniently blot out ethically dubious product histories that might disrupt Oxfam's upbeat moral geographical imaginaries.

Here, then, in a shop in which both used and fair trade goods jostle for consumer attention, moral ambiguity is rife as the first-hand ethics of fair trade rub against the second-hand ethics of used goods. The ethical fields of Oxfam retailing are thereby blurred as they are interwoven. In the process, and given de facto product censorship surrounding used items rendered safely ‘anonymous’,⁶ the majority of goods (which are indeed usually used) sold at Oxfam shops put a break on the expansive relational ethic of its operations. The sale of used goods in this manner enshrines a contradictory second-hand ethics at the heart of Oxfam retailing that simultaneously boosts income and ethical vulnerability—the latter relating to the charge of ‘profiteering’ from sweated labour.

The world(shop) of fair-trade goods

Walk into a typical worldshop and, as with Oxfam, you are struck by the large amount of educational information available. Once again, there is careful imaginering: colourful and smiling images of distant Others in the guise of fair trade growers, weavers, and farmers dance before the eyes on products and posters, all of which are accompanied by livelihood stories. Yet there are points of contrast with Oxfam too. As the flowery introductory passage from a worldshop volunteer indicates, these shops often mark themselves out through exotic scents (notably incense)—something that is very different from Oxfam shops where the smell of used goods (clothing, books, toys) is only partly camouflaged by the presence of ‘sweet-smelling’ fair trade items. Before considering in more detail the contrasting retail settings of worldshops and charity shops, we need to briefly present the history⁷ and practices of worldshops.

Worldshops, fair trade and moral governance

While a cornerstone of the fair trade movement, the cultural economy of worldshops has received little attention. Indeed, even in-depth work on fair trade tends to focus on expansion into the mainstream, rather than on a dedicated fair trade retailer such as the worldshop (e.g. Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Low and Davenport, 2005). Such neglect obscures one of the more fascinating aspects of the fair trade movement. Self-billed as the “windows of Fair Trade” (NEWS, 2007d) and “the consumer’s first point of contact with Fair Trade” (NEWS, 2007a), worldshops are united in their function as a key site for promoting the fair trade model, even as they are differentiated by the manner in which they express that role. Thus, while all work to the same ‘broad criteria’⁸, NEWS-member shops are nonetheless quite diverse, ranging from sophisticated high street outlets selling *haute couture* handbags from India to volunteer-run church back rooms selling basmati rice, medicinal teas, and Nepalese jewellery. At the same time, though, these diverse sites all sell fairly traded handicrafts – what Littrel and Dickson (1999) call ‘cultural products’ (see below).

⁶ This is not to say, however, that consumers are immune to reflection on past use of items they purchase. See Gregson and Crewe (2003, page 143) for a fascinating discussion of stories by consumers about former owners and uses of items that they have bought from charity shops. Still, such speculation about previous *owners and consumers* is different from ‘deeper’ knowledge about conditions faced by those who *produced* the items in the first place – which is our concern here.

⁷ A full history including the role of worldshops in the contemporary fair trade movement has yet to be written.

⁸ According to NEWS, these criteria include: [1] A fair price is ensured to the producer... This cost provides a living wage that also covers the cost of production; [2] Long term co-operation, allowing producers to finance the development of their communities; [3] Good working conditions with adequate health and safety procedures for all workers; [4] Democratic working processes define the make-up of producer-led co-operatives and workers' associations; [5] Respect and promotion of human rights, especially those of women, children and people with disabilities; [6] Ecologically sound production (NEWS 2005d).

Emerging from religiously inspired social movements that advocated a just international trading order in the 1970s and 1980s, and thereafter merging into the fair trade movement, worldshops are subject today to a series of governance regimes that purport to underpin the ethics of their retailing. Three interrelated regimes that construct, control and police are involved here. The first two, associated with the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO) and the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT), are important in regulating the circulation of fair trade goods in worldshops (as well as in Oxfam shops), but operate in a slightly different manner. Thus, FLO standards apply mainly to food commodities. Once these commodities are certified as 'fair trade', they are festooned with the FLO logo. IFAT, by contrast, assesses textiles and handicrafts. However, rather than certifying individual products, it designates the groups and companies that sell these products as 'Fair Trade Organizations' (FTOs), thereby giving these institutions the cultural cache of 'IFAT FTO' status. Worldshops also rely on a third governance regime in the construction and safeguarding of the ethical field on which retail operations are based. Thus, to be a member of NEWS, they must work to the following criteria:

- (1) the shop endorses, through its own mission or values statements, publicity material and actions, the definition and principles of Fair Trade;
- (2) the primary purpose for existing as a shop is to promote Fair Trade. Fairly traded products therefore take up the most important share of the shop's stock;
- (3) the shop reinvests the profits from its sale of products into the Fair Trade system;
- (4) the shop informs the public about its aims, the origin of the products, the producers and about world trade. It supports campaigns to improve the situation of producers, as well as to influence national and international policies. (NEWS, 2007a)

These regimes define a first-hand ethics of fair trade, with worldshops dedicated retailers of that trade. Such regulation has an impact, not least in how 'good fair trade practice' is represented to consumers in these shops – thereby raising points of comparison with the situation faced by Oxfam shops.

Worldshop retailing: Visualizing production as 'non-charity'

The first-hand ethics of fair trade assumes storewide proportions in worldshops. From logos and slogans on products and posters to ubiquitous brochures near cash registers and store entrances, these shops present themselves as spaces wholly dedicated to educating consumers "about the realities and contexts behind the products on sale" (NEWS, 2007a). These materials, part of strategies Barnett et al (2005, page 31) argue govern ethical consumption more broadly, describe in detail the production and consumption of commodities for sale in worldshops. They thus help to make these spaces simultaneously ethical and political through carefully targeted knowledge dissemination. Further, and unlike ethical ambiguities noted with regard to Oxfam, worldshops seek to avoid ambiguity by *only* stocking fair trade goods, thereby conforming to the governance regimes described above. Hence, there is a distinctively comprehensive ethical vision about the production of *all* their goods that is noticeably lacking in Oxfam counterparts.

With nothing to hide, political 'shop talk' is encouraged at worldshops as part of a wider education campaign. Strategies include engaging consumers through questions and answers about fair trade, drawing attention to particular items and their ethical production, or generally serving as a meeting place for "... like-minded individuals who come to discuss, share ideas, and exchange views" (NEWS, 2007d). Such talk is seemingly akin to that of the

‘charity talk’ that Gregson et al (2002a,b) discuss. Yet there are important differences here too. At Oxfam, political talk is selective – comprehensive about some things (such as fair trade items and the forward-looking benefits of Oxfam development work made possible through shop purchases), but coy and evasive about other things (such as the production conditions of donated goods that may have been made with sweatshop labour). In the worldshop, in contrast, there is greater freedom to compare fair trade commodity chains (proudly proclaimed to define production and consumption for all worldshop items) with unfair trade commodity chains (which shape production and consumption in mainstream commerce). Here, having nothing to hide means that these shops (unlike Oxfam shops) have nothing to lose. Indeed, they have everything to gain, as wide-ranging political talk helps to promote business in a retail world bedevilled by ambiguity and hypocrisy.

These two retailers may also be compared on other matters. Consider, for instance, how worldshops are resolutely ‘non-charity’ in outlook. True, these shops vary a good deal among themselves – some more ‘business-like’, others more ‘amateur’ for example – as to how they operate. Yet, a core premise linking them is that they are *not* about charity in as much as they promote an alternative business model. ‘Trade not aid’ works to develop “... a partnership between producers, traders and consumers who work together to improve peoples’ livelihoods via better access to markets and the promotion of sustainable development” (NEWS, 2007c). Here, the mantra ‘people before profits’ becomes ‘people *and* profits’ – the better to support equitable *economic* relations between producers, retailers, and consumers in the marketplace. As with charity shops, then, retailing in worldshops reflects faith in the utility of the market, as well as a recognition that profit is essential to the process, albeit profit that is ploughed back into the organisation not to shareholders. Yet, whereas Oxfam shops are there notably to fund charity work, worldshops eschew charity altogether in favour of an alternative business model based on fair trade.

Spaces, Places and Charity and Worldshop Moral Geographies

Yet in the case of both worldshops and Oxfam charity shops, issues surrounding the role of space and place in the construction of moral geographies of alternative retailing loom large. Here, recent work, notably by Barnett et al (2005), considers inter-linkages of space and place thereby engaging with wider debates on these concepts in the context of ethical and sustainable consumption (e.g. Malpass et al, 2007) and questions of the ‘responsibilities’ of the North (Lawson, 2007; Massey, 2004).

In assessing ethical consumption and fair trade, these scholars challenge accounts of space and place that treat them as opposites. As they put it—echoing work on ‘distanciation’ and ‘displacement’ in commodity geographies (e.g. Cook and Crang, 1996; Crang, 1996)— “[p]lace is understood to be the location of clear-cut ethical commitments, while space serves as a shorthand for abstract, alienated relations in which distance intervenes to complicate and extend the range of moral duties” (Barnett et al, 2005, page 24). In contrast, their work on the fair trade NGO Traidcraft is designed to illustrate ethical ‘devices’ and ‘performances’ that overcome spatially linked indifference thus enabling a politics of care and responsibility at a distance that complements equivalent place-based politics.

Still, in making their arguments Barnett et al (2005) tend to lose sight of the fundamental *place* of place—both material and discursive—in fair trade and its consumption networks.⁹ In

⁹ See also Bernstein and Campling (2006, 435) who seem content to omit investigation of the semiotics of place from commodity geographies.

our view, these authors only relate half a story – especially when one considers moral geographies of worldshop and charity shop retailing. Thus, and pace Barnett et al (2005), both shops work assiduously to foster ethical relations across space. On the one hand, there are ethical governance regimes of worldshops that underpin material and discursive ‘outreach’ in fair trade. On the other hand, there are the selective yet explicit forward-looking connections to poor ‘Others’ made in Oxfam charity shops. In each case, expansive ethical fields work to overcome discursive and material spatial blockages upon which conventional commodity systems thrive.

Yet in doing so discursive devices are used that ‘rough up’ (Cook and Crang, 1996) products in these shops so as to connect *places* of consumption to *places* where ‘deserving Others’ live—be they places solely of production in the case of worldshops or places of production (for fair trade goods) and development (donated goods) in the case of Oxfam charity shops. Take, for example, Cafedirect’s fair trade ‘Machu Picchu Mountain Special’ coffee (see **Figure 4: Machu Picchu Fair Trade Coffee**) that is sold in both worldshops and Oxfam shops. This product is grown by the COCLA cooperative which is clearly *placed* on the Andean hillsides near (scenic) Machu Picchu itself—however ecologically problematic—before being moved long-distance across space to be once more *placed* and sold on the shelves of these alternative retailers – for instance at the ‘One World Shop’ located in a backroom of St. John’s Church in Central London. There is too, as we have seen, the example of those ‘imagineered’ sales tags that seek to connect place of purchase to place of development.

Here, then, there is a process of *re-placement* going on that connects consumers, retailers, producers and development beneficiaries within ‘alternative’ retailing. Indeed, what these connections do is blur place and space in the creation of expansive ethical fields. Consumption, as sustainable consumption, is thus re-placed as it finds its rightful place in the worldshop commodity chain or the Oxfam shop ‘charity-chain’. Thus, it is the imagineered connections of *place* at a number of scales—shop floor to coffee field, charity shop to development project site—that are instrumental in constructing the caring at a distance that is seen to occur in Barnett et al’s (2005) ethical consumption networks. In short, it is precisely the connection of production and consumption *places* that imbues seemingly abstract and alienating spaces between people, economic processes, and local biophysical environments with ethical content, thereby creating moral geographies of alternative retailing.

Retailing moral difference

The analysis so far has considered the ways in which ethics and place are brought strategically into play in alternative retailing. Complex material and discursive dynamics were seen to be occurring, notably in relation to the articulation of complex ethical fields (based on first-hand and/or second-hand ethics) and multi-scale ‘imagineered’ places. Such dynamics raise questions, in turn, about the broader importance of a possible retailing of moral difference. We note here three points in this regard.

First, worldshops and charity shops are increasingly aiming to boost quality in the fair trade (and in Oxfam’s case, also donated) goods they sell, thereby raising questions about the relationship between ‘alternative’ status and the social construction of taste in these outlets (cf. Goodman, 2009). True, the push for quality is being pursued in the fair trade market as a whole, as this niche sector enters the mainstream economy thanks to big retailers (e.g. Nicholls and Opal, 2005; Nicholls, 2002). In the process, fair trade is fast becoming a

household name¹⁰ (Low and Davenport, 2005; NEWS, 2007b). By quality, we certainly mean ‘better’ tasting and looking. Yet, there is much more at play here than that inasmuch as talk of quality is always about cultural differentiation (Bourdieu 1984). It also involves a politicised ethics encompassing such things as ‘alternative’ development in the South (for example via fair trade) as well as the sense of personal ‘moral selving’ afforded to consumers through purchase of these commodities (Barnett et al, 2005; Harrison et al, 2005). For Oxfam in particular, the push for quality is an especially complex endeavour given the simultaneous provision of new and used goods – necessitating a campaign mindful of both new (fair trade) goods suppliers on the one hand, and donors of used goods on the other hand. And yet, to ratchet up the ‘quality’ of the latter has become integral to its operations.¹¹ For example, the ‘Sorted!’ campaign specifically asked donors to sort through their donations so that only ‘sellable’ items would be passed on.¹²

Oxfam’s promotion of specialist-cum-designer goods and even shops has taken this quest for taste to new heights. Thus, there is the Oxfam ‘Originals’ line of shops dedicated to selling retro and vintage fashion, as well as stand alone book, furniture and music stores, and even dedicated bridal shops (with dresses up to £600 for designer gowns). Meanwhile, there is also the ‘Valued’ programme which sells high-end goods (such as antiques and paintings) and books on eBay, as well as the ‘Unwrapped’ programme which sells unusual gifts such as goats and alpacas for the South’s poor. Indeed, the designer ‘makeover’ of Oxfam’s clothing stock—aided and abetted by calls for donations that specifically include designer-label clothing—received an unprecedented boost from Victoria (Posh Spice) Beckham in 2006 when she purchased a cocktail dress and fashion book from the Notting Hill Oxfam store. Thereafter, donations to that store soared by 70% even as customer visits trebled in number, giving rise to a ‘Posh effect’ in UK charity.¹³ All of which builds Oxfam’s brand value as a leader in ‘quality’ provisioning:

Do you have a flair for fashion? Are you passionate about clothes? With over 600 shops selling clothing, Oxfam can be relied upon to provide the perfect item at an affordable price. Whether you are searching for a designer dress, stylish suit or the ultimate accessory, Oxfam shops are the place to look. At Oxfam we aim to offer our customers a wide range of choice. We stock fashion for men and women, sports wear, outdoor clothing, shoes, fancy dress and much more. If you are looking for something unusual, please ask the shop team whether they have it in stock. All the clothing, shoes and accessories donated to our shops are carefully sorted to ensure you get good quality at a fair price. Our

¹⁰ According to the Fairtrade Foundation (2005a), the fair trade logo was recognized by 50% of UK adults in 2005 and fair trade was bestowed ‘Superbrand’ status – thus beating out the likes of AOL and BT as one of the best-known brands in the UK (Fairtrade Foundation, 2005b).

¹¹ There is here a wider story. Thus, ever fiercer competition over low-end goods from cheap clothes retailers combines with increased competition within the charity sector (itself suffering from ‘charity-fatigue’) to make the need to try and go up-market quite imperative – even if only to stay in business (Broadbridge and Parsons 2003; Parsons 2002; Low and Davenport 2005).

¹² Chris Coe, Director of Trading at Oxfam in a press release stated: “We’re so grateful for the incredible donations we receive from the community, but like any retailer there are things we can and cannot sell. The things we cannot sell are damaged, unsafe or just unsuitable for sale, such as broken electrical items and worn out clothing. A good donation is something which is unbroken, complete, clean and sellable” (Oxfam, 2005).

¹³ See <http://www.showbizspy.com/movies.aspx?articleid=734>. There is a wider process of celebrity endorsement; see *Inside Oxfam* magazine where celebrities routinely grace their pages (Oxfam 2006a).

shops only sell items that we think our customers will want to buy. (Oxfam, 2007a)

Secondly, there are differences in how Oxfam shops and worldshops go about pricing their goods reflective notably of differences in their sourcing. Thus, and its push for quality notwithstanding, most Oxfam stores still stock an array of goods sold at relatively cheap prices. Here, the fact of their reliance on *used* goods is to be noted – which means that most goods that enter their doors are virtually free to the NGO (there are small costs associated with sorting, pricing and transporting). Almost by definition, then, there is considerable profit to be made from the sale of these goods – a boon to the fortunes of a charity shop like Oxfam. That profit will depend on the prices that donated goods sell for – which is, in turn, linked to local high street market conditions and consumers’ associated willingness-to-pay. In a number of cases and places, they are re-sold ‘cheaply’, especially where brand names are not involved and/or when stock needs to be turned over quickly (via price discounts and ‘sales’) to make space for newly arrived goods. In contrast, worldshops clearly do not enjoy the economic windfall that is donated goods. Instead, their goods have to be paid for – and at ‘fair’ (above conventional market) prices to producers at that. Hence, worldshops are not in the position that Oxfam shops are to be able to conduct alternative retailing ‘on the cheap’ – indeed, for worldshops to do so would even raise troubling questions about the way in which they were conducting business with fair trade producers.

In any event, worldshops are not cheap *by design*, as the idea is to generate as much added value as possible. Thus, difference is cultivated not only in a relative ability to pay for pricey goods, but also in what is provided in return: ‘quality’ foods and ‘ethnic’ handicrafts. While thoughtfully critiqued by Johnston (2002) and Varul (2008; see also Hendrickson, 1996) as an objectification of the Other, our point here is rather that the aim of this pricing policy (excluding poorer consumers) is precisely to extract more money for ‘caring at a distance’. A ‘solidarity premium’ is paid even as consumers are encouraged to develop a sense of ethically directed solidarity that celebrates difference (Goodman, 2004). Here in the worldshop, then, is a call to solidarity that echoes, albeit in a different fashion, the one that was noted earlier in relation to Oxfam sales tags. Increasing the quality (and hence price) of fair trade products as a means to promote equitable development and respect for difference is thus a growing concern in worldshops. For example, Ten Thousand Villages (personal communication, 2004) has re-designed goods in keeping with a fashionable fusion of Northern tastes and Southern ‘traditional’ styles in order to pique consumer interest. To this end, it employs style consultants to work with producers in order to enhance the quality of artisan products offered for sale to solidarity-seeking and premium-price-paying Northern consumers.

Third, the alternative retailers considered herein intersect with a growing society-wide concern to protect the biophysical environment, raising another facet to a possible retailing of moral difference. Yet, here, ambiguity and contradiction abound. Take, for instance, the first-hand ethics associated with selling fair trade goods in worldshops and Oxfam shops. Now, in purely environmental terms, such sales are decidedly ambiguous. On the one hand, fair trade goods are produced under conditions that *may* be broadly described as environmentally benign; foods are often (but not always) organic while handicrafts often rely on the re-use of materials and/or extraction from sustainable sources. Indeed, ‘ecologically sound production’ is included in fair trade criteria stipulated by NEWS (2007c). On the other hand, fair trade goods are coming under fire because they entail ‘excessive’ food/commodity miles reflective

of a large carbon footprint.¹⁴ Indeed, the very success of fair trade compounds this problem—raising uncomfortable questions about the broader ecological wisdom of this commercial form of caring at a distance (Averill, 2007; Kelland, 2007).

Here, the Oxfam charity shop may outshine the worldshop since used goods that it sells represent ecologically commendable ‘recycled consumption’—indeed, perhaps even a model for ‘throw away’ societies. This practice reduces the impact of consumption as shoppers substitute used for new goods, thereby giving discarded clothes, toys and books a new lease of life. True, recycled consumption is still miniscule when compared to overall consumption patterns. Yet, at least *some* consumption has been re-routed in this way – in the process providing partial relieve to overburdened landfill sites. Given growing waste disposal problems, the re-circulation of goods provides extra breathing room for policymakers as they grapple with this crisis. It drags out an otherwise rapid and damaging process (production, consumption, disposal) that is the bane of modern capitalism (Redclift 1996; Royte, 2005).

Yet this is no radical solution. Prolonging the consumption cycle only postpones the outcome. It does not address a basic flaw in contemporary consumption-driven capitalism. Such re-circulation may simply *reinforce* wasteful consumption, as charity shops help ‘marginal’ and/or bargain-hungry consumers to partake in a high consumption lifestyle. As one Oxfam shop leaflet (n.d.) observes: “We always try to price your donations attractively and fairly. Our customers often tell us: ‘That’s just what I’ve been looking for.’ Sorted!”

Conclusion

This paper has explored the mingling of space, place, and ethics in cultural economies of alternative retailing with reference to Oxfam charity shops and independent world-shops. It argued that material and discursive ambiguities surround this endeavour complicating their ethical appeal. This is especially so for Oxfam’s shops where uncritical acceptance of donated goods has resulted in the propagation of a second-hand ethics. In contrast, a strict focus on fair trade at worldshops prompts a first-hand ethics where nasty conditions of original production are banished. Yet, once an environmental dimension is added, that focus became the source of a new problem: a heavy carbon footprint (linked to transporting goods from the South to the North).

The paper also examined some of the strategic choices that alternative retailers face. The ‘imagineering’ of ethically charged place in these outlets prompts complex moral geographies in which connections and disconnections between places of production, consumption, and retailing are selectively emphasised. Whether via ‘forward looking’ sales tags at Oxfam shops or fair trade foods and handicrafts at worldshops (also to some extent at Oxfam), material and discursive choices are made that are never innocent but rather are crafted to maximise an ethically-based ‘alternative’ consumption experience. Yet retailing moral difference prompts ambiguities over quality and price, value for consumers, and the environmental ramifications of that experience.

¹⁴ Food miles are the number of miles a particular food commodity travels from field to fork, the reduction of which is now the cornerstone of local food movements (Born and Purcell 2006; Seyfang, 2006). Part of this argument is the fact that the less miles travelled, the less resources used in transportation, and thus the smaller the total carbon footprint (the amount of carbon emitted to the atmosphere) contributing to climate change. Fair trade, with its need for international travel and larger carbon footprints than local trade, is coming under scrutiny from ‘food miles’ critics, although the discussion is now beginning to centre on the question of ‘fair miles’; see, for example, the pioneering work of Macgregor and Vorley (2006).

Indeed, one of the key points to emerge from this paper is that considerable ambiguity surrounds the extent and meaning of ‘alternative’ retailing. Thus, as the environmental record of fair trade suggests, there may be a fundamental ethical contradiction at the heart of this process that will erode its appeal. Contradictions also abound, meanwhile, when alternative retailing rides on the coattails of mainstream relations of production and consumption as the Oxfam experience with donated goods sometimes produced under unethical conditions revealed. Thus, in scaling up from the everyday, micro-spaces of alternative retail to those of the complex and contentious environments of sustainability governance and policy, the ambiguities of the practices of more sustainable consumption—situated as they are in the contexts of neo-liberal markets—must be front and centre. And, this involves not only understanding the retail places and spaces, which forms one of the key ways most ‘post’ consumers engage with sustainable consumption, but also the very ethical relations retail-scapes work to forge between shoppers, goods, and environmental and social justice.

In light of these findings, it is appropriate to suggest three ways in which future research could serve to clarify further the position of alternative retailing in the context of sustainable consumption and lifestyles. First of all, research is needed that examines the precise material and discursive relationships that link alternative retailing to *other* elements in the broader movements for sustainable lifestyles and not least, the ramifications of those links. Thus, how does such retailing—which asserts a retailing of moral difference even as it tends to use and hence legitimate many sales techniques and discourses found in the mainstream sector—fit with other strands in the cultural and economic promotion of an ‘alternative’ to the status quo? Much credence is given in alternative movements, for example, to the notion that ‘transformed’ means are as important as transformed ends—that how you pursue social justice is equally critical as attaining such an end (see Schlosberg 1999; Polletta 2002). To what extent, though, does the rise of alternative retailing—indeed, the spread of sustainable consumption as political practice more generally (e.g. Jackson, 2006; Princen et al, 2002)—subvert and/or promote this social movement maxim?

Secondly, and in particular, work is needed on the *reciprocal* nature of the relationship between alternative retailing and its much larger mainstream counterpart, especially in the context of ‘planning’ for and the governance of more sustainable consumption and production. We noted how the former is not always that different from the latter. This is perhaps not surprising given the ubiquity of mainstream retailing. Tried and tested practices are bound to rub off. However, to what extent can we speak of distinctive *alternative* retail practices and if so what are the key aspects that define them? Further, how might pursuit of a retailing of moral difference and sustainable consumption behaviours afford new opportunities to mainstream retailers? This is more than simply charting the spread of fair trade into supermarkets and the like. There is the bigger question here of how the essence of ‘alternative’ – encompassing process and product – may be used to boost the mainstream. As the boundary between ‘alternative’ and ‘mainstream’ becomes blurred, will alternative retailing even lose its political, economic and cultural utility?

Finally, what does the rise of alternative retailing in the pursuit of sustainable lifestyles as described here reveal about the future direction of a cultural politics of economic radicalism? Are there radical alternatives to it and if so, what are they, and more importantly, how do they avoid the pitfalls of cooption? Does the answer reside in a variant on the ‘small is beautiful’ argument coupled to small-scale non-capitalist exchange in LETS economies for instance (see, e.g. Collinson et al, 2003 and Lee et al, 2004)? Certainly, the growing environmental predicament might suggest this course of action. And yet, would this not simply be a collapse

into a reactionary politics of the local—a politics with little or no place for caring about ‘distant Others’ (cf. DuPuis and Goodman, 2005)? After all, part of the political attraction of alternative retailing (linked to fair trade) is precisely that it is a mechanism, however flawed, for tackling social injustice worldwide.

These are big questions that perhaps cannot ever be answered in a satisfactory manner. Yet, each in their own way point to the larger social and historical importance of the kinds of alternative retailing discussed in this paper, as well as the possibility that the uneasy compromises and awkward ambiguities that bedevil such practices may be a small price to pay given the stark and often unpalatable features of the alternatives that can be imagined. The compromises of alternative retailing—and sustainable consumption more broadly—may thus, in the end, be a price worth paying.

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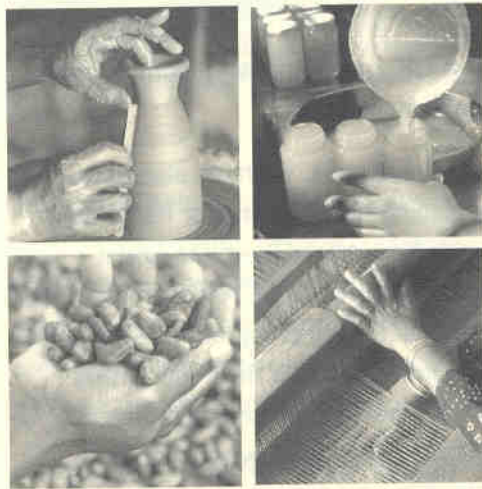


Figure 1. Making Fairtrade images and discourses your habit



Oxfam

A bright future for **Fair Trade**



Fair Trade gives people in the Third World the chance to set up small businesses and work their way out of poverty. It's a simple idea with far-reaching benefits for poor families and communities all over the world.

**Here's the latest news about
Oxfam Fair Trade...**

Figure 2. Oxfam: A bright future for fair trade

Your books mean the world to us



and to him

Giuseppe D'Alfonso/Oxfam

We are very grateful for your gifts of books to this shop. Through careful pricing Oxfam ensures that your donation goes further – helping people to break out of poverty.

A paperback book donated by you could raise £2.00 to pay for twenty school-books for children in Vietnam.

Poor people are often unable to read and write because they haven't had the opportunity to learn. For many, literacy offers the only chance to escape a life of poverty. Oxfam is helping to improve educational opportunities for poor people by building schools, providing desks and materials, training teachers, and ensuring that adults who haven't had the chance to go to school can learn basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Thank you for supporting Oxfam.

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Thank you FOR SHOPPING WITH US

£1.99

Approximate size for guidance only *10/7/99*

CODE *Elayka*

Unless otherwise shown this item is made up from mixed or miscellaneous fibres



£1.99 helps to run a tree nursery in Bangladesh

194085

Oxfam

59p

Approximate size for guidance only *20/11/99*

CODE *Elayka*

Unless otherwise shown this item is made up from mixed or miscellaneous fibres



59p buys identity bracelets for orphaned refugees

Thank you
FOR SHOPPING WITH US

Thank you
FOR SHOPPING WITH US

£5.99

Approximate size for guidance only *6/6/2002*

CODE *W56*
32 *TU*

Unless otherwise shown this item is made up from mixed or miscellaneous fibres



£5.99 buys new clothes for a street-kid in Ethiopia

194166

Thank you
FOR SHOPPING WITH US

£7.99

Approximate size for guidance only *12*

CODE *SA 2613*

Unless otherwise shown this item is made up from mixed or miscellaneous fibres



£7.99 buys cement to line a well in Mozambique

194182

Figure 3. Oxfam: Sales tags



Figure 4: Machu Picchu Fair Trade Coffee