The Mirror of Consumption: Celebritisation, developmental consumption and the shifting cultural politics of fair trade

Mike Goodman

Department of Geography, King’s College London

©2009 by the Author
This paper is posted at King’s College London, Department of Geography at http://www.kcl.ac.uk/schools/sspp/geography/research/epd/working.html
Prologue: Alternative Food/Media Spaces

With his typically shrewd flourish, Arjun Appadurai (2000, 2) asks a timely question: “Can the media ever be turned to the interests of the poor?” Well, if one has been paying attention to the market for and marketing of fair trade goods in the UK, then the answer is resoundingly in the affirmative. One of the reasons why Appadurai’s question can be answered this way is due to the growth of what Freidberg (2004) refers to—with an equally shrewd flourish—as the ‘ethical complex’ of food. Through critique and exposé, food activists and NGOs have captured space in the popular media causing supermarkets to rethink and rework their supply chains along more ethical lines for those toiling at the production end. As she puts it,

… the ethical complex … reflects the efforts of Britain's contemporary agro-food movement—whose members do not simply depend on but instead include elements of Britain's print and broadcast media—to expose, reform, and in some cases reconfigure transnational geographies of work in food. (Friedberg, 2004, 514)

Thus, NGOs, through public relations campaigns fuelled by media-friendly, self-produced investigative reports, have quite quickly eased into what Hughes et al (forthcoming; after Clarke et al, 2007, 240) call a ‘brokering role’ between not just consumers and powerful multinationals, but also between the poor and these same powerful companies. And if the general uptake of corporate social responsibility—for example, the development in the UK’s oligopolistic food retail sector of more ethical international sourcing routines and the infiltration of fair trade coffees into the everyday supply chains of Starbucks, McDonald’s and Nestlé—is any indication, this ‘politics of shame’ (Clarke et al, 2007, 238) has at least been partially successful.

As ‘alternative economic spaces’ (Leyshon et al, 2003) have grown—with alternative foods leading the way (Maye et al, 2007)—activists have become even more media savvy. From glitzy ads, to a shifting coterie of campaigns and tag-lines that grab the attention anew every six months, to a growing online presence, media neophytes these organizations are not. One of the most important sets of figures to arise in contemporary activist media-scapes, and in the landscapes of the cultural politics of environment and development more generally (Boykoff and Goodman, in press; Brockington, 2008; Littler, 2008), is a growing list of media and business celebrities that lend their voices and ‘heavenly bodies’ to these campaigns. In addition to endorsing particular progressive campaigns, several of the more ‘rich and famous’ (Bryant, 2007) have even started their very own anti-poverty organizations; the most well-known might be the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, now devoted to promoting the wonders of ‘creative capitalism’ for the poor (Gates, 2008), DATA (‘Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa’) started by Bono, and the Jolie-Pitt Foundation begun by Hollywood’s top couple, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt. Indeed, charity and anti-poverty are themselves now big business, with organizations like Oxfam and movements such as ‘fair trade’ becoming literal brands in their own right (Girod, 2005; Low and Davenport, 2004, 2006).

This growing celebritisation of environment and development has reached an almost fever pitch in the UK’s fair trade movement. Here, the newest fair trade campaigns are less about trouble-making than they are about market-making through the judicious use of celebrity and marketing wherewithal. As a specific example of the general trends discussed in this paper is an exploration of the shift in the ‘imagineering’ (Routledge, 1997) of fair trade—from poor
farmers, to touristic landscapes of ‘quality’, to movie, television and music celebrity endorsers—and a parallel shift in the subsequent cultural politics of fair trade. Indeed, as I work to show more fully below, in fair trade, it is now through the globally-recognized mega-star that the subaltern speaks. And, tied directly to the theme of this special issue, these moves to a more ‘star-studded’ aesthetic cultural politics have particular consequences for the transparency of fair trade foods, and the moral economy this transparency purports to create and for which it is vital (Goodman, 2004). Thus, to return to Appadurai’s opening question, the media has been turned to the interests of the poor but in particularly spectacular and potentially ambiguous ways that work against transparency in the wider networks of development in different ways.

The paper proceeds as follows. I open with a section that situates the growing importance of two inter-related but also general trends in the context of development and anti-poverty campaigns: the connection of these campaigns to the processes, materialities and discourses of consumption as well as now celebrity. Conceptualized here as ‘developmental consumption’, this signals the phenomenon of the qualitative and quantitative investment of the processes and politics of (Northern) consumption with the powers of development. Then, as newer accoutrements in these novel developmental consumption regimes, I explore the growing employment and/or involvement of celebrities as illustrated by several recent examples of the more general spectacle-ization of development. I briefly discuss how and why celebrities have become so important in these campaigns and politics more generally and what the implications for this expanding celebritization of development might be.

Next, I turn specifically to fair trade to explore the changing nature of its cultural politics. In short, as evolved and accumulated over time—principally through the mainstreaming of fair trade foods—the various ‘embodiments’ of fair trade have changed. Where once there was the face and words of the small fair trade farmer from Latin America, Asia, or Africa, now stands the figure of the movie/music star—and one figure in particular in Chris Martin, the lead singer of the multi-platinum-selling British band Coldplay. This then is at the heart of what might be called fair trade’s Faustian bargain: as it has moved rapidly into the mainstream and onto supermarket shelves, the market has exploded, thus more money than ever before is being generated for poor fair trade communities. Development the world over—fostered through fair trade networks—is on the march. Yet, all of this has occurred with a heavy toll to the ‘deeper’ moral economy fostered by fair trade’s earlier and more ‘alternative’ commitment to developing ethical relations of care between poorer producers and richer consumers. With the move to celebrity endorsers, the once-vaunted transparency of fair trade becomes almost completely opaque and works to the detriment of the original—and, as I argue, more potentially transgressive—cultural politics of the connections of production and consumption that have been the hallmark of the fair trade movement. Rather, in some ways, both fair trade and other campaigns that now use celebrities present the danger of turning into a virtual ‘house of mirrors’ where our own consumerist subjectivities are simply reflected in the newly embodied cultural politics of the celebrity spectacle. And, perhaps insidiously, these spaces of connection that have been abandoned by fair trade have been quickly claimed by the likes of Nestlé, the largest food corporation in the world, and Tesco, the largest retailer in the UK, as they have sought to replicate the earlier more transparent ‘imaginaries’ of fair trade networks. I conclude with a short discussion of what I think this ambiguity in fair trade means for its cultural politics—in the light of the success of

---

1 See also, Goodman and Goodman (2001).
fair trade through its media-savvy celebritization—and present a set of considerations about development politics more generally.

Act I: A New Politics of Development in Consumption, Celebritization and the Spectacle

Development, at least in the UK, can be bought nearly everywhere. From the tried and true Oxfam shop, to the supermarket freezer case\(^2\), sundry and spice isle, to the high street and mall, to the virtual spaces of the Internet. And, in addition, the sorts of development that you can ‘do’ through consumption is just as staggering. You want to support cleaner water in poor countries? Buy either a bottle of ‘Charity: Water’\(^3\) or, when in the US, shop at Saks Fifth Avenue as they support the charity through window displays and events in their flagship New York store. You want to support small farmers in Africa? Buy your next T-shirt at Topshop in London, who now sells fair trade, organic cotton clothes from People Tree.\(^4\) You want to double your efforts and support both local development and the soaking up of your own-generated carbon? Purchase carbon offsets for your next flight from the rapidly expanding voluntary carbon offset market (Bumpus and Liverman, 2008).\(^5\) This is really just the tip of the iceberg for these growing connections of consumption and development and, as Trentmann (2007) is starting to show in extensive detail, is something that has a much longer history than is typically thought.

For me, the concept of ‘developmental consumption’ (hereafter simply ‘DC’)—as these programs have spread in number and scope\(^6\)—takes on particular salience in working to understand the contemporary incarnations of these processes. First, the concept helps to encapsulate qualitative changes in the practices, processes, and expressions of the act of consuming in contemporary societies. Here, consumption has morphed into a clear and unmitigated ‘tool’ of development; the transnational livelihood networks Bebbington (2003; Bebbington and Kothari, 2006; Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001) talks about inhabiting development now can clearly be said to reach into and on the very bodies of consumers through the likes of fair trade foods and clothes. The livelihoods of the poor are connected directly to—and indeed dependent on—the lifestyles and lifestyle choices of consumers. Thus, consumption as a process of ‘creative destruction’ (Clarke et al, 2003) takes on new and enhanced meanings, especially with respect to the former term. At the same time, the consumer takes on novel subjectivities (Guthman, personal communication; cf. Guthman and DuPuis, 2006 and Barnett et al, 2005) in their role as ‘responsible’, ‘ethical’, and/or ‘sustainable’ consumer. The consumer, like the very act of consumption, is literally re-cast as a/the ‘savior’ whose power to promote development the world over has become paramount in spreading these commodity networks.

Second, in all of these products, development as a process and outcome is thoroughly commoditized into the commodity-form for sale in the marketplace. Thus, the very environments that these livelihoods are dependent on are commodified and purchasable by ‘green’ consumers. Sustainable development can now and truly be store-bought. Part of this

\(^2\) Who wouldn’t want Ben and Jerry’s® ‘Coffee Heath Bar Crunch’ made with fair trade coffee from Costa Rica?!
\(^3\) See [http://www.charitywater.org/](http://www.charitywater.org/); a portion of the profits from buying Charity: Water bottled water goes to promote safe drinking water in poor communities.
\(^4\) See [http://www.peopletree.co.uk/](http://www.peopletree.co.uk/)
\(^5\) Two of the most well known offset companies are Blue Ventures in the UK ([http://www.bveco.org.uk/](http://www.bveco.org.uk/)) and Carbonfund.org in the US ([http://www.carbonfund.org](http://www.carbonfund.org)).
\(^6\) In both the North and now in the South; on this latter point, see Bryant et al (2008).
is nothing new; many have pointed out the persistent and problematic processes of the commodification and commoditization of ‘nature’ over time (e.g. Braun and Castree, 1998, passim; McAfee, 1999; Robertson, 2006, Price, 1995; Smith, 1996). Rather, what is new here, are the growing ties of livelihoods as linked directly to consumption choice and—even more persistently—the growing need of the poor to sell themselves as sustainable, entrepreneurial stewards by marketing their ‘worthy’ livelihoods, their communities and, of course, some sort of sellable product. Part of the driving force for these sorts of set-ups are actually many of the producers themselves; there has been a continuing and often desperate cry for unobstructed access to Northern market to sell things, including storied livelihoods, so it can easily be poor communities developing these programs as much as it might be Northern companies and NGOs. With other schemes, however, such as with Charity: water, the point is less about selling a particular product and more about selling a particular cause or concern, which in this case is cleaner water through the purchase of ‘special’ charity-oriented bottled water. In both cases, willingness-to-pay can be measured in the extra price premium or simply the higher prices—now even more of a problem in an age of rising oil and food prices (Naughton, 2008)—charged for what are often quality goods of ‘distinction’ and ‘difference’.

Third, much of this is about shifting and re-directing consumption choices and patterns to more sustainable/ethical goods and services. DC has very little to do with questioning either the quantitative impacts of consumption or even who gets to partake in what consumption forms and networks. Indeed, the by-line of many activist and development organizations is typically something like the following: ‘You are going to be buying product X anyway so choose X product in its ethical/sustainable/green form because it promotes development in location Y’. Indeed, carried to its logical ends, with DC, the more you buy of these goods, the better. In a way then, DC actually supports more consumption, but clearly of the right ethical goods.

Finally, the development of transnational- and national-scale moral economies does have historical precedence in, for example, attempts to get UK consumers to support colonists by purchasing the goods of the Empire (Trentmann, 2007). Yet, today, the meteoric success of the fair trade market has been imminently influential in spreading the more generalized concept and processes of DC. This ‘fair trade effect’ has not only been felt in attempts at the development of domestic forms of this model for the US (Jaffee et al, 2004) and UK, but has spread across numerous economic sectors and commodities (e.g. Barrientos and Dolan, 2006). Being able to build on the massive success of the fair trade model is why the specific programs of Charity: water and—as detailed more below—(RED), are put together the way they are and why they are so successful as other and perhaps more ‘mature’ instances of DC.

Several of the contributors to this special issue as well as other writers have been at the forefront of researching and commenting on numerous aspects of DC (e.g. Lyon, 2006; Mutersbaugh, 2002; Whatmore and Clark, 2006; Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). Here, though, I want to examine two particular responses to the growing trend of DC and their specific commentary on the problems and possibilities of its mainstreaming of the politics of choice as the choice of contemporary politics. The first set of arguments—from the collective of Clive Barnett, Nick Clarke, Alice Malpass and Paul Cloke (Barnett et al, 2005, Clarke et al, 2007)—are broadly supportive based on their work on ethical consumption. Echoing throughout their work a number of similar arguments past and since (DuPuis, 2000; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Goodman, 2004; Whatmore and Clark, 2006), one of their points is that, through mechanisms like fair trade, an ethics of care can ‘travel’ across space
and need not be confined to the affinities created through personal relationships developed in ‘place’. Second, they make the claim that people have multiple subjectivities and so, in ethical consumption networks, it is the ethically/morally ‘connected’ subjectivities that are developed and accentuated rather than that of ‘consumer’ per se. Ethical consumption networks call on and give people space to materialize the ethical/moral relationships that inhabit the ‘everyday’ activities of eating and clothing themselves. Third, these “ethical consumption singularities” in consumer purchases are then worked into a form of politics by supporting the lobbying and media work of the NGOs and charity organizations economically connected to the markets for ethically-consumed goods. In short, the politico-ethical subjectivities of consumers are materialized and actualized in acts of consumer choice which are then materialized in the wider political activities of NGOs and charities.

Julie Guthman on the other hand, in her writings on organic food (i.e. Guthman, 2003; 2007), provides a set of important counter-arguments and cautions to this line of thinking. For her, ethical consumption and the tools of eco-labeling by which it is articulated work to entrench neo-liberal forms of environmental and social governance but also that of the neo-liberal ‘figure’ in the form of ethical consumer. In this, she develops the argument about the problematic processes of ‘de-volution’ inherent in labeling and DC more generally: the responsibilities for socio-environmental governance are laid at the rather rocky feet of consumers. Further, this is all performed and articulated in the contexts of competition and across the multiple inequalities that inhabit neo-liberal economies. So, in some ways, Guthman (2007) provides a much needed corrective to Barnett et al’s (2005, 39) somewhat shallow statement that ethical consumption ‘enlist[s] ordinary people into broader projects of social change’. Rather, ethical consumption enlists particular people—in particular ways and means—into particular projects of social change. One of her main worries is that wider structural changes become diluted and/or side-lined as they becomes hung exclusively on the fickle hooks of shopping, fashion, taste and aesthetics with few alternatives in sight.

Yet, both of these accounts, I would argue, suffer from bouts of over-generalization and, in particular, over-theorization. Barnett et al make a series of rather abstract claims about consumers and ethical consumption without much reference to or discussion of the actual practices embedded in the commodity networks that bring the ethical goods to these consumers. Moreover, Guthman (e.g. 2003) downplays and, indeed, dismisses as overtly classist, the important and inescapable role that taste—in the vernacular sense of ‘tasty’—plays in the context of food politics in particular. And, while she seems to be softening slightly if begrudgingly on the potentially positive effects of labeling for those who can be involved, this tends to, in the end, get papered over in the desire to develop and maintain a more structural critique of neo-liberal environmentalism. Thus, she has recently concluded that

The best hope for these labels, then, is that they could help produce more collectivist political subjects who in time would develop forms of governance more commensurate to the socialized problems before us.

(Guthman, 2007, 474)

What is missing from these and other accounts is a more fully-formed, specific and deeper accounting of the actual shifting practices of ethical consumption and its multi-form

---

7 Her specific argument is that taste—as in having ‘good’ taste in the Bourdieuan sense—has been problematically hijacked by leading portions of alternative food movements in order to further distinguish their added-value markets. The more visceral sense of taste and its role in food politics is left relatively unexamined.
networks; indeed, echoing the statement above, there remains much space for exploring how particular ethical consumption networks are developed and how they work for particular people located not just at sites of consumption but also those of production; this is particularly true when looking at the processes and promises of DC. Indeed, as these sorts of networks continue to expand and transgress more into the mainstream, the key is to understand the shifting relationalities among markets and the realms of production and consumption, especially as governed by ethical and developmental consumption companies and NGOs, retail capital, and standards organizations. And, while not the specific focus here, ethnographic work—some of which has been begun in earnest at the production end (e.g., Luetchford, 2008; Lyon, 2007) and with supermarket ‘intermediaries’ (Hughes et al, 2008; forthcoming)—that explores the praxis of ethical consumption and DC markets needs to be at the center of research and writing on these networks.

In efforts to build from this more theoretical work on ethical consumption, this paper looks to shine a specific light on the shifting praxis of one particular aspect of fair trade: that of its marketing and the changing ‘embodiments’ of who is able to and can speak about fair trade in the UK. This is situated in the context of wider NGO- and market-led shifts of fair trade to a recognizable and more mainstreamed product of ‘quality’. In short, I want to highlight and explore the changing relationships of the push to mainstreaming and ‘quality’ in fair trade markets to several commensurate shifts in the praxis of fair trade’s imaginary now in the form of celebrity endorsers. Part of my task here is to also air the ambiguous implications of these shifts as they have come to define fair trade networks and especially what this means for its traditional politics of transparency. Before getting into all of this, however, I want to quickly explore the more broad infection of development with the spectacle of celebrity, a movement also very much gripping UK fair trade networks.

The Celebritization of Development

If development can be bought just about everywhere now through DC, so too has it thoroughly infiltrated popular culture through various media forms and events. From a longer history of ‘celebrity diplomacy’ through the UN (Cooper, 2007), to the global events of ‘We are the World’, Live Aid, and Live 8, to the growing association of celebrities as the new ‘faces’ of particular development-related causes, organizations and foundations, the goal is to bring the topic of development to a much broader audience through the relatively privileged position of the celebrity. Drawing on Marshall (1997) and Street (2004), celebrities are able to develop and canvas a more weighty presence and greater capacity for action than the rest of us. As Rein et al (1997, 15; cited in Turner, 2004, 32) put it, ‘a celebrity is a person whose name has attention-getting, interested-rivetting, and profit-generating value’, which, here, works in the interests of promoting development in some form or another. For Bono—the frontman of the globally-popular band U2 and the global face of African development in particular—celebrity is a form of “currency” (Singer, 2002) that seems to not only give him access to publicity and media coverage wherever he goes, but to some of the world’s most powerful political leaders and heads of state. What we might call this growing celebritization of development involves celebrities bringing their personal politics into the public realm of their own volition but also through the active recruitment of stars into various campaigns by anti-poverty NGOs such as Oxfam.

---

8 Or, following Cooper (2007), in recognition of Bono’s leading and influential role, the Bonoization of development.
9 For more on celebrity politics in general, see Boykoff and Goodman (in press).
I want to give four brief examples of this growing trend of the celebritization of development; the first three illustrate the historical and general processes of this celebritization, with the fourth example of Bono’s (RED) project demonstrating the growing cross-over of these processes with those of DC.

**David Beckham: Goodwill Ambassador in Africa**

One of the most recognized and well-paid football players in the world, David Beckham toured Sierra Leone in early 2008 to bring awareness to issues of poverty and child health as a UN Goodwill Ambassador for UNICEF. One in a long line and large group of celebrity Ambassadors (Cooper, 2007), Beckham played soccer with locals, administered the polio vaccine to a child at a health clinic, oversaw the distribution of insect netting to young and pregnant mothers and visited a UNICEF-funded therapeutic feeding center for malnourished children (Nybo, 2008). In a prepared statement, he commented that

> We can't turn a blind eye to the tens of thousands of young children who die every day in the developing world. [In Sierra Leone], one in four children dies before reaching their fifth birthday – it's shocking and tragic especially when the solutions are simple – things like vaccinations against measles or using a mosquito net to reduce the chance of getting malaria...Saving... children's lives is a top priority for UNICEF...and as an Ambassador I hope I can help to draw attention to this issue across the world. (Norman, 2008)

Photographed throughout his visit, this was a concerted media campaign by UNICEF—the story and images appeared on TV, in *People Magazine* (Norman, 2008) and in UK newspapers (e.g. *The Independent*, 2008)—in the lead up to the release of their *State of the World's Children* (2008) report and to bring particular attention to the fact that Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of infant mortality in the world.

**“We Can Make a Difference”: Scarlett Johansson and Women’s Empowerment in India**

As covered in the pages of *Marie Clare* in the UK and *People Magazine* in the US, in February, 2007, Scarlett Johansson was sent on an Oxfam-sponsored trip to India and Sri Lanka to raise issues of women’s empowerment in these two countries. Photographed with local women, school-girls and elephants in a combination of “jeans, T-shirts and locally bought trinkets that you’d see on any 22-year-old backpacker”, the writer traveling with Johansson shares that “…while the rest of us appear increasingly unkempt, she looks amazing throughout the trip—her pale, clear skin glowing as if lit from within” (*Marie Clare*, 2007, 205). In visiting various women’s projects and schools in both countries, in preparing to head back to New York, she states that the trip has been

> ...exhausting—emotionally and physically. … I’ve learned that you can make a difference. In places like this, even small amounts of money go a long, long way, I can’t ignore the things that I’ve seen—and can’t wait to see more. (Marie Clare, 2007, 208)

Indeed, at the conclusion of the trip, ‘ScarJo’ as she has been dubbed in the tabloids, has agreed, like “…other A-listers who have signed up, [including] actors Helen Mirren and
Colin Firth, Coldplay and Archbishop Desomond Tutu” to become an Oxfam ambassador. As she puts it

Having visited Oxfam-funded school programs in rural communities has made me realize how vital education is to developing countries in bringing people out of poverty and giving them a sense of dignity, self-worth and confidence. (Oxfam, 2007)

“The Bling Philanthropist”: Jay-Z and Clean Water in Africa

With a net worth nearing $320 million, in 2006, the US rap-music and clothing mogul Jay-Z toured Africa to, in his words, come “all the way from New York, all the way back home” (McLean, 2006, 24). Teaming up with the UN’s efforts to raise issues about poverty and water and MTV which was filming portions of the trip for the documentary Diary of Jay-Z: Water for Life, Jay-Z visited “shanty towns, rural communities and urban centres” in and around Cape Town and Durban to “bring clean water to the world’s poor”. As the article in the Telegraph Magazine argues, “[o]n paper, the UN and the world of hip-hop—characterized by bling-bling acquisitiveness, sexy videos, excess and, all too often, violence—could not be further apart” (McLean, 2006, 29). Jay-Z, however, sees it a bit differently:

I mean, the common ground was, we are all human beings. When you see a problem so staggering, and you don’t do anything to get involved, something’s wrong with you. It’s a basic thing—people should have access to clean water. The idea that water is a luxury is just crazy to me. They define access to clean water [as being] within a mile. That’s not access. That’s a trek!

He continues:

I wanted to get out and touch the culture of the cities, not just play music at night, and that morphed into, well, I might as well do some good while I’m there. And as I looked for a cause to take up, water seemed number one on the list.

During the tour and visits to local communities, he decided to fund a series of 10 water pumps—the development of which was partially funded by the Case Foundation established by the founder of AOL, Steve Case—to the tune of $140,000, a very modest amount of money to a multi-millionaire as the article’s author points out. Jay-Z responded the following way: “[m]y greater goal is to bring awareness to [the issue of the lack of clean water], more than what I can do physically and financially, because it is a solvable problem”. This is a sentiment shared quite heartily by the reporter who—in efforts seemingly designed to head off any criticism of his subject—states “[m]iddle-class Western hand-wringers may tut at another celebrity popping up in the Third World, posting for pictures with smiling poor people. Yes, Jay-Z’s monetary donation to the playpump scheme was probably less than his annual jewellery bill, But he is doing something. Plus, are any of those children … right now thinking ‘Damn, I wish Jay-Z had never come here’?” (McLean, 2006, 33; emphasis mine).

(RED), Celebrities, Iconic Brands and Developmental Consumption
The (RED) campaign, started by Bono and fellow DATA compatriot, Bobby Shriver, works by enrolling and ‘branding’ particular product lines of “some of the world’s most iconic brands” as a (PRODUCT) (RED) good (joinred.com, 2008). Corporations involved include American Express, Apple, Converse, Dell, Armani, Gap, Hallmark, Starbucks and Microsoft; thus, with Gap, for example, specific clothes lines at the company are branded as “(Gap) RED™” for consumers to purchase. As (RED) proclaims, it

...is not a charity. It’s a business model designed to create awareness and a sustainable flow of money from the private sector into the Global Fund, to help eliminate AIDS in Africa. Consumers buy (PRODUCT) RED, and at no cost to them, money is sent directly to the Global Fund. (joinred.com, 2008)

In short, in explaining in more detail how the scheme works in the context of buying one of Apple’s (RED) goods, “you have a new iPod nano (PRODUCT) RED and you helped save a person’s life”.

The star power, beside that of the power of capital, behind the (RED) campaign is quite staggering. From the progenitor of Bono, to other media, political and business ‘giants’ such as Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, Elle McPherson, Gisele Bündchen, Kanye West, Nelson Mandela, and Julia Roberts, celebrities have quickly been enrolled or joined the campaign. And despite criticism—least of which is how the program pushes for more consumption and the fact that most of the companies spent millions of advertising their (RED) products (Vallely, 2007)—the program should perhaps be seen as a form of DC extraordinaire given the celebrities and corporations involved. Indeed, unlike most high quality, DC goods, the products don’t cost more than similar un-(RED) branded goods; the money comes from corporate donations on these purchases which cut into the PRODUCT (RED)’s margin for the company. In support of the program, recent media coverage stated that

What the RED initiative has set out to do…is create a stream of revenue for the fight against AIDS in Africa which will far exceed one-off payments from corporate philanthropy budgets. It looks set to create a major source of cash for the Global Fund, and one which is sustainable. It is an entirely new model for fund-raising. (Vallely, 2007)

And, as of 2008, the program had given $63 million to the Global Fund, which (RED) credits with lowering rates of HIV infections across Africa (joinred.com, 2008); given that (RED) is still in its early stages of development, this program has the potential to greatly influence how DC is done and the impact of consumer-led development.

The Power of Celebritization and the Spectacle
So, what are we to make of the celebritization of development, if as Littler (2008, 238) highlights, these sorts of things are now “part of the contemporary celebrity job description and a hallmark of the established star”? What are some of the reasons this might be happening in the context of the specific shifting cultural politics of development and how can we understand it a bit better in the even wider nexus of media, politics and celebrities? As

---

10 DATA stands for Debt, AIDS, Trade, Africa and works to leverage public funds for African development; it was started in 2002 by Bono and Bobby Shriver—a well-connected former venture capitalist, film maker and poverty campaigner—and “…activists from the Jubilee ‘Drop the Debt’ campaign”. DATA has now combined with ‘the ONE’ campaign for a more united front and wider impact; for more, see http://www.data.org/.
developed throughout writings on celebrity culture and politics (e.g. Cashmore, 2006; Ferris, 2007; Lim, 2005; Marshall, 1997, 2007; Redmond and Holmes, 2007; Street, 2004; Turner, 2004), celebrities have, embody and deploy particular forms of power. Specifically here, they are particularly powerful in bringing issues into the media and to large audiences through their capacities as ‘endorsers’ of development-related causes:

The advantages of linking individual star power to a collective project are clear. Celebrities have the power to frame issues in a manner that attracts visibility and new channels of communication at the mass as well as the elite levels. As the head of Oxfam argues: “What celebrities can do … is that they can help you reach an audience which you wouldn’t otherwise get to, one which doesn’t listen to institutions but responds to people”. (Cooper, 2007, 7)

Littler (2008, 241) agrees, stating that “… celebrity involvement can raise the profile of a campaign, [bring] in extra media coverage and [attract] new audiences” at the same time—in the words of a UK communications organization—it can work to “demystify” issues, raise funds, mobilize public opinion and action and reposition and/or reinvigorate existing campaigns and NGOs. As one activist puts it, celebrity is “a gateway drug, of the best kind” (Duncombe, 2007) seemingly similar to how buying and consuming ethical goods can enroll consumers in larger campaigns (Clark et al, 2007).

Thus, the ‘use value’ of celebrity for progressively-minded stars is to ‘sell’ issues and causes to an audience that is becoming very used to being sold things by the famous. Complex—but also particularly constructed—stories about women’s empowerment, poverty, children’s health in the South are ‘packaged’ and sold to us by celebrities, their aesthetic wherewithal, their association with these causes and their talents for media exposure. The ‘brands’ then of both the celebrity and the causes are expanded through relationships with each other as presented to audiences and potential cause contributors/consumers. Seen one way, “if the celebrity is a brand that requires wide exposure through a number of different media in order to maintain its profile and topical currency, then one extremely cost-effective way is to provide endorsements for a humanitarian cause” (Littler, 2008, 241). Yet, this “brand extension” also provides space for celebrities to bring their personal politics into the public realm and/or to become politicized through the processes of working with progressive organizations. Indeed, as described in the various examples above, we are often treated to the tales of the specific moment of celebrities’ political and affective awakening of their “cosmopolitan charity” (Littler, 2008). Thus, through this politicization of celebrities in the expression and fashioning of their identities as ‘caring’, ‘good’—and indeed, political and politicized—individuals, there is often the implicit and/or explicit bolstering of various celebrities’ exchange value of their own branded commodity-ness.

Furthermore, as many causes have recognized, celebrities also embody the power of emulation. Developed out of the more conventional and somewhat overwhelming processes of celebrity product endorsement (McCracken, 1989), “hype is used to sell hope” (Lim, 2005, 26) in the sense that if we purchase an endorsed product we become more ‘like’ the celebrity and, thus, more ‘celebrity-like’. Whether we like it or not, in the “desire to be someone in our mediated age” (Duncombe, 2007) many (un)consciously create and manage

---

11 Awakening can be generated through celebrities’ own social networks as well; many, like Jay-Z, cite engagements with either Martin or Bono as working to get them interested in charity and development-related causes.
their identities—as well as create meanings—out of branded goods, their connections to branded celebrities and the particular aesthetics and meanings associated with movie, TV and music stars. For development and anti-poverty campaigns that use celebrities, very similar processes are evident: just as celebrities have bought into campaigns and can construct themselves and be seen as ‘caring’, ‘good’, ‘political’ and ‘doing something’, so too can we take on these characteristics—and, thus, create meanings for and about ourselves—by also buying into these campaigns through support, contributions and associated activities. But, as the campaigns are counting on, we are also able to buy into and be associated with much more than just the caring or good celebrity; rather, we are able to buy into and be associated with the celebrity, their brand, their spectacle, their meanings and identities and indeed, them as ‘intimate strangers’ (Schickel, 2000). Thus, various bits and pieces in various combinations of the celebrity aesthetic—for example, attractiveness (e.g. Beckham, Johansson), adventurousness (e.g. Johansson, Jay-Z) and coolness (e.g. Jay-Z, Bono)—are transferred to us and there to be incorporated into our identities as we choose to take part in these campaigns. We are also able to tap into the wider and other circulating constructions of various celebrities such as Bono’s and Jay-Z’s ‘rebel-ness’ as an anti-establishment rocker and rapper as well as something like Chris Martin’s ability and desire to care based on the ‘emotive’ flavor of his music. And, as celebrity endorsements of products and causes continue apace, combined with the development of their own food, perfume and clothing lines—for example, Jay-Z’s hugely successful Rocawear brand—the “de-differentiation” (Bryman, 2004) of celebrities, brands, and causes becomes even more intense with respect to the processes of consumption. Indeed, the (RED) campaign was developed with this de-differentiation as a core component of its business and marketing plan. So, now, if I purchase a Coldplay album, given Martin’s involvement with the fair trade movement, am I not also buying into Oxfam, fair trade and its various campaigns? If I now purchase fair trade coffee or contribute to Oxfam, am I not also now buying into Coldplay and Chris Martin? If I now pay for and see a movie Johansson is in, am I now also buying into some sort of global feminism? Or, more problematically—as taken up more below—what if I can’t stand U2 and so fail to listen to what Bono has to say or contribute to the causes he trumps because of my dislike for him or his music?

In the celebritization of development, there is not only a bid to work through the transference of ‘extra-ordinary-ness’ of these celebrities on to audiences, consumers and campaign contributors, but there is also a kind of transference of ‘ordinary-ness’ onto the celebrity subject/object. Just as we are overwhelmed by poverty, injustice and environmental destruction, so are they, as the statements above suggest. Celebrities often become ‘our’ representatives in the places of poverty they go to and observe, speaking for and to ‘us’ as normal people who are all in this together to solve the issues of poverty and development. They are our eyes and ears— their fabulous wealth and privilege faded into the background and talked over through their amplified but ‘ordinary’ voice—and our conscious. In observing what they are observing they are doing something about it with their celebrity but also in their capacity as a ‘normal’ caring person able to build rapport with the audience. Thus, if they can do something, so too can we as ordinary people who can work to transcend politics, governments and institutions in relations of care and campaign contributions. Here, then, in the celebritization of development is a sort of double transference of meanings and identities between stars and the audience in order to build and maintain anti-poverty campaigns: we are gifted with the various aesthetic qualities of celebrities and they the qualities of ‘normalcy’ and ordinary-ness so that ‘something’ can get done in the name of global development. Through this “pubic fashioning of the celebrity soul” (Littler, 2008) in
media accounts is an attempt to open up and cross the boundaries of celebrity/non-celebrity, private/public, rich/poor, North/South and most importantly care and non-care.

One of the keys with the celebritization of development is that, at some point during the various campaigns, the celebrity in question needs to somehow be situated in the landscapes of poverty they are pronouncing on. This act of being placed ‘in place’ can take the form of reporters’ descriptions of celebrity/poverty encounters, published celebrity travel diaries, and of course the tried and true, well-publicized photo-op with locals and local communities. This is not just about bringing media attention to an issue in places like Africa, but is simultaneously often designed to provide the celebrity with first-hand, on-the-ground experience with respect to ‘their’ landscape of poverty. For example, much like the experiences of Jay-Z and Johansson, Chris Martin was flown to Haiti as part of his involvement with Oxfam, with his experiences detailed in a publicized trip diary and set of accompanying images. As Oxfam describes in the introduction to his travels, “[t]aking a crash course in the economics of international trade, Coldplay’s Chris Martin spent a week in Haiti with Oxfam to promote the Make Trade Fair Campaign” (Oxfam, 2008). And as Martin confesses about the trip, “I felt like a fourth-rate Bono. Later on I felt like a third-rate Bono, and hopefully it’ll escalate until I feel like a full-on Bono”. Celebrity ‘placements’ then are not just about experience but about building this experience up in order that they have the knowledge about a particular place or topic in order to be a credible and trust-worthy voice on these places/topics. Unlike other product endorsements, then, celebrities—and the campaigns behind them—‘selling’ development works to develop audience rapport and the celebrities’ convince-ability by building up their knowledge of particular issues (e.g., international trade) and/or by being ‘in country’ and ‘with the people’. For Martin, building up his experience and knowledge allows him to become more ‘Bono-like’ given Bono’s perceived credibility, power and status as the ‘original celebrity’ in development’s celebritization pantheon of stars. We, as the audience, need to be convinced to some degree they, as the celebrity, do indeed know what they are talking about in order to be taken somewhat seriously and, thus, the celebritization of development is not just simply about marketing-driven photo-shoots designed to up the celebrity’s exchange value.

Celebrity involvement in anti-poverty and development campaigns is not without its problems. Indeed, beyond the ‘rich’ ironies of some of the world’s wealthiest superstars ‘holding forth’ on the poor, what Cooper (2007, 114) refers to as the ‘celebocracy’ and Young (2008, 50) calls the ‘celebritariat’, there are several specific critiques and issues worth airing. First, in one of the most swingeing critiques of the celebritization of politics more generally, Littler (2008, 246) makes the point that the ‘hyperindividualisation’ of celebrity is “structurally antithetical to democracy”; thus, campaigns that use celebrities are, in effect, buying into and “exacerbate” these inequalities and divisions. Much like the problematization and solutions to climate change (e.g. Hobson, 2006; Slocum, 2004), wider structural cultural and social problems are forcefully refracted through the neo-liberal lens of the ‘heroic individual’ (Boykoff and Goodman, in press, 10) taking responsibility off the shoulders of, in the case of development, international financial institutions, states, and the economic structures of inequality more generally. Indeed, caring celebrities do their ‘something’ as an individual but one with vast resources, political ties and an aesthetic retinue that not many of us can call on nor deploy. This is no small point but seems to often get lost in discussions supporting celebrity involvement as some sort of ‘third way’ of progressive politics. Second, there is the very real possibility of celebrities’ involvement becoming more ‘noise’ than ‘signal’ in the discourses about very real and very pressing concerns about poverty. There are a number of issues to consider here, the least of which is how celebrities might work to
simply distract audiences from the more substantive aspects of various campaigns and muddying what media-generated transparency there might be for famine, poverty and inequalities stalking the poorer parts of the globe. At the same time, they might turn our eyes in droves to a particular issue, but this ‘turning’ might simply become the extent of people’s involvement; here the aesthetics might not only get in the way of the more substantive message but also the actual praxis of caring by diluting the substance into superficial media appearances in an already thoroughly ‘mediated’ world. For example, in the article on Jay-Z’s campaign for clean water in Africa, his clothing line of Rocawear was mentioned more than five times, while the names of the children he met and talked to were apparently not even worth a mention. Thus, aesthetic performance trumps both politics and praxis with celebritization’s ‘superficiality’ of complex structural problems and inequalities becoming a potential problem very worthy of consideration. Third, in the celebritization of development more specifically, the reduction of poverty is now attached to the politics of personalized taste. Here, a potentially impenetrable layer of taste is added onto the often already tough layer of getting people to part with their money and contribute to campaigns or buy associated products. If I don’t like U2’s music or Johansson’s movies, chances are I might not be willing to listen to their messages about development. As many celebrities become the sole ‘face’ of a particular campaign, if I cannot stand them or the various media they produce, then why would I want to listen to them drone on about clean water or maternal healthcare? In addition, even with the sponsored ‘credibility tours’ designed for celebrities to gain knowledge of particular issues, it is hard for many stars to cross this credibility gap and to not be seen as a meddling musician/movie star first and caring, knowledgeable individual last only out to make more money on the backs of yet another photoshoot with the poor. In short, there is the very real possibility of taste, fashion and aesthetics working to derail and dilute the efficacy of celebrity-fronted campaigns.

In assessing the possibilities and problems inherent in the celebritization of development, I agree with Cooper (2007, 114) who—in writing about celebrity diplomacy more broadly—puts it this way:

> By its very nature, this type of debate is irreconcilable. The pros and cons exist in two solitudes with little or no room for merger. For the promoters of celebrities, this phenomenon represents an inexorable force tied in with the onward rush of globalization, with all its attendant elements of mass technology in global communications. Structure is everything. For the resisters the challenge is cast as part of an opportunistic spillover from the wider celebrity culture, with the global stage providing an inviting place for public stunts and self-indulgence. The issue is not about systematic change in the profile of diplomacy [and here, development], it is about a flawed form of agency.

Indeed, even for a respected critic like Littler (2008, 247), “[a]t the same time as [celebritization] heightens processes of neo-liberal individualization…celebrity do-gooding is a response to suffering and this should not be underestimated”. Furthermore, here I would add that it is a specific response from a specific set of vastly (over-privileged) group of people who are given a specific space for a specific set of discourses. Exploring how this has and is playing out in the specific—and as I am going to argue below—special case of fair trade is what I want to now turn to.
Act II: The Shifting Embodiments of Fair Trade in the UK: Quality, Mainstreaming and Celebritization

As many have detailed in the literature (e.g. Moore, 2006; Low and Davenport, 2004, 2006), fair trade goods are now thoroughly part of mainstream markets in the UK. No longer the provenance of dusty Oxfam charity shops or faith-based organizations’ Christmas catalogues, fair trade goods are now sold through established lines at supermarkets, coffeeshops and cafes. Estimated at £500 million in 2007 (Fairtrade Foundation, 2008a), many supermarkets now sell fair trade items—mainly coffee and chocolate—through their own-label brand goods, working to associate themselves very closely with fairer and more ethical trade. Even Nestlé—one of the most boycotted corporations in the world—sells fair trade coffee through its single line of ‘Partners’ Blend’ Nescafé fair trade coffee.

Led by several key UK fair trade brands, this mainstreaming of fair trade was at the base of much of the movement as markets started and continued to grow throughout the 1990s. For example, Cafedirect—set up through the joint workings of Oxfam, Twin Trading, Traidcraft, and Equal Exchange—had at its origins the desire to lead fair trade into the mainstream by capturing new consumer and market share. Yet, like organic foods, fair trade suffered from an image problem: that of poor taste and of poor quality. For example, some of the earliest fair trade coffees were rather hard to drink, thus only the most committed and core ‘solidarity drinkers’ bought fair trade coffee and other ‘early’ fair trade items. As a key player in the UK fair trade coffee industry put it to me in an interview, “in the early days, Oxfam would basically sell anything”. Thus, in parallel with the mainstreaming of fair trade was the drive—again led very much by the coffee sector—to develop fair trade as a set of ‘quality’ branded products of distinction and ‘good’ taste. Indeed, for some companies, selling and marketing fair trade goods as a quality item has overtaken much of the moral economy embedded in fair trade. In the same interview, my informant stated the following:

We’re not the ethical brand they have on their shelves, we are another brand and sure we’re ethical…but we are a brand just like Kellogg’s. … So there is definitely the changing focus to premium foods and fair trade second because that is how we see ourselves being, competing under mainstream against the big players, we differentiate on quality and price.

And in speaking about one of their newest fair trade lines, while he stated that “we are fair trade at our core”, he continued to say that “it’s a great tasting product, and, you know, that’s what we are selling it on. It’s on quality; it’s not on fair trade”. Another interviewee from an organic, fair trade chocolate company put it succinctly: “I think with [our company], taste is the first thing, and then the fact that it’s organic and then the fact it’s ethical”.

While tied somewhat to the wider shifts to ‘quality’ foods more broadly (Goodman and Goodman, 2009; Goodman, 2003) and the growth of the specialty coffee sector (Bacon, 2005), fair trade’s turn to quality and its parallel moves into the mainstream has had multiple and far-reaching effects. Thus, in what might be called a ‘de-centering’ of fairness in favor of quality in fair trade networks, there are four effects in particular that I want to highlight here. First, the market for fair trade goods in the UK has exploded with this mainstreaming going from an estimated total of £500 million in 2007 with a yearly market growth rate of somewhere on the order of 40 percent each year for the past five years (Fairtrade Foundation, 12 The worldwide total for fair trade goods was thought to be £1.6 billion in 2007 (Fairtrade Foundation, 2008b).
The sale of fair trade bananas—£150 million in 2007—has topped that of fair trade coffee which was £117 million (in 2007), rising 24 percent from the previous year (Fairtrade Foundation, 2008a). Importantly, what this market growth means is more money in the form of sales and price premiums going back to farmers and those others associated with the production of fair trade goods. In other words, more sales and market share—based on increasing quality, better taste, and retail shelf space—equates directly to more and expanded ‘development’ for producers. Second, with the inclusion and expansion of fair trade lines at supermarkets and through more corporatist channel such as Nestlé, these much maligned food actors are able to deflect the continuing criticism of their business practices through the kind of ‘halo’ effect that goes along with sourcing, selling and the marketing of fair trade goods. Third, the new quality requirements of fair trade goods are becoming clear barriers to entry for some of the most marginal farmers/producers wanting to take part in fair trade networks; this is evidenced by the Fair Trade Labelling Organizations International’s (FLO) program to increase producers’ quality as well as anecdotal comments made to me by several leading fair trade standards organizations. In some ways, this is similar to but beyond the standards-based ‘barriers to entry’ Guthman (2007) talks about in organic food networks; fair trade producers must comply not only with fair trade standards as laid out by FLO but now must also conform to the quality requirements dictated by what amount to, for example, ‘good tasting’ coffee or chocolate. Fourth, as will be detailed below, the move to position fair trade as a quality product has meant a need to shift the original marketing methods of fair trade to one of ‘quality’; thus, the earlier images and texts of fair trade goods has given way to, first, ‘landscape’ images of quality and, second celebrities. Thus, the historical transparency inherent in fair trade networks designed to make the connection between producers and consumers, part of fair trade’s ‘imaginary’ when purchasing these goods has become muddled in favor of newer and more ‘spectacular’ visual narratives.

The above points go to the heart of fair trade’s Faustian Bargain: With mainstreaming and the increasing quality of its products has come market growth and more money going back to poor and relatively marginalized farmers. But all of this has transpired at the cost of bringing in the ‘unsavories’ of supermarkets, greater barriers to entry to fair trade networks and a growing opaqueness to its transparency. A sort of worrying ethical, material and structural consequentialism has begun to take over in fair trade: the ends of more development through market growth are justifying the means of the intimate involvement of historically exploitative and exceedingly powerful multinational capitals, the increasingly ‘preciousness’ of quality (cf. Guthman, 2003) and of fair trade networks more generally, and the muddling of fair trade’s historical transparency with its aesthetic ‘turn’ as part of the wider celebritization of development discussed above. Indeed, when I asked a leading member of a charity organization heavily-involved in fair trade if he was concerned at all about the sale of fair trade through the likes of Nestlé he answered with a resounding “no” citing many of the points being made here about the positive connections and correlations between sales and development. Yet, however ‘worrying’ this consequentialism appears to be, it might be rather academic—in more ways than one—given the structures of how fair trade operates; in short, it doesn’t matter much who sells it and/or how as long as more is being sold to contribute to more and expanded development for poor farmers. Yet, perhaps it is better to say that—upon close examination of fair trade praxis—there are particular ways in which it does and should matter by whom and how fair trade is structured, marketed and sold. For me, nowhere are these considerations more clearly needed than in the shifting embodiments and imaginaries inherent in the marketing stories fair trade tells about itself.

Act III: Fair trade’s shifting embodiments and the mirror of consumption
As this growing ‘iron cage’ of quality has descended on fair trade networks, the imaginaries that surround, construct and produce fair trade in the UK have shifted. In short, the media and marketing imagery and the associated discourses through which fair trade ‘speaks’ to consumers and potential consumers—what I think of as the cultural politics of fair trade—has developed around new and changing ‘embodiments’ very much connected to a changing fair trade aesthetic. Here the meanings of and information about fair trade are being voiced and voiced differently through these embodiments as well as given to very different visual imagery and media ‘space’. There are four progressively different embodiments that have accumulated over time as driven by fair trade’s quality and associated aesthetic turns. The first and earliest embodiment is exemplified in fair trade’s ‘political ecological imaginary’—the images and descriptions of farmers, their livelihoods and environments, and the benefits of fair trade market participation—that works to develop a moral economy between fair trade producers and consumers. The key here, for me (cf. Lyon, 2006; Watson, 2006, 2007), is the set of images and discourses that attempt to construct these connections and relations of ‘care’ resulting in consumption on the one hand and Development on the other through the fair trade moral economy. The Fairtrade Foundation’s website (Figure 1) provides a specific example of this general trend that typifies the imagery on most of the earliest packaging of fair trade goods like coffee bags; consumers are afforded the opportunities to ‘see’ and ‘connect’ to fair trade producers and their families and are provided with descriptions of how selling in fair trade markets have improved their lives. Thus, this first embodiment of fair trade involves a sort of thick description of the producers’ lives and livelihoods—and indeed the very faces and bodies of the farmers themselves—in a bid to not only ‘de-fetishize’ these fair trade commodities and enable the development of the moral economy embedded in fair trade’s potentially transformative material and ‘imaginary’ alternative economy.

Yet, in many ways, much of this is now moot, especially in the coffee sector in the UK. Indeed, in order to develop “premium looks” of quality (as put by one of my key informants), the farmers are now gone in favor of a newer and second embodiment: that of dazzling and more ‘touristic’ images of sunsets/sunrises and world-famous landscapes like Machu Picchu (Figure 2), the later less known for its coffee than for the iconic Incan ruins clinging to its top. The problem, as an interviewee put it, was that the images and descriptions of farmers and their livelihoods became ‘too’ ethical and fair trade, thus maintaining those perceptions of the earlier and poor quality of these goods. As he put it:

“There’s not a picture of a smiling farmer on the front and there is a reason for that because that would be very fair trade and very ethical, and you go, ‘oh look’, you know, ‘farming’… but that scares consumers.

The connective and meaning-full transparency of fair trade networks had become a liability in the rapidly mainstreaming spaces of fair trade quality. Here, then are the beginnings of the opacity and muddling of the transparency of fair trade; no longer were consumers able to engage with communities’ livelihood struggles, however superficial this interaction might be, on a coffee bag through these earlier instances of transparency of the conditions of production and consumption. Instead the fair trade logo—now recognized by 57% of UK adults in a recent study (Fairtrade Foundation, 2008a)—becomes a kind of visual proxy for the relations developed in previous fair trade narratives and has taken on greater meaning in these shifting cultural politics.
And, as this turn to quality has continued to evolve and sediment even more now, this growing dis-association with producers’ livelihoods and the pull-back from transparency has taken a new twist: that of marketing fair trade through celebrities. This then is the third embodiment of fair trade and three particular instances of this stand out in the UK, all either concocted by or attached to Oxfam\textsuperscript{13}, the Fairtrade Foundation and/or Fairtrade Fortnight\textsuperscript{14}. First, there was the ‘let’s-pour-various-food-items-produced-by-the-Southern-poor-over-film-TV-and-music-celebrities-and-take-pictures’ campaign which started much of this off (Figure 3). Published fully in the Observer Magazine (Siegle, 2005) and then in dribs and drabs in other parts of the UK media and on Oxfam’s ‘maketradefair.com’ website, the point was to

...illustrate a story. A story about how poor farmers are being 'dumped on' every day by rich countries and rich companies and about how you can change this by joining the Big Noise petition to make trade fair. If we all join together and make a big enough noise politicians and corporate bosses will have to listen. (maketradefair.com, 2006)

The second instance involves photographs and celebrities again, but instead of having goods dumped on them, different foods were placed in various people’s mouths (Figure 3) bringing a new level of ‘performativity’ to fair trade media; this culminated in a photo exhibit in a London gallery and write-up in the Observer Food Monthly:

It's the new black - or rather, the new blue, green and black [the colours of the Fairtade logo]. Fairtrade, with its funky but strangely impenetrable logo, has become fashionable … . Last year it was voted 'best of the superbrands' in a poll to mark the launch of the Superbrands 2005 handbook—beating AOL, BT and The Times as the one that has excelled in its field. (Purvis, 2006)

The third instance involves the enrolment by Oxfam of Chris Martin, the lead singer of the British band Coldplay. Clearly not just the ‘other half’ of Gwyneth Paltrow\textsuperscript{15}, nor only the frontman for a band that has sold over 30 million albums and has four Emmys®; rather, he is quite convinced about fair trade: ‘If Beyonce sells hair products, I can sell fairer trade as that is what I believe in’ (Siegle, 2005). Taken to talking about fair trade and being photographed with ‘dumped’ food, Martin has taken this to another level by wearing fair trade shirts, but, I would argue, more interestingly, by writing ‘maketradefair.com’ on his piano and then his hand (Figure 4). This then, as fair trade has become a brand and the maketradefair.com campaign began to spread to a wider audience, turned into simply writing—with a nod to the Artist-Formerly-Known-as-Prince—an ‘equals’ (i.e. ‘=’) symbol on his hand. This then is the progressively fourth embodiment of fair trade: it’s earlier images, voices and stories of poor producers working themselves out of poverty through fair trade as been reduced to a mere equals sign.

I want to suggest that there has been a double shift in the cultural politics of fair trade. First as the ‘embodiment’ of fair trade have changed, the symbology of what fair trade is and is about has progressed from poor producers’ livelihoods, to the fair trade logo, to celebrities, to a ‘=’ on the hand of a rock star, so to has there been a shift in terms of who can speak about it and

\textsuperscript{13} Who now has a full-time celebrity ‘handler’ that gets various celebrities to pump for various Oxfam causes.

\textsuperscript{14} This is two weeks of a fair trade media blitz spearheaded by both Oxfam and the Fairtrade Foundation. See http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved_fairtrade_fortnight.htm

\textsuperscript{15} Who along with Cameron Díaz, has her own website dedicated to all things ‘green’ and environmentally friendly: http://www.actgreen.com/
how this can be done. Indeed, as Martin has put it—in a rather astounding statement for a musician—‘Nobody has to listen to me as long as they can see me’. Fair trade celebrities, logos, symbols and landscapes are overtaking fair trade’s previous bent of and for transparency and constructing a much less rich visual and textual language around the producer/consumer relationship constructed by fair trade’s material structures.

Second, this shift to quality, brand, brand value, and celebrity endorsements—besides inviting the ire of everyone from *The Economist* (2006) to fellow musicians—I want to argue, has caused fair trade in these mainstream clothes to lose some of its political ‘soul’ in the search for wider markets at the same time distancing itself from its overtly political beginnings of altering trade and working to raise the consciousness of consumers. Here then the Faustian Bargain—mainstreaming for more Development—in symbolic and discursive practice, acts to cover up the images and texts that might just work to politicise consumers in the form of Guthman’s (2007) “collective political subjects”. If anything, that sort of (un)making of politicized subjects in consumers she is worried about through labelling—if indeed, we hold to some of my earlier arguments about fair trade networks—has been held over on fair trade websites (e.g. Figure 1), on more niche-oriented goods, and with new entrants like Nestle. Indeed, one look at Nestle’s Partners’ Blend coffee and Tesco’s own-label fair trade coffee suggests a return to the ‘old school’ of fair trade marketing and a (re)embodiment of fair trade in the livelihoods of farmers and communities (Figure 5). Simply put, Nestle already has the quality credibility going for it, so the marketing sky’s the limit for as many poor farmers as they can fit on one label of bit of marketing. The irony here—that Nestlé has taken up the mantle transparency so much a part of fair trade’s political and ethical project—is quite a mouthful and worthy of much further critique and consideration.

*Fair Trade Celebrities: The Mirror of Consumption?*

So where does all of this leave us with respect to transparency? As argued above, on the one hand, transparency of production and consumption conditions and relations was and in some ways remains one of the key facets of fair trade; for me, it allows the unseen and unheard—at the same time they are clearly selling a product and a story—to have their (limited) say and is fundamental to the development of more moral economies but also the destabilization of exploitation and ‘uncaring’ economic trade relations. ‘Following the thing’ (Cook et al, 2004) was never more easy in these early media and marketing incarnations of fair trade networks and indeed, formed in integral part of the wider morally-inflected political possibilities of fair trade. Here, though, while transparency doesn’t automatically make politicized consumer subjects, alternative consumption does at least make them a possibility. On the other hand, being transparent in fair trade networks in the bigger scheme of things may not matter all that

---

16 This emphasis on the visual in connection with celebrity has also been voiced by ‘Mr. Darfur’ himself, George Clooney: ‘My job isn’t really to change [the minds of the UN Security Council]. My job is to make sure that cameras and light follow where I go’.

17 As Justin Dawkins (The Darkness) puts it: “Make your f***ing mind up. If you want to be a household name, be a household name.” Concerning Martin’s Fair trade cause Hawkins said, “If you’re concerned about Fair Trade, tattoo it on your skin, don’t just f***ing write it on your hand in felt tip.” And then there is Liam Gallagher (Oasis): “That lot are just a bunch of knobhead students - Chris Martin looks like a geography teacher. What’s all that with writing messages about Free Trade on his hand when he’s playing. If he wants to write things down I’ll give him a pen and a pad of paper. Bunch of students.”

18 This plays into the rather mystifying hands of Clarke et al’s (2007) formula for consumer ethics-politics: damn the subjectivities, consumers are being political by purchasing goods that contribute to some sort of nebulous ‘political networks’.
much as long as mainstreaming continues, markets grow, sales increase and development continues; indeed, swapping the subaltern aesthetic for those of landscapes and the ‘beautiful people’, if the recent growth in sales in the UK are any indication, has been a rather smart and shrewd move based on fair trade’s structures and a more consequentialist perspective.

Yet, in light of the general celebritization of development, the specific cultivation and media dissemination of fair trade celebrities deserves a bit of critical reflection. In changing out transparency and meaning-full imaginaries for market growth, I would argue that fair trade has produced for itself some ultimately ambiguous results as they now stand. In short, as more celebrities such as Chris Martin continue to colonize the media and marketing space for fair trade, fair trade consumption becomes a set of stories and images that we make for and tell to our rich and Northern selves and less about those (always limited) stories and images of poor Others that carry at least the possibilities of building ethical networks of care. This mirror of consumption, as one might have it, works to disassemble any opportunity to develop those connections with producers and the potentially collectivist political and knowing subjects of fair trade consumers (if indeed these connections ever did). In other words, if all we are seeing is celebrities talking about and supporting fair trade, consuming these commodities becomes more about being like that celebrity—and thus our ‘ordinary’ and ‘extraordinary’ selves—than it does about making connections to poor producers and their marginal and marginalized livelihoods wherein lies at least the opportunities to develop consumption as a form of ‘politics in an ethical register’ (Clarke et al, 2007). My biggest worry is that with both the celebritization of development and fair trade more specifically we are entering a veritable house of mirrors that works to reflect more of our own selves back to our own selves than it does on shining daylight on the global spaces of poverty, inequality and injustice; this house of mirrors might work to squeeze out the growing ethics of care in networks like fair trade and charity in favor of a cosmopolitan celebritization that cold amount to more hollow spectacle than material change. Thus, in the end, I would argue that while perhaps transparency as a process in the context of the structures of fair trade might ultimately not matter—to the material relationships embedded in these networks—as a possible tool in the service of politicization and possibilism in the realms of both production and consumption, it might well turn out to be rather invaluable.

Coda: Whither development and fair trade politics?

With the aesthetic rapidly taking over fair trade networks and development more broadly, these are interesting times indeed. Media and marketing/material imaginaries are being turned to the interest of the poor, but in particular ways through specific practices that move beyond the ‘ethical complexes’ of exposé and critique into new mediated versions of ‘the lifestyles of the rich and famous’ through the celebritization of development and the processes of DC. The ambiguous outcomes of these new mediations are readily apparent in the shifts being seen and experienced in fair trade markets: rapid market growth and Development for producers has come though mainstreaming and its progressively less transparent forms and guises with respect to fair trade’s marketing networks and imaginaries. In an era framed by ‘no alternative’ (Guthman, 2007) in the ascendant consumerist, neo-liberal-driven politics of DC, the house of mirrors being erected through the contemporary celebritized spectacle of development might rapidly shut down even more “ways out” than does the eco-labeling of various commodities such as water, foods and, more generally, the development process itself. Shouldering transparency aside in the hopes of creating market share through celebritization as is being done in fair trade networks is one way to go about doing more Development through fair trade structures and indeed, appears to be quite a successful
strategy taken in terms of market growth; this outcome, though is unique to the actual economic and governance structures of fair trade as they have been set out. Yet, to lose one of fair trade’s key sources of its difference—the construction of a distant-crossing moral economy and possibilities of more conscious and politicized consumers (e.g. Goodman, 2004; Barnett et al, 2005)—all developed out of the transparency inherent in the visual and textual production/consumption relations of fair trade networks, seems not only problematic but a rather substantial reversal of its original intent as an alternative way of doing Development. For me—and I would guess for Guthman (2007)—in the desire to develop more collective politicized subjects in the consumers of fair trade and Northern consumers more generally, it really is the means that matter just as much as the ends when considering the specific practices and processes of how, why and by whom fair trade gets done.

Consumer- and celebrity-driven politics in development are only really reaching their stride and don’t seem near to slowing down. On the one hand, they are about doing ‘something’, to recall what the journalist described Jay-Z as doing in Africa. But it is the particularities of these ‘somethings’ that are a bit more troubling; these are a politics of a kind but of a particularly media-ted kind that are specific to some and not to others, some kinds of action (e.g. consumption) and not others. Indeed, one of the most worrying trends in DC is the situation some communities find themselves in: they have nothing ‘marketable’ to sell to the North, be it a story, a particular aesthetics or a more material sort of good that consumers can take home with them. And, even if we might consider the (RED) campaign as somehow more innovative (yet also building on older DC-methods of fair trade), this sort of ‘something’ works to fundamentally entrench not only the neo-liberalist penchant for devolution of responsibilities to individuals and choice, but it entrenches those wider problematics of DC mentioned above. DC and campaigns such as (RED)—and the associated celebritization of development they affect—are often presented as ‘alternative’ forms of development that work in the gaps created by the roll-back of the State in the spaces of neo-liberal market reforms current gripping the globe. Perhaps now is the time that the development of some alternatives to the alternatives is in order.

19 This is certainly the case if one is to peek into the unfolding movements for ‘social entrepreneurship’ and ‘creative’/‘compassionate’ capitalism being driven by the likes of Bill Gates and others of the CEO-classes of the North (e.g. Gates, 2008) who have re-discovered not only the entrepreneurial force of the Southern poor, but more fundamentally have discovered their latent demand as consumers of Northern goods like cheap computers and communication technologies.
References


Bryant, R., 2007. For richer, for poorer: Towards a political ecology of the rich and famous. Paper presented at King's College London Departmental Seminar Series, November.


Marie Clare, 2007. Scarlett Johanssen in India: ‘we can make a difference’. October, 204-208.


The Economist, 2006. Voting with your trolley. 7 December.
Young, T., 2008. Lulled by the celebritariat. Prospect December, 50-52.
Figure 2

Cafédirect Launches New Wholebean Coffees