NO ALTERNATIVE: PARTICIPATION, INEQUALITY, AND THE MEANINGS OF

FAIR TRADE IN NICARAGUA

by

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Title: NO ALTERNATIVE: PARTICIPATION, INEQUALITY, AND THE MEANINGS

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This dissertation research takes an ethnographic perspective on competing notions

of "fairness" in the first vertically-integrated garment production chain in the world that

is certified as fair trade. In sharp contrast to the straightforward images of social justice

that are so common on the consumer end of fair trade, the dissertation demonstrates that

relations of fair trade production, distribution, and consumption are complicated by

ideological disjunctures, by different experiences of work and labor, by unequal access to

capital and political opportunity, by asymmetrical power, and ultimately by disparate

concepts of economic justice.

Organized as a commodity chain analysis, this dissertation is based on sixteen

months of multi-sited, ethnographic research in Nicaragua, funded by the National

Science Foundation (NSF), with four separate fair trade organizations: a faith-based NGO from North Carolina called the Center for Sustainable Development, a well-known Michigan-based fair trade retailer called Clean Clothes Organics, and two Nicaraguan producer organizations, including a women's industrial sewing cooperative (The Fair Trade Zone, which is the first worker-owned organization in the world to gain free trade zone customs certification), and an industrial cotton spinning plant called Génesis. The research shows that, from the standpoint of production and distribution, conflicts frequently emerge over the terms, conditions, and meanings of labor, business contracts, extra-contractual relations, participation in decision-making, and the definition of roles. Producers, moreover, often have no alternative but to accept the terms of more powerful groups under duress of poverty.

Theoretically speaking, this dissertation contributes to an understanding of alternative economic formations, including fair trade and cooperatives. In this vein, I argue that the idea of fair trade as an "alternative" to conventional trade is a problematic rhetorical move that tends to obscure the fact that all aspects of trade—production, distribution, and consumption—are not only inherently political, they are also riven with the complications of mediating between disparate cultural meanings, social positionalities, and political, economic, and social inequality. I recommend revisioning the relationship between the economy, the state, and various spheres of society in light of the insights of substantivist economics, feminist political economy, and ethnography.

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more than I can ever repay. Your keen insight and the sheer amount of time and effort that you gave over to me are far more than I deserve.

Father Oscar Romero wrote:

Es una caricatura de amor cuando se quiere apañar con limosnas lo que ya se debe por justicia, apañar con apariencias de beneficencia cuando se está fallando en la justicia social. El verdadero amor comienza por exigir entre las relaciones de los que se aman lo justo.

It is a caricature of love to try to cover over with alms what is lacking in justice, to patch over with an appearance of benevolence when social justice is missing. True love begins by demanding what is just in the relations of those who love.

The following is dedicated to the women and men of The Fair Trade Zone and Génesis cooperatives, as well as the many people who have dedicated their lives to seeking true justice.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The making of an alternative, economic imaginary appears to be underway with

fair trade. Emerging from a critique of free trade ideology and its human consequences,

fair trade has over the past twenty years gained a significant consumer presence in

markets in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia. In the global North, at least, fair

trade appears to alter the unjust terms of transnational trade by re-connecting consumers

and producers in relationships of solidarity (as opposed to exploitation), by re-aligning

consumption patterns with an ethic of compassion and care (rather than indifference or

ignorance), by re-balancing trade relationships between the North and the South, and by

re-embedding production and distribution in equitable, democratic, and participatory

social relations. In practical terms, the fair trade system accomplishes this by making the

trading chain shorter and more personal, by eliminating middlemen who take a cut at

each step, by returning a larger percentage of the final purchase price to producers, and

by ensuring that the products themselves come from democratically-run organizations

like cooperatives. What has emerged, in short, is an image of the fair trade movement as

an alternative to "mainstream," often identified as a solution to globalization's ills.

At the heart of fair trade, however, there also lie contradictions. Foremost among

them, perhaps, is the somewhat ironic fact that fair trade's notable consumer presence and

its alternativeness within consumer markets are not at all matched in the realm of

production. Firstly, as a increasingly iconic and mainstream manifestation of social justice, fair trade is not and cannot be a solution to globalization's ills. Although it is a four billion dollar industry that is growing at an unparalleled rate, in the long shot, fair trade also represents much less than a hundredth of a percent of goods traded globally and largely ignores the service sector and heavy industry in favor of consumables with high supermarket visibility like coffee, tea, chocolate, fruits and vegetables, and clothing. Second, for producers of these goods, the tangible effects of fair trade—economic stability, food security, access to education, empowerment in the workplace, and democratized trading relationships with (typically Northern) distributors—are far more complicated than the received image lets on. To be sure, price premiums paid for fair trade goods may prove economically advantageous to producers, but, realistically, those prices do not suddenly make producers' working lives "fair" so much as allow producers the flexibility to experience and articulate their own, new meanings of fair that might otherwise be impossible in conventional arrangements of trade and labor. Fair trade, that is, does not really map out an alternative pathway within globalization or global capitalism so much as utilize already existing market mechanisms to reconfigure (and, to some extent, to reproduce) race, gender, and class inequalities.

With the goal of moving beyond the limited, consumer-oriented imaginary, then, this dissertation explores the tensions, contradictions, and frictions of fair trade that, in an ethnographic lens, substantially make up the interactions, relationships, and experiences involved in a fair trade garment production chain in Nicaragua. While framing fair trade

as an alternative is useful for pointing out that there is something wrong with conventional trade, the largely rhetorical move also tends to reinforce the problematic assumption that there exists some coherent, context-free "mainstream" capitalism that fair trade is, in effect, on the outside of and toward which fair trade practices are opposed. The extension of what is ultimately a very circumscribed political, economic, and social imaginary of fair trade to the realm of production, moreover, tends to obscure recognition of the many points of overlap, connection, and continuity of the trading strategy with the so-called mainstream. The production side of fair trade, I argue, can instead be illuminated by an understanding of the commodity chain through which goods are produced and distributed.

While the majority of fair trade research thus far has arguably been concerned with theorizing fair trade consumption patterns as well as the supposed challenge that fair trade represents to conventional trade, this dissertation locates itself within the slowly growing field of research that seeks instead to bring production and producers' meanings and experiences to the foreground of the discussion, to pull back the shroud of consumerism—or what Marx refers to as the "fetishism" of the commodity—and to reveal the actual social relationships concealed behind it. The dissertation takes as a case study the transnational network involved in the finance, production, distribution, and marketing of garments in a vertically-integrated, fair trade commodity chain in Nicaragua, extending into the U.S. via a transnational network of financial, legal, and political support. By network, I am referring to a number of discrete yet interrelated

groups, including (1) a small, faith-based sustainable development non-government organization (NGO) from North Carolina called the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), which has provided financing and on the ground legal support to the projects; (2) a Michigan-based fair trade retailer called Clean Clothes Organics, which is the production chain's primary client; (3) a women's sewing cooperative, called The Fair Trade Zone, in the urban community of Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua; and (4) a organic cotton spinning cooperative, called Génesis, also in Ciudad Sandino, which is currently in the construction and legal formalization stages and, as of this writing, is scheduled to start production in January of 2010. Notably, in September of 2009, this production chain received fair trade certification by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), a sustainability and standards developer and certifier that, in cooperation with National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) International and the International Labor Rights Fund, recently developed a garment certification system called Fair Labor Practices and Community Benefits, making it the first garment production chain in the world to be certified, from field to factory, as fair trade.

The dissertation follows the conceptual model of the commodity chain, starting with financier, distributor, and marketer and moving backwards from factory to field. Instead of simply accounting for the function of each link in the chain as a function of the whole garment production process, however, I instead track at each stage the social relations of production as they are structured, shaped, negotiated, and sustained within both disparate and shared frameworks of ideology, meaning, and power. I therefore

foreground the complexity of dynamic relationships, the imperfect connection between actors, as well as the tension, miscommunication, conflict, and asymmetrical power that are central to fair trade and that often reproduce well-trodden race, class, and gender inequalities. At the same time, I argue that the economic and social organization of fair trade in producer communities functions more to clear space for producers to articulate and experience new meanings of fair than to enable those producers to suddenly experience fairness in their lives and work. In so doing, I also argue that an ethnographic perspective on fair trade requires that we ultimately to do away with a strictly economic understanding of fairness, measured in the narrow terms of higher wages or increased profits, and return to some of the fundamental and long-standing questions that anthropologists have posed about human life. As Robert Redfield (1956) frames it, What do people desire for themselves and for their children? To what kind of life do they attach highest esteem?

COMMODITY CHAIN ANALYSIS

Originating with world-systems theory, commodity chain analysis is a useful approach for organizing observations about the many connections involved in production and consumption within the context of specific, political economic structures.[1] Commodity chain analysis also performs the important task of unsettling commonsense understandings of trade, especially when trade is simplistically depicted as a single kind of social dynamic playing out, such as market forces or even social solidarity (Collins

2003). In the case of fair trade—which is, following Gary Gereffi's (1994) terminology, a "buyer-driven" chain, meaning that it is primarily concerned with the production of consumer goods—commodity chain analysis is also useful for bringing into sharp, critical focus the many different transactions, social relationships, and experiences that exist before those fair trade relationships become either hidden from view by the anonymous nature or the market or before they are stylized in advertising to meet the expectations, desires, and needs of consumers. Commodity chain analysis, in other words, challenges the misplaced concreteness not only of fair trade as an identifiable set of alternative trading practices but also of the so-called "mainstream" trade to which it is opposed.

At the same time, however, there are some pitfalls to the commodity chain approach that must be acknowledged and addressed. To begin with, commodity chain analysis tends to oversimplify each step in the production process by representing each as an identifiable set of activities, by ignoring the recursive effects of finance and capital in the "connection" between actors, and thus by abstracting the chain itself from the particulars of those activities and connections from geography, history, and cultural and social relations (Williams 2000). In other words, the commodity "chain" is a metaphor, and though it may capture the interconnections between different elements of production and consumption systems, it may also sever those elements from the full range of complex determinations (Bair 2008, Jackson et al 2006). As a way of organizing observations about and understandings of those connections and nothing more, it is

important to resist reification of the commodity chain and to instead rely on empirical (i.e. ethnographic) data.

With the goal of understanding economic connections as imperfect and laden with asymmetrical power while at the same time bringing into consideration putatively non-economic factors, my ethnographic approach to this Nicaragua-based commodity chain draws on the theoretical work of Timothy Mitchell (2002, 1998), J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006, 1998), and Anna Tsing (2005), each of whom have unsettled in their own ways the perceived stability of categories like *the economy*, *economic activity*, and *transnational connection*. Mitchell (1998:85), for one, challenges the contemporary idea of "the economy" as a separate, closed, and self-regulating system with distinct physical dynamics (i.e. equilibrium, stability, elasticity, and inflation), showing it to be discursively co-emergent with physics as a coherent scientific discipline in the late nineteenth century. He instead identifies two discursive processes through which, over the years, the self-contained sphere of the economy has come to appear fixed and self-evident: (1) the exclusion of what does not belong to the economy (the household and the state), thereby defining certain areas of life as "non-economic" (Mitchell 1998:92), and (2) the quantification and measurement of that which happens to fall within the "economic" sphere, such as monetarized exchange. In fair trade, likewise, understanding alternative economies as well as the mainstream economy as discursively constructed, rather than positively existing, clears space not only for problematizing the demarcation between fair trade and regular trade but also for reconsidering those non-economic

interactions, relationships, and experiences that appear to be outside of the purely economic consideration. These seemingly non-economic elements are very much experienced as part of "fair" relationships of exchange but are not often accounted for in terms of the profits returned to producers.

Of course, Mitchell was not the first to challenge the boundary between what is considered economic and non-economic. Feminist economists and social scientists have for some time now sought to broaden the scope of "the economic," often by proposing strategies for counting in activities that have largely been ignored. Mackenzie and Rose (1983), for example, suggested that the focus on the "sphere of production," of market production and exchange, misses the importance of the "sphere of reproduction," of unpaid domestic labor. They argue that understanding the co-existence of the public sphere with the domestic sphere is crucial for a more complete understanding of the capitalist economy. Nancy Folbre (2001), likewise, argues that market economies are sustained by relatively invisible activities of care and suggests that the solution is to stop assuming that norms and preferences for caring are somehow "outside" of the economic system. Marylyn Waring (1988) extends this basic argument by proposing that women's unpaid work be counted by assigning it monetary value and including it as part of a country's gross domestic product (GDP). She estimates that, in Australia, for example, the value of household labor of unpaid, domestic workers would be almost equivalent to the total value of goods and services in the market. By re-conceptualizing the economy and extending its mechanisms for measurement to new spheres of activities—domestic

production, reproduction, the economy of care, and the gift economy—one may come to a better understanding of the relative value of work and, even more to the point, effect a kind of political transformation of society.

Yet, as Gibson-Graham (1998) argue, it may be the case that strategies of counting in those heretofore unrecognized spheres might fall short of a fully transformational politics. While they certainly add to the picture, they do not help us think differently about the economy. In fact, though the added sectors may be recognized and counted, they nevertheless remain locked in the subordinate position of the binary vis-à-vis the "core" economy. At the same time, compartmentalizing economic activities obscures the fact that market-based production might, in some circumstances, contain features of worth, and non-economic sectors might produce inequitable relationships. Gibson-Graham (1998) argue that, instead of pursuing a platform of making "the economy" complete and whole, what is instead needed is its total deconstruction, especially in consideration of its inextricable embeddedness within the full range of social processes.

In the study of fair trade, what Mitchell's (1998) and Gibson-Graham's (1998) insights open up is not just a more complete understanding of "fairness" in fair trade, extending analysis beyond the quantifiable data of profits to non-economic phenomena like the experiences of producers, participatory relationships with trading partners, and equitable interactions with other members of the network. Rather, deconstructing the fair trade economy in ethnographic terms means dissolving the rigid opposition between the economic and the non-economic. It also means understanding the transnational

connections that fair trade enables—not just in economic exchange but also in patterned social relations and everyday interactions—to be riven with the disruptions and malfunctions of wholly unfair power dynamics and strategies of resistance.

Drawing on the work of Anna Tsing (2005), in particular, I argue that the "frictions" of fair trade, which often produce unexpected and unintended consequences, are crucial for re-conceptualizing a commodity chain analysis that unproblematically implies continuity and collaboration between actors. Rather than focusing on the perfect connection in the production of fair trade, Tsing's (2005) approach suggests that we must shift the margin to the center and focus on *de facto* differences and disjunctures in order to generate a more complete picture of not only how fair trade networks "work" but also how they often fail to do so, unintentionally reproducing inequality rather than challenging it.

METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

This dissertation is based on approximately 16 months of ethnographic research in Nicaragua and employs a scaled down version of "multi-sited ethnography" (Marcus 1995), which is especially well suited for commodity chain research. Although the scope of the project will in the future be expanded to include the agricultural end of the production chain, (a) El Porvenir, an agricultural cooperative community of 25 families in the mountains of Chinandega, Nicaragua, and (b) COPROEXNIC, a small-producer federation cooperative of about two-thousand producers in the Matagalpa region, which

are both making the transition to the production of cotton, the research I present thus far is based on ethnographic data from Nueva Vida and Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua. These sites are very much transnational sites, as they are home to not only The Fair Trade Zone and Génesis cooperatives but also the sustainable development NGO, CSD. Moreover, they are frequented by the primary fair trade retailer involved in the production chain, Clean Clothes Organics, as well as representatives from a number of church and university delegations in the U.S. who form part of the larger transnational network.

Multi-sited ethnography, in this respect, dovetails with "global ethnography" (Burawoy 2000) as a way of shedding light on translocal phenomena via place-based ethnographic research. Global ethnography uses multiple sites and broader social movements and removes them from the hard-and-fast local in order to embed them in broader systems. Situated action can therefore be seen as transnational action and vice versa, as transnational forces may come to be understood as rooted in or having effect on historical and cultural contexts. In the case of fair trade, global ethnography is useful for focusing the connections that inevitably occur between transnational actors while at the same time reflecting on questions and concerns that extend to the international community.

For the purposes of data collection, this research project has been divided up into three broad approaches: (1) Participant observation, unstructured interviews, and secondary or archival data collection, (2) semi-structured and focus group interviews with each research population, and (3) life history interviews. Participant observation involves

observing, recording, and participating in daily activities and public conversations of

research participants (e.g. Schensul et al 1999). Because what people say, what they

believe, and what they do are often at odds with each of the others, the purpose of

participant observation is to observe unanticipated patterns of thought and behavior

within a naturalist setting, as well as to contextualize information collected through other

methods, such as archival data, unstructured or structured, individual and group

interviews, and life history accounts (Dewalt et al 1998). Participant observation requires

taking part in the work process, attending informal or formal community gathers, trips to

the store, meals at restaurant, and ceremonies and holiday celebrations. In the context of

fair trade, this methodology is central to the project of dissolving the distinction between

economic and non-economic phenomena, functioning to make clear that, on a day to day

level, economic activities cannot be understood apart from their various purposes,

conditions, and historical, cultural, and social contexts. In this dissertation, archival and

secondary data collection involving newspapers, magazines, websites, and demographic

and other documents further contextualizes the lived experience of research participants

(Bernard and Ryan 1998, Farnell and Graham 1998). Second, unstructured and semi-

structured, individual and group interviews function to explore in greater depth the

factors and sub-factors that are most important to research participants (Morgan 1988).

And third, while recognizing that accounts of the past are always given in the present, life

history interviews function to give historical depth, especially with regard to the

construction of the network and the production chain and with the broader goal of

identifying patterns of unequal power and structures of inequality in fair trade as they are continuous with past experiences.

I do not wish to perpetuate the problematic idea that these methodologies, even the rapport that a researcher develops with research participants (read: subjects), merely enable the researcher to "gain access" to the field site, to engage with "the field" and return with knowledge. However often ethnographic research may be framed in such terms, I do not conceptualize rapport—or, more specifically, the relationships and friendships that I sought with research participants—as directed toward the purpose of gaining greater depth of perspective or knowledge. In fact, I find the idea insidious and objectionable, having the distinct aftertaste of manipulation and domination. I also find it misrepresentative of the dialogical manner in which the basic framework and central research questions of this project were originally formulated. Instead, I understand relationships, friendships, and rapport not as a tool for gaining knowledge but as the precondition of knowledge production and engagement. Drawing on feminist research methodologies as well as the advice of research participants in The Fair Trade Zone, Génesis, and CSD, I seek a mode of engagement that does not stop with a consideration of the scientific veracity of those methods, but brings to the fore the logics and ethics of those relationships. As a relational mode of engagement, in other words, I seek to go beyond explanation to evocation and translation, and I identify my own participation in this research as not simply "on" but "with" and "alongside" (Abu-Lughod 1990, Behar 1993, Casas-Cortés 2008, Latour 2005, Strathern 1991, Tsing 2005).

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter II, "The Three-Legged Stool," focuses on the two North American organizations, CSD and Clean Clothes Organics, as well as the emergence of the transnational fair trade network through relationships of collaboration and conflict. Based largely on participant observation and life history interviews, I give an account of the emergence of CSD in 1979 in North Carolina as an intentional community working with homeless shelters. I chart CSD's progressive formalization, or NGO-ization, its eventual move to Nicaragua in 1994, and the initial formulation of the network in 1999 with the NGO's connection to Clean Clothes. Yet, instead of representing CSD's NGO-ization and its role in financing this network as the inevitable consequence of the neoliberal shift that occurred circa 1990 in Nicaragua, I seek, as E. P. Thompson put it, to rescue an account of CSD from the "enormous condescension of posterity" (1980:12). I instead focus on the contradictions that exist between the CSD community's ethical and moral ideals, the political economic circumstances of their actions, and what they perceive to be practical, realistic, and sustainable, suggesting the notion of reluctant consciousness as a way of demonstrating that the NGO's actions and ideals are not isomorphic. Given this historical and ethnographic context, the main goal of this chapter is to highlight the conceptual differences between charity, sustainable development, ethical business, and social justice, as they inform the economic strategies of CSD and Clean Clothes Organics.

In Chapter III, "Dignified Work, Motherwork, and the Logic of Sweat," I give a historical account of the formation of The Fair Trade Zone, the first worker-owned cooperative in the world that also has free trade zone (*zona franca*) status. I give an ethnographic account of workers' labor in building the cooperative by appeal to the idiom of "sweat" (*sudor*) and its relationship to the identity of mothers, and I explore cooperative members ideas of fair trade in terms of the concept of "dignified work" (*trabajo digno*) as opposed to "fair trade" (*comercio justo*). As such, I explore the differences between ideologies of abstract labor and membership imposed by CSD and Clean Clothes, on the one hand, and the concrete experiences of labor, on the other. I recommend a phenomenological approach to labor, which brings to the fore the not-yet-coded and not-yet-quantified "lived experience" of labor, for understanding the tension that emerges between The Fair Trade Zone, on the one hand, and CSD and Clean Clothes, on the other.

In Chapter IV, "Fair / Competition and the Friction of Fair Trade," I critique the idea of "partnerships" in fair trade as a way of representing how groups with different backgrounds and agendas manage to work together with a common purpose. I suggest that partnership is not always the best characterization of the concrete relations of fair trade networks, as the term has tended to curtail, rather than amplify, the recognition of specific instances of disjuncture, difference and differential power amid so-called "grassroots" actors. Drawing explicitly on Tsing's (2005) concept of "friction," I attempt to illuminate the imperfect quality of interactions, conflicts between disparate

frameworks of meaning and ideology, and divergent understandings of "fairness" in fair trade by recounting a story of conflict that emerged between CSD, Clean Clothes, and The Fair Trade Zone over issues of labor and membership in the cooperative. At the center of this conflict are divergent understandings of the business contract, the analysis of which registers a challenge to some of the basic assumptions of voluntaristic economic exchange.

Chapter V, "Building Consciousness from the Ground Up," moves on to an account of the early stages of the Génesis cooperative's construction and formalization. Based on research conducted during the implementation of Clodomir Santos de Morais' Organization Workshop OW), a large-scale enterprise-building and employment generation workshop originally from Brazil, I analyze the OW's concept and strategy of "organizational conscientization," which harkens back to Paulo Freire's famous method, and examine the implementation of the workshop's consciousness-raising technique within the social, cultural, organizational, political, and economic context of Génesis. Using consciousness as a starting point for thinking about the formation of a cooperative and the development of equitable social relations, I explore cooperative members' ideas about "fairness" in their working relationships with one another.

Finally, Chapter VI, "Fair Trade and Translation," is based on a collaborative research project, alongside a committee of Génesis cooperative members, and reports on an attempt to build a website that more accurately represented the cooperative, its history, its structure, and its various challenges. Génesis cooperative members ultimately handed

the project over to CSD for editing, however, and so, as a window to the micro-politics of

representation in fair trade, I examine the choices that CSD made in order to "market" the

cooperative to donors. I conclude by reflecting on the distinction between self-

representation and self-determination.

NOTES

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[1] The term *commodity chain,* defined as "a network of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity," comes from Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986, 1994), where it is used to discuss the variety of international chains for agricultural and timber products.

CHAPTER II

THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL

For many scholars, the professionalization, or "NGO-ization," of social

movements has represented one of the most important social, political, and economic

shifts of the last twenty years, ushering in a new kind of transnational political strategy to

respond to the spread of democratization, discourses of cultural citizenship, as well as the

near global spread of neoliberalism (Álvarez 1998, 2009). As David Harvey writes:

> The rise of advocacy groups and NGOs has, like rights discourses more generally,
> accompanied the neoliberal turn and increased spectacularly since 1980 or so.
> The NGOs have in many instances stepped into the vacuum of social provision
> left by the withdrawal of the state from such activities. This amounts to
> privatization by NGO. [2007:177]

The proliferation of NGOs, in other words, is a direct consequence of political economic

change. Accompanied by the (perceived) democratization of authoritarian state regimes,

the (alleged) disappearance of counter-political movements, and the rolling back of the

state in the areas of welfare and the provision of social services, neoliberalism has

demanded the professionalization and formalization of former grassroots movements,

which have been forced to stake out their territory by transforming into legally

recognized organizations with budgets, hired staff, and well-defined projects or areas of

expertise. Further empowered by a new generation of individual and identity-based

rights discourses, Harvey argues, NGOs have in fact accelerated the process of neoliberal

privatization rather than cushioned its impact in society, thus functioning, in a way, as

"Trojan horses for global neoliberalism" (Harvey 2007:177). Perhaps the farthest

reaching critique of the proliferation of NGOs and the NGO-ization of now-muted,

counter-political social movements has been based on the impression that the NGO

sector, as well as micro-lending development initiatives such as the Grameen Bank, hand

in hand with market reforms and liberal democracy initiatives pushed by the IMF, the

World Bank, and the U.N., effectively amount to a new brand of imperialism that

circumvents and undermines the authority of the state (Edwards and Hulme 1995:4,

Karim 2008, Petras 1997, Pons Cortes 2001).

From a more optimistic perspective, another set of scholars and activists have

preferred to characterize the NGO phenomenon as a "quiet" revolution that has helped to

build a more vital and democratic civil society, to broaden popular participation and

disseminate alternative perspectives such as sustainable, community, and participatory

development (Fisher 1997:40, Esteva 1987, Escobar 1995), and to liberate poverty

alleviation strategies and disaster relief measures from the ineffectuality of the state

(Rocha and Cristoplos 1999). These scholars also commend the NGO's expansion

internationally, as the new alliances between actors have helped to forge a vibrant

international civil society that connects networks of activists through their globally

shared concerns (Nash 2004, Keck and Sikkink 1998, Korey 1998). Moreover, the NGO-

ization of social movements—such as Álvarez (1998, 2009) describes in the case of

feminist organizations across Latin America—has resulted from vanishing need for or

viability of spontaneous counter-political movements operating outside of established

legal structures. While this increased access to political and civil society, moreover, has

allowed for a greater range of interests to be expressed, already well-established groups

have also reasserted their influence.

This chapter is based on ethnographic research with the Center for Sustainable

Development, an intentional, faith-based community that emerged in the late 1970s in

North Carolina that sought to address issues of homelessness and disappearing social

welfare systems in the U.S. during the 1980s and that became part of the Central

American solidarity movement, reformed as an NGO, and moved to Nicaragua following

the country's neoliberal structural adjustments in the early 1990s. While acknowledging,

as Harvey points out, the structural conditions that have allowed for NGOs in the late

1990s, I argue that it is also important to understand that neither NGOs nor the actors that

in turn compose those organizations can be neatly categorized as a single type of actor

(Fisher 1997:441). Though they may occupy similar social positions in society, these

organizations vary greatly in size, structure, politics, histories, sources of funding, and

relationships to the state, and they have undertaken an enormously varied range of

activities, including provisioning of welfare services, implementing grassroots

development, promoting human rights, protesting environmental degradation, engaging

voter literacy, and even pursuing right-wing or conservative issues (Berthoud 2001,

Fisher 1997, Leve and Karim 2001, Mencher 1999). Members of these organizations,

likewise, may have their own ideas, ideals, and identities, which do not necessary mesh

with the concrete practices of the NGO. To simplify NGOs to either panaceas of

neoliberalism or handmaidens to it is to miss the real substance of their local-global

dynamics and the particular effect they have had in shaping things like development

strategies, the flow of transnational capital, and the relationship between non-

governmental actors and the state. Likewise, to identify members of these organizations

with articulated policies, strategies, or goals of the organization is to miss the tension that

often exists between what people think is right or just, on the one hand, and, on the other

what is practical and effective, given political, social and economic circumstance.

In the case of the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), I therefore seek to

problematize the connection between beliefs and practice, arguing that, in a discussion

that is oftentimes replete with sweeping generalizations—not the least of which is

glossing all types of mobilizations as "civil society" or "grassroots"—anthropologists

may make an enhanced contribution by engaging the structures of neoliberal capitalism in

the concrete, ethnographic terms of local-global dynamics. In the first part, I offer an

ethnographic account of the NGO's own professionalization over thirty years, focusing in

particular on the emergence, construction, and narration of specific kinds of political

subjectivities among political actors, the emergent forms of social consciousness

regarding structures of race, class, gender, and politics in North Carolina in the 1970s and

1980s, coupled with the imperative in historically progressive forms of Christianity to

"*do* justice" rather than to merely speak, think, preach, or write about it. As is abundantly

clear in a historical account of the formation of CSD as a theologically radical, faith-

based community in 1979 and its subsequent reconfiguration into an NGO in the 1990s,

political transformations of actors are based in specific sociocultural and historical contexts, not generalized "epochs."

Yet, CSD's case also shows that political subjectivities and, indeed, "consciousness," may not always translate into practice, but rather may exist in tension with ideas of what is practical, given political and economic conditions. Thus, in the second part of this chapter, I give an ethnographic account of the conceptual difference between charity, on the one hand, and sustainable development and community empowerment, on the other, that CSD developed over the years as well as the many compromises that CSD begrudgingly makes on a daily basis. One of these compromises, as it turns out, is fair trade. Since the late 1990s, CSD has been instrumental in coordinating the construction of a vertically-integrated, garment production chain of cooperatives and in linking that chain with a fair trade market in the U.S., the largest component of which is the fair trade retailer Clean Clothes Organics. While CSD pursues fair trade as a marketing strategy for these garment production cooperatives, they are under no pretense that fair trade is an optimal, or even good, solution to the problems presented by corporatism and neoliberalism. Thus, against the perspective that NGOs embrace fair trade as a strategy and thus are colluders in extending neoliberal logics and devolving regulation of the economy to the market, I point out that, in this case at least, fair trade is better thought of as a compromise than a solution. From CSD's point of view, fair trade is not the structural or systematic change required for truly realizing social justice, yet there there really is no alternative.

FORMING AN "INTENTIONAL" COMMUNITY

Although the exact year in which the idea of forming what would later be called

the Center for Sustainable Development came about is a matter of some debate, Carolyn,

Vanessa, and Roger—the three college friends and founding members of the organization

—vividly recall that it all started sometime during a hot summer in the 1970s. After

college, Roger and Vanessa had just graduated from seminary in Indiana and returned to

their home town of Statesville, North Carolina, where Carolyn was teaching high school

social studies. In order to make ends meet while they were working with their local

presbytery's summer youth group program, they decided to move in together and share

resources. Carolyn describes the moment in which the idea of putting their efforts to

"something good" first came up:

> Literally we're sitting around watching the evening news, going, the world is
> going to hell in a hand-basket, and why isn't anybody doing anything? And we
> went, you know, we're not doing anything either. It was at that moment the three
> of us started to think seriously about what we should be doing.

CSD effectively started in the house in which they shared rent. The ill-defined

notion of doing something good began to take shape as they realized that, in order to do

anything at all, really, they needed to share expenses and pool their resources. Given

their common social, political, and religious visions, the three eventually adopted the

model of an "intentional community," a term of Quaker origin that denotes the active

choice to collaborate and work together for a common spiritual, social, or political goal

(Brown 2002). They then began to think about how their meager, shared resources could

be put to use as the basis of community projects. Of course, they did not yet have a clear

idea of what those projects would be, and so they decided to start by surveying the local

community. Roger and Carolyn visited local hospitals, the salvation army, social

services, and local pastors with the goal of determining what community needs were and

were not being met with the current allotment of resources, space, and staff. As Carolyn

recalls, the survey ultimately generated an ambitious list of more than fifteen basic needs

in the Statesville community, "none of which we were equipped to meet and all of which

cost lots of money."

Meanwhile, Vanessa had discovered that in the south end of Statesville there was

an old, dilapidated church that had been abandoned by the congregation when, as part of

a larger "white flight" trend, the formerly white neighborhood was become progressively

black, and white people were instead moving into the recently built suburbs to the north.

Roger and Vanessa, identifying themselves as seminary graduates, decided to approach

the congregation with the proposition of turning the space into a shelter for the homeless,

which they had identified as one of the major needs in the city. Though the church

leadership did not immediately turn them away, neither were they cooperative. Carolyn

describes it:

> They kept going, oh, you nice idealistic young people, you don't know what
> you're getting into. Which was true, and it's probably good that we didn't, or we
> never would have tried. But nevertheless, they would say go forth and do a
> geographical what do you call it when you do a people survey, and come back.
> And so we would go away and we'd come back, and we would answer the next
> set of questions, and they would say, oh you nice young people, but you still don't
> know, so go away and do this. And then we would come back. We were
> persistent, until finally they really were left with the choice of either giving us the
> building or saying no, they didn't want to help the poor. I mean, we left them
> with no other alternative, so they gave us the building.

Carolyn, Vanessa and Roger gave up their house and sold their cars and much of their belongings to start the first homeless shelter in Statesville. Thankfully, the church was grandfathered in so that would not have to meet housing regulations, and Roger found a job in order to provide some income for the community for food and for making improvements to the building. Meanwhile, Vanessa and Carolyn pulled old mattresses and bed frames off the curb, or bought them cheap at yard sales, and went door to door in asking for donations of old linens and pillows.

Their shelter formally opened on October 15 in 1979 and named itself after the concept of "jubilee" in the Old Testament book of Leviticus 25:9, the ancient Hebrew practice in which every fifty years (i.e. the year of the Jubilee, the end of seven cycles of Sabbadical years) debts are forgiven, land is returned to its original owner, and indentured slaves are released so that that communities torn by inequality may be restored.[2] To spread the news of their opening, they returned to those local churches, social services and hospitals with whom they had done their initial survey. Though the three were reluctant to work with police, whom they perceived to be agents in the reinforcement of inequality rather than protectors of rights, that quickly changed. Carolyn recalls:

> Lo and behold, the police called us on October 15 to say that they had a stranded hitchhiker. C'mon over, obviously we're open. He'll have to put his bed together, but c'mon over. And we started the shelters.

Until almost 1981 Vanessa, Roger, and Carolyn funded the project entirely out of pocket. Though Roger kept his job, the other two did not have the time to work and run

the shelter, and so the did odd jobs or solicited donations from a network of supporters in

the community that was slowly growing in size. They gathered leftover corn from fields

that had been harvested to feed people in the shelter. They canned tomatoes that were

given to them by the basket and were about to go bad. And they picked up leftovers

people were going to throw out from their freezers or from church catered events. They

washed linens, cooked, cleaned without outside help and slowly made improvements to

the shelter.

Eventually, even though they still thought of themselves as an intentional, faith-

based community, it became clear that they needed to formally incorporate into a legally-

recognized non-profit organization so that they could receive monetary donations.

Carolyn explains:

> We were all Christians, but the point was to be an ecumenical, non-exclusive, and
> no-nose-stuck-up-in-the-air, community. As long as you really want to do justice,
> fine. C'mon. You know, we really don't care past that...that was in 1979, and we
> haven't known farther than our nose what we were doing the next month since
> then...We literally have lived month to month trying to do whatever needed to be
> done with whatever money we had as far as we could make it stretch.

The formalization of the organization, in other words, came slowly and oftentimes by

trial and error. As time passed, it became clear that, while networking was of course a

useful way of reducing the burden on their community to try to coordinate everything by

themselves, the professionalization of the organization as a distinct entity allowed them to

increase the effectiveness of their work in the broader Statesville community.

> We didn't know how to keep the books, we didn't know how to file the
> government forms, we started doing public speaking because we figured out that
> Rotarians and Sivitans always needed people for their Thursday noon things, and

we volunteered. And we began taking slides to illustrate our work, so that we did an interesting twenty minutes instead of a boring twenty minutes...Ten years later, just doing it the nickel dime one step at a time, we had a mailing list of several thousand people, we had a budget of a hundred thousand dollars with guaranteed funding sources from church commitments, individuals. So anything that we do here in our project is all grassroots foundation organizing, and all stuff that we never knew how to do before, we just built on what worked. Somebody needs to learn how to do this because obviously we have to do this.

By 1984, five years after the intentional community's initial formation, CSD had

expanded to three shelters: an emergency shelter for stranded or evicted people, a

battered women's shelter for their county and five surrounding counties, and a winter

shelter for the permanent homeless population to escape freezing temperatures of the

winter. They also ran a separate soup kitchen and had achieved important victories in

existing public service systems, such as initiating medical advocacy system for the poor

at hospital emergency rooms and legal advocacy for those who cannot afford adequate

representation.

Of course, this is not to say that Roger, Vanessa, and Carolyn did not also have to

work against the Statesville community in many ways. They often had to deal with a

social climate that frequently ignored social problems such as violence against women or

homelessness. They attained "consciousness" of those problems, as Vanessa says, by

working in the thick of it and opening their eyes to the injustices around them and the

many issues presented to people who may just be down on their luck. "If you come in for

a job smelling and looking dirty, or even if you have bad teeth," says Vanessa, "you don't

get the same shake as if you come in clean and tidy." For this reason, the shelters

provided important basic services like a shower and an mailing address for when a person

decides to apply for a job. Yet, even so, their efforts were often met with a great deal of resistance. Prevailing attitudes about homelessness or domestic violence, explains Carolyn, basically fell into one of two categories: blame the victim or turn a blind eye.

> The first [complaint] was why are you keeping the bums in town. Then the second one was why are you breaking up the family. Then the third one was why are you encouraging people to be drunks. People didn't like to think about the idea that family violence existed, and it's just that the poor people were the ones who had no options, and that stranded people were out there even if you didn't see them on your way to the mall...People could not believe at first that that kind of poor existed in their community, and when they became comfortable with that, then it was that domestic violence doesn't exist here. And when they became comfortable with that, it wasn't that people were freezing to death on the steps of our church because they're drunks. Because those people lived in the woods. They didn't see them, and the people that died on the church steps were gone by the time the church opened at ten o'clock. You know, so they didn't see them. And the ones that they passed by they chose to be invisible.

Making people aware that poverty or domestic violence did, in fact, exist in Statesville, in other words, was an important part of their organization's work because it would ultimately lead to an entire community, rather than just an series of shelters, accepting responsibility for dealing with their own community's problems.

Vanessa, Carolyn and Roger did not, however, limit their analysis of social problems to Statesville. Rather, they saw problems in Statesville as reflective of ongoing, national-level politics, especially with regard to the domestic policies of the Reagan administration and issues of homelessness, mental health, and public housing. Indeed, from the view of the shelters all of these things were very clearly connected. Continuing a project that he had started as governor of California, in his first year as president Reagan halved the budget for public housing and Section 8 (housing voucher

subsidization) programs to about $17.5 billion. Simultaneously deinstitutionalizing

mental health, he also cut aid to federally-funded mental health programs and sought over

the next few years to eliminate federal housing assistance to the poor altogether.

Believing that the responsibility of care instead fell to the individual or the family, he

further stigmatized people who utilized need-tested programs like welfare as lazy or even

criminal. Though in the White House this might have appeared to be a war against the

paternalism of "big government," from the view of the shelters it became very clear that

mental health, the availability of low-cost housing, homelessness, and even domestic

violence were very clearly connected. Nationally, the homeless population swelled

during Reagan's presidency from around 200,000 to between 600,000 and 1.2 million

(Dear and Wolch 1987, Jencks 1994, Wright 1989). Approximately one third of those

people suffered from some kind of mental illness (Rossi 1989). And about half of

homeless women during that time were victims of domestic violence (NCH 2008). As

Roger remarked, the Reagan ideology was something that the shelters dealt with every

day, as the Statesville community's financial ability to deal with these problems shrunk

every day, so that greater and greater numbers relied on private sector initiatives like their

own:

> People in need of mental health care were a large part of who we helped, many of
> them Vietnam veterans, and whatever we could do to get some of them back on
> their feet, more kept on showing up; they would be prosecuted for vagrancy, sent
> through the so-called justice system, and eventually be back on the street in much
> worse condition that they were at the start of the cycle.

The three of them eventually came to see the virtue of working with police on matters of domestic violence and vagrancy, but it was increasingly the case that, with disappearing public sector support, it fell to law enforcement, rather than specialists, to deal with systemic issues of homeless, mental illness, and substance abuse.

The building of the "intentional" community, then, and sustaining it in the face of so much resistance, was not only about the formation of close friendships and material interdependence. It was also about generating a consciousness of systematic social problems. As Vanessa explains:

> It meant examining our own personalities, our strengths and weaknesses, and calling bullshit on each other...We were on the front lines of Reagan's war on the homeless, and we testified to the carnage of its effects on innocent people. Our ethical resolve to help the poor was one thing, but the experience, of coming to political consciousness, of understanding how all these things are interconnected —and continuing to do that to this day—was and is the foundation of what would eventually be called CSD.

Though their intentional community provided them with a source of strength, at the same time, they were each drawn to the work they were doing by intensely personal narratives. Carolyn, for example, is the daughter of Presbyterian missionaries, and she is exceedingly proud of the work that her parents did. Her father was a pastor and her mother was an educator, and early in Carolyn's life they were invited by the Presbyterian church in Taiwan to serve, where they worked in different areas and in different positions —as a university chaplain, in rural churches, teaching in seminary—for over fifteen years. During that time, Carolyn learned to speak Mandarin as a second language but also, she says, to learn to live in the heat and in difficult and unfamiliar environments.

When she moved to North Carolina for college she remembers realizing that she was one

of the privileged ones not only in Taiwan but in the U.S. as well:

> When I went to the campus physician one day he had a black waiting room and a
> white waiting room. And I just walked in the door that was closest to the dorm,
> and then they ushered me through to this other waiting room, and I didn't know
> why, and I found out that I had sat down in the black waiting room, and I found
> out that there were water fountains for coloreds and water fountains for whites,
> and I had never experienced that. And I hit college which was pretty much a
> white school with, like, a handful of black students you could count on either
> hand…I realized that [when I was in Taiwan] I was in the minority population and
> I was always treated with utmost courtesy, and here I was finding people around
> me in the U.S. being treated with disrespect because of their skin, or their faith, or
> they didn't have the right language, or they didn't wear the right clothes, or
> whatever, and I was horrified...So, then, it was only when I was 18, 19, 20 years
> old when I discovered racism, prejudice, and race riots in the US, and it was in
> my face.

Because her family did not speak openly about politics at home, for Carolyn the fact that

racism was at the foreground of discussions of social justice in the late 1960s and early

1970s in North Carolina served as a catalyst for her political transformation. The

guidance she received from her parents and the college, and the eventual choice to

recognize racism as a broader issue of social justice, Carolyn says, was a formative

moment in her life:

> My whole world changed, and a lot of my classmates pretty much did one or two
> extremes. We either stayed in very little, tight, conservative religious boxes,
> where everything was just right, and towed the line, or we leapt off the deep end.
> And I was very fortunate to be going to a school where we had excellent bible
> staff and professors who asked, why do you believe what you believe? Look at it.
> Don't throw it out the window, but don't accept it at face value, study it. Look at
> it. See. They encouraged you to explore. It was really hard for me, but I did and
> what I found out was that God was a lot bigger than I thought. And a lot more
> inclusive and a lot more adventuresome, and that's not a dish on anything that I
> grew up with, it's just to say that I found that I liked this inclusive creator a whole
> lot more than the boxes one. And so when I got over the shell shock of expanding

my theological horizons, I grew up a lot. And then the whole thing of shelters and all that, you see, for me came out of that expanded awareness.

Before becoming part of the intentional community, Carolyn earned her Master's in Education and pursued a career in teaching high school social studies, where she reveled in the opportunity to play "devil's advocate" and challenge students' preconceptions, especially in the task of teaching U.S. history. The most important part of that job, she said, was to teach the students not just the facts but how to be part of a world community: "The world is not a huge place where what you do doesn't matter. The world's a small place and different parts are related to each other. It all matters."

Close friends with Roger and Carolyn from college, and just as Roger was about to graduate, Veronica decided to follow in her own father's footsteps and attend seminary as well. For Veronica, the ability to make hard decisions and accomplish difficult tasks in the face of adversity is something that she credits to her parents, who, even late in life, decided to pursue non-traditional life courses, foregoing retirement to take up positions in a Presbyterian church in China. And although the religious upbringing that Veronica's parents instilled in her was predominantly pre-Vatican II in character—that is, tending toward apologetics for the status quo of Church and society—the experience of being the only woman enrolled in seminary, when it was uncommon for women to seek that kind of religious education, radicalized her future religiosity. Male students, with whom she found little camaraderie, frequently derided her beliefs about gender equality as naïve, challenged that she had a "calling," and even argued that her role should instead be as a mother. While she found some support in professors, Veronica increasingly discovered

herself on the outskirts of orthodoxy and supporting the idea of a God not limited by the

human folly to draw distinctions between genders as well as religious denominations,

both in and outside of the Christian tradition. It was about the time that she, Carolyn, and

Roger decided to start an intentional community that Veronica parted ways with the

formal church:

> I found myself setting higher standards for myself than I had for those around
> me...I was incredibly sensitive to the rhetoric of those who speak about loving
> their brothers and sisters and the hypocrisy of their daily actions. So I spent a
> great deal of anger or rage toward the higher being—who can of course take it,
> being higher—and also toward the institution of the church, to which I was
> feeling more and more estranged.

In fact, she conceptualized herself as moving beyond the limitations of a Christian

identity and started observing Jewish holidays like Yom Kippur, Hanukkah, and Purim,

which the others supported and eventually participated in as well. At the core of her

spirituality, Veronica says, was the idea of doing social justice despite whatever petty

differences. Yet, because what the organization does is often at odds with what she

believes, she says, she is also often compelled to "throw cold water on the unreality of

[their] work" and point out the hypocrisy of others:

> I didn't believe in throwing folks out of the shelter, even if they broke the rules
> and they were being pains in the ass," she explains, "or saying no, you can't have
> food, you have to go to the soup kitchen for that, because those are the rules.
> Treating people like brothers and sisters means loving them and caring for them,
> despite them being assholes and despite the rules that are made for our
> convenience or comfort.

The work of the shelters, like the work in Nicaragua with CSD, has been an up and down

experience for Veronica, one that has been a constant tension between what is right and

what is actually doable. Veronica eventually married Roger, whom she terms her "stability" for his ability to see the balance between the two.

Yet, Roger, too, is deeply ambivalent about the balance between the ideal and real. For him, the experiences of growing up in the South led him to theology rather than the other way around. Born in northern Florida, he remembers his family was neither rich nor poor, but rather lived comfortably in the means that they had. Always reticent to speak in more personal or terms, Roger recounts that one of the most transformative moments of his early life was when he was nineteen and his father suddenly became seriously ill. Because he did not have adequate health insurance, neither did he receive adequate treatment, meaning that "By the time he died, he had not a penny to his name." The experience sparked in him the realization that the status quo can be terribly unjust, a sentiment that only grew with time. The term he uses today to describe the type of transformation one undergoes in such an experience, which comes from his seminary days, is *kairos*.[3] "In Greek," he explains,

> there are two terms for time, *chronos* and *kairos*...Chronos means linear time, like days and weeks, and kairos means the opportune moment that intervenes in the human consciousness, that directs the human mind through its own intentionality. This is what Dr. King meant when he talked about an oppressed people *waiting* for justice, then the flashpoint comes along and moves history forward...So kairos is revelation, in biblical terms, it's when injustice is shown to you and also shows you the way forward. It is the roots of consciousness, revolution, and change for individual people and groups.

For Roger, social awakening and spiritual awakening came hand in hand. In large part it was this fact that contributed to his decision to enter the seminary after graduating from college. While at seminary, however, he was disappointed to find that many of his fellow

students did not share his passion for contemplating issues largely outside of church doctrine, preferring to think in narrowly institutional terms. It was then that he was first drawn to the ideas of a radical southern preacher named Will Campbell.

A Baptist minister, an outspoken opponent of the war in Vietnam who helped draft resisters find sanctuary in Canada, the only white supporter of civil rights who was present at the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Dr. King, and the author of the autobiographical books *Brother to a Dragonfly* (1977) and *Forty Acres and a Goat* (1986), Will Campbell never considered himself an activist, and thus purported to keep his distance from political movements. To Roger, Campbell's ideas were appealing for a number of reasons. First, Campbell thought that racism was more than a legal problem based in securing the legal rights of equality in the eyes of the government. It stemmed from the nature of humanity, and even though many elements within the institutional church did not support civil rights, he believed that the Church is positioned to intervene: "for surely we are created to love one another" (Campbell 1986:270). And since the church was not always in the right, this meant acting as a person of faith rather than a political activist, by reaching out to black communities as well as white communities. In *Forty Acres and a Goat* (1986) Campbell details his close, lifelong friendship with a black man and the eventual humbling recognition that there were irrevocable and insurmountable differences between the two, differences based on life experience, racial profiling, economic strife, and so forth. In light of that, how could they ever really know one another? The solution, he concluded, was also to attend to

those poor white communities from which the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) often drew its

members, with the goal of building a worldview in which souls were no longer thought of

in terms of race but as a common humanity. He argued, "anyone who is not concerned

with the dispossessor as he is with the suffering of the dispossessed is being something

less than Christian" (Campbell 1977:201). This activity was of course not without social

resistance. While he received death threats when at the University of Mississippi as a

supporter of integration, he was also criticized for ministering to members of the KKK, to

which he reportedly responded by saying, "Mr. Jesus died for the bigots as well."

Campbell thought that it was the segregationists and other racists who needed perhaps the

most council, because their limited views on the nature of God and humanity was nothing

less than tragic: "One who understands the nature of God can never takes

sides" (Campbell 1977:226).

Second, Roger liked the idea that Campbell's theology was rooted in the idea of

ethical action rather than the institution of the Church. A redeemed community, as

Campbell understood the concept, existed not within the boundaries of the Church but in

ethical actions. Since the actions of the institutional church were not always ethical,

moreover, then the redeemed community was not always the Church. *Forty Acres and a

Goat* also describes Campbell's eventual disillusionment with conventional religious

groups, and in it he paraphrases the doctrine of the Church held by Carlyle Marney,

another Southern Baptist, who often said "Church is a verb" (1986:148).[4] By the end of

his career, Campbell had not rejected the church but rather the "institution" of the church,

calling for a number of reforms, including to increase the number of female bishops, to open churches to the homeless, and to require that ten percent of all corporate donations to church affiliated colleges be used for poverty relief. The only other option, he said, was "to walk away sorrowfully, for behold...we are very rich (1986:122).

While Roger often felt frustrated by what he perceived to be the narrow scope of the church's concerns—often focusing on things like worship, ritual, and ultimately its own perpetuation—he found in Campbell's ideas comfort that one could indeed pursue an independent spiritual path without rejecting the church outright. Given the draw that social concerns had for him as well, he was invigorated by the idea that ethical action might indeed be more spiritually fulfilling. When he had finished seminary, then, Roger did not pursue a position within the church but rather became involved with a number of issues, including the Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America (CITGA, the organization from which Witness for Peace emerged) and the formation of CSD. Much of the time, Roger chooses to express his dissatisfaction with the institution of the church with humor. One of his favorite jokes, in fact, reflects on the narrow idea of spirituality involved in sectarian church politics:

> A Catholic, a Presbyterian, and a Methodist all die. The three find themselves standing outside of the gates of heaven waiting in line to speak to Saint Peter. The Catholic walks up and Peter tells him, "You have been a good man, enter into heaven and walk down to Door Number 4. However, be very quiet when you pass Door Number 1. Peter then calls the Presbyterian up telling him the same thing, "You have been a good man, enter into heaven and walk down to Door Number 3. However, be very quiet as you're passing Door Number 1. Finally, the Methodist walks up and hears the same message from Peter that he told the Catholic and Presbyterian. "You have been a good man, enter into heaven and walk down to Door Number 2. However, be very quiet as you pass Door Number

1." The Methodist is curious and asks Peter, "Why do I need to be quiet as I walk by Door Number 1?" Peter relies, "Oh, that's where the Baptists are, and they think they're the only ones here."

For Roger, the aversion to institutionalization does not stop at the church, it was also forefront among his concerns as the shelters slowly formalized and professionalized, moving toward being an NGO. In fact, Roger explained, the shelters and later CSD would sometime become an institution—that the organization's purpose would be its own perpetuation at the cost of ethical action and the social good, just as he perceived to be the main failing of institutionalized religion—was one of his biggest fears. As early as the 1980s, Roger resisted the idea of formalizing the shelters as a non-profit, though he ultimately recognized the practical necessity to do so.

The transformations that Carolyn, Veronica, and Roger underwent in their lives, leading up to and including the experiences of starting the shelters, were not impelled by any one thing and, indeed, did not find expression in any single term. For Carolyn, it was an "expanded awareness" of social issues. For Veronica, it was the "consciousness" that came from finding herself on the outside of the Church looking in on the status quo. And for Roger, it was the *kairos* of perceiving himself to be in a historical moment in which he should act. Yet, in each case, the logical conclusion was not simply to speak, think, write, or preach about justice, but rather to *do* justice in their daily lives and work. This unorthodox theology did not, of course, come without resistance from those closest to them. Carolyn remembers:

> My parents were very proud of what we were doing, but kept wanting us to have bible study with everybody on the front porch, and we just wouldn't do that. We

> would not do 'you have to worship the way we do' in order to earn your dinner.
> That bothered them, and it bothered Roger's and Veronica's families too. And,
> my response became, mother, I am doing ministry the way God wants me to do it
> the best I can. You're going to have to leave that one up to God. If God wants me
> to do bible study on the front porch, God's going to have to hit me upside the head
> and get my attention and explain to me that I'm supposed to be doing bible study
> on the front porch instead of doing what I'm doing.

They did not expect it to be an easy journey, and in fact sometimes reveled in, as Carolyn

says, "going bleary-eyed, brain-dead burnt out because we worked non-stop for seven

days a week for months at a time." For Roger and Veronica, in fact, the resistance that

they often encountered from the institution of the church, or those who perceived

themselves to be agents of it, reassured them that they were on the right track and even

compelled them to redouble their efforts. They found a community of similarly minded

individuals in the Carolina Interfaith Task Force on Central America (CITCA), which led

them to expand the scope of their activism outside of the U.S. Between 1982 and 1985,

all three of them went on short-term delegations to Nicaragua with Witness for Peace.

Roger returned in 1984 as an election witness for the Sandinista victory, and even went

with Witness for Peace (which emerged out of CITCA) to Iraq before the Gulf War in

1990.

In July of 1987, the intentional community expanded to include Jill and Lisa, two

sisters from Chicago who had replied to a listing in the "Communities of Communities"

section of *Sojourner Magazine*. For Lisa, the desire to become part of a community first

grew out of her participation in a long-term delegation in Nicaragua with Witness for

Peace, in which she had lived as part of a community of like-minded individuals, shared

resources, and, in her words, "felt the power of what a solidarity community can do in terms of justice work and a justice lifestyle." When she returned, she and Jill—who had gone to graduate school for social work and was employed as a counselor—felt that they were at a crossroads with regard to where they would go next in their lives. As Lisa explains, "We felt like we had been going in certain directions, you know, trying to have less impact on the earth, trying to work for justice, and that we were at the end of what two individual people could do. We decided that we really needed to be part of a community." As it turned out, however, joining a community is not as straightforward a matter as looking for a job. She describes the process of first coming to hear about the intentional community:

> As we were reading through the list of communities [in *Sojourner Magazine*], the description jumped right out at us, and we said, wow, these sound like great people, but, you know, it's in North Carolina, and we were trying to make our community search process be a spiritual journey, we felt like God was calling us in this direction and probably had a place for us, and we were willing to be used. But, at the same time, we were asking as a favor, please not the big cities on the east cost, you know, Boston, Washington, please no suburbs at all, and we don't want to go to the South. So it didn't meet that requirement, so we finished looking looking over the list and we sent out fourteen letters of introduction, and as long as we were doing that many we sent one to North Carolina, you know. Maybe North Carolina wasn't as south as some Carolinas, you know. And they were the first ones to get back to us. Roger called us and we talked for about an hour, long distance on Christmas day, 1985...We talked for a long time, and we really enjoyed talking to him, and the community sounded great. It was definitely in the South, though. [laughs] He signed off the conversation by saying, 'I have to go now, we're taking photos at a Ku Klux Klan rally downtown, and I was like, noooo, I don't think so. A couple months later, Jill happened to run across a travel agent who had a really good flight to Charlotte, so we said, alright, let's go visit. So we flew there and only with the greatest difficulty did we resist the temptation to call up our third housemate and say 'send our stuff,' we're home. This is it.

When they visited the shelters for the first time, they experienced a kind of homecoming. The calling to this organization was even further heightened for Lisa by the serendipity that she had actually met all three of CSD's community members—Roger, Veronica, and Carolyn—on separate occasions while in Nicaragua.

For Jill, however, the course of coming to feel like part of the intentional community was quite different and not so evident a course as it was for Lisa. Jill received her undergraduate degree in mathematics, but what she realized that she really wanted to do by the time she graduated was to become a family therapist. Not having the background, she went about to get life experience that would then qualify her to receive professional training as a family therapist, ending up working for the American Friends Service Committee, where she recalls that she was "radicalized" and "conscientized." Though that experience, she says she developed a greater political awareness than she had previously as well as a sensitivity to people that eventually led her to the method of "accompaniment," rather than coming in as the expert.

While the intentional community's attitude was that "We take who God sends," as a Quaker she was accustomed to a different style of consensus building. She explains her process of coming to feel that the community was the right choice:

> The Quakers do a group consensus process that Presbyterians don't know anything about. And, so, the way Quakers do things is, individuals get clear within themselves, and if they need help, they will call a clearness committee within the worship community to help them get clear. When that group is clear, they will go to the monthly meeting and see if the whole monthly meeting can unite in consensus about whatever, in this case, my sense of call. So that, what Quakers believe is that you discern a call by if people hear God the same, then, it's a better chance that it really is. Well [CSD] didn't do that. [CSD's]

philosophy was that we take who God sends. And I really felt cut off, because I as a Quaker needed to do a consensus process with them, and they didn't do that. I mean, they made decisions by consensus, but not, I mean they would have said, it's your life, it's your relationship with God. What do we have to do with that? You know, we take who God sends. Um, and so Lisa and I did our discernment process, and I included my meeting, and we got clear, and called up Roger to tell him that we were coming. And Carolyn answered the phone and said, you know it's really funny because just the day before yesterday I was showing a group of visitors around, and they said, how many people are there in the community? And she said five. And then she stopped and said, wait a minute, there's not that many of us, where did I get that number, where did that number fall out of my mouth? And she said I realized that I was counting you two already as part of the community. And to me it was real clear that God had spoken there, and that was my group affirmation of our consensus call, even though they didn't do that, even though Carolyn didn't have a clue what she was doing.

When Jill and Lisa arrived, CSD had an annual budget of a hundred thousand dollars with guaranteed funding sources from church groups and with a mailing list of several thousand people. The two sisters therefore found themselves trying to work within an already well-established set of practices that to some extent defined their roles as community members. With previous office experience, Lisa, for example, coordinated the day-to-day financial components of the shelters, Jill readily moved into the role of a counselor at the battered women shelter. Yet, the now expanded community did not emerge organically. Jill explains:

Lisa and I had experimented with the idea of community for some time, and so when we first moved into the community I thought we knew what we were talking about. Um, I think what community is *not* about is a bunch of people earnestly struggling together and trying to be one, working in unity and harmony and, certainly some kind of a family, but not a great big happy ideal, Brady Bunch kind of family.

Conflicts and miscommunications, some petty and others not, made the sisters reconsider their expectations of the group and come to a more realistic point of view regarding the

others who were part of the community. Jill argues that, despite the differences that

existed between them, the key point about the social dynamics which emerged thereafter

was that it really was an "intentional" community:

> A lot of our community has to do with a lot of people with a lot of shared history
> and shared values, who are living together and struggling together, committed to
> each other, and committed to our common work. For me, one of the biggest most
> important aspects of community has to do with living with people who are very
> different than I, and have very different goals for community than I have. While I
> am the one of all of us that values processing things, personal sharing, I thought
> that when I moved into community we were going to know each other, and be
> intimate and pour our hearts out to each other, and in this community we do that
> in sub-groups. We don't do that as a whole big group. And there are people in
> this community that have no patience at all for processing, and, in fact, it's
> difficult when a problem comes up to even sit down and directly talk about it.
> And so, the community includes all of us, and I've got a commitment to the
> people whose personal styles are very different, just as they have a commitment to
> me. The challenge is how to be who we are, and get done what we've all
> committed to getting done together. So the process of learning mutual respect,
> and learning boundaries and spaces, and the dance of what we really do have to
> do together, and what we really do have to respect. The struggle is solving both
> the work-related problems and the personal problems where the whole community
> is involved. Those very much overlap, because our work has always been an
> extension of community...We started out calling ourselves an intentional Christian
> community, we've tended to drop the Christian over the years, but to me the word
> that has become key is the word "intentional." Intentional means that we've
> decided to do it. And damn it we're going to do it. And that plays out by in large
> in the work that we do, the projects that we're pursuing.

Rather than simply existing, or being drawn together by forces outside of each of the

constituting members control—which is to say, common histories, common identities, or

even common ideas about community—from Jill's perspective the type of community

that they have collectively and intentionally built has been by virtue of active choices,

oftentimes despite differences.

THE MOVE TO NICARAGUA

On the tenth anniversary of the shelters in 1989, the community decided to undergo an intentional re-evaluation process to determine the future of the community. As Lisa explains, "Part of being a community involves occasionally reasserting the desire and collective purpose of being part of one." Thus, for two months on end they took what they called a "week middle"—they could not take weekends because they were too busy—to have a mental retreat and hammer out the details of what the next ten years might look like. Eventually, as a group they converged on the conclusion that, if they were able to find a group willing to take ownership of running the shelters, they would actively seek the opportunity to expand their efforts beyond Statesville, North Carolina.

Not surprisingly, Central America was the focus of these discussions. The relations between the U.S. and Central America during the 1980s were, to say the very least, troublesome. The Reagan administration's support for repressive regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala, its sponsorship of illicit paramilitary organizations such as the Contras, and, simultaneously, the White House's ironic tagging of the Sandinistas as "terrorists," "genocidal," "Murder, Inc.," a "cancer," "hardline communists," people who "hijacked" their own country and brought to the region a "Central American gulag," a "communist reign of terror," and a "totalitarian dungeon," were offensive, much as they were to the vast majority of the U.S.-Central American peace movement (including CITGA and Witness for Peace) with whom they had become closely linked (e.g. Smith 1996). Like many others who, in addition to protest in the U.S., also traveled to the

region, the reality of injustice in Nicaragua was made all the more real to Roger,

Veronica, Carolyn, and Lisa, who each experienced firsthand the smoldering wreckage of

villages, scattered mortar shells, wounded and shellshocked survivors of Contra

offensives, the fear of landmines every time they drove down a road, and all of the other

carnage and suffering wrought by the ideologically motivated "Cold War psychosis," in

Veronica's phrasing, that Nicaragua was of "vital interest" to U.S. security.

This firsthand experience of the U.S.'s actions in Nicaragua was also vital for

laying bare the connection not only between the Reagan administration's policies and

homelessness in Statesville, North Carolina, but also between homelessness and war in

Central America. As Roger said,

> When you think about it long enough, Reagan's war on the homeless was
> essentially the same as the war in Nicaragua. Not only could the billions of
> dollars spent on the Contras and in aid to military regimes throughout Central
> America have been spent on social programs in the U.S., it is also all based on the
> same, interconnected logic and key players, that Ayn Rand kind of *fuck you, we
> don't need you* to the world.

At the same time, Veronica added, though the issues may appear to be disparate, one does

not need to think about them in political terms to see them connected by the common

thread of injustice.

What eventually sealed the deal that the focus of their work would be Nicaragua

was the fact that, when Roger was in Nicaragua in 1984 as an election witness, he

established connections with Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, a Maryknoll priest and

liberation theology adherent who served as the Foreign Minister to the Sandinista

government (as of this writing, d'Escoto is also President of the 63rd U.S. General

Assembly). After the 1990 transition in Nicaragua in which the Sandinistas lost power, yet promised to "govern from below," d'Escoto focused his energy on revitalizing a sustainable development organization called *Fundación de Desarrollo Social Integral* (FUNDESI) that had originally been founded during the 1972 earthquake. In 1992, d'Escoto and Roger reconnected, out of which came the invitation to work with FUNDESI, solidifying the intentional community's decision to move their organization to Nicaragua.

Changing their name to the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), with the aid of FUNDESI they felt that it was in Nicaragua that they could make the greatest contribution to the root of socio-economic problems as opposed to their work in the shelter. CSD turned toward the poor Nicaragua, in other words, because it was there that they could respond to the frustrations of enacting social change in the U.S. by throwing in their lot with an apparently more feasible project in Nicaragua. Working with homeless shelters in the U.S., Lisa argues, "was more like putting band-aids on society's wounds." In Nicaragua, the need was much more enormous, in no small part because of the interventionist politics that the U.S. had been practicing there. At the same time, the existing level of organization was so much higher in Nicaragua because of the revolution. In fact, Nicaragua is considered to be one of the most NGO-ized countries in the world, with more than four thousand in operation in the country, channeling 70 percent of the foreign aid, which amounts to a little over 20 percent of Nicaragua's GDP (Briones 2004, CAPRI 1996). For those who had been to Nicaragua previously, the connection to the

country was also an emotional and spiritual one based on the perception that, despite the difficulties that Nicaraguans had experienced, as Lisa says, "they had somehow managed to hold onto their faith in situations that to us just looked hopeless."

In 1993 CSD formally handed over the operations of the three Statesville shelters to a new group (who is still running them), turned the Statesville houses in which they were living into low-income rentals, and began the process of moving to Nicaragua with enough money to live on for about a month. The move involved a month-long caravan trip through Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras, before eventually reaching Ciudad Sandino in Nicaragua, where they had arranged through FUNDESI to buy a ranch style house from a cooperative that had gone under shortly after the 1990 transition in which subsidies disappeared. Little did they know, at that point, that the history of the house ran even deeper: it was the former residence of Lillian Somoza Debayle, sister of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, who was the president of Nicaragua from 1974 to 1979 and who was overthrown during the revolution. The fact that the NGO moved into the house on the 15th anniversary of the revolution was for CSD an unintentional symbolic gesture, but one that they interpreted as a sharp break from the troublesome past of U.S.-Nicaragua relations, a new beginning rather than a continuation of it.

Indeed, CSD's partnership with FUNDESI, the direction and support that they received from the Nicaraguan sustainable development organization, helped. Six months after arriving, in fact, Theodor Mejía, then the FUNDESI representative given the task of working with CSD, was able to take the CSD representatives to every neighborhood in

Ciudad Sandino and Roberto Clemente (then a satellite of Ciudad Sandino, not a *barrio*), where elected community representatives to deliver written proposals containing prioritized lists of what needed to be accomplished in the *barrio*, what resources were available, and the potential benefits of each project—a clear sign to CSD, at least, that the community was willing take some ownership over the projects. CSD's current doctrine matured through extensive discussions and of course collaborative practice with FUNDESI. It is worth a brief discussion of the two concepts so formative to the organizations' practices on the ground.

SUSTAINABLE AND PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

As a critique of conventional development practices in the 1950s and 1960s—which were organized around either modernization theory-driven, macro-level strategies such as technology transfer and agricultural extension or dependency theory-driven, macro-level strategies such as import substitution—the idea of "sustainable" development emerged as early as the 1970s with the goal of factoring into the industry's heretofore narrow concept of economics important environmental concerns such as the idea of "equilibrium with basic ecological support systems" (Stivers 1976). Many of these critiques were based in the observations of non-economists and included the rather Malthusian point that infinite growth (the tacit assumption of development thus far) was very much an impossibility. A great number of variables inevitably intervene, such as carrying capacities for the world population, extra-economic consequences of

industrialization and pollution, the limitations of food production, and of course resource depletion (Meadows *et al* 1972). In the 1980s, the sustainable development approach became a mainstream alternative, culminating with the Bruntland report, prepared by the U.N.'s World Commission on Environment and Development, which declared that "Humanity's inability to fit its doings into [the patterns of Earth] is changing planetary systems, fundamentally" (World Commission 1987:1). The new vision of development, Arturo Escobar argues, has been premised on a "distinct vision of the world as a global system where all the parts are interrelated" and in which the relationship between "humankind" and "nature" must be reconciled, even transformed into a relationship between society and environment (1994:193-4). Moreover, in order to accomplish such a task, sustainable development must call to its aid successful, scientific planning and management.

In more recent discussions, sustainable development has expanded the scope of "sustainability" to include sociopolitical, economic, and environmental equilibriums, known as the "triple bottom line" (Hasna 2007). In addition to the concern for environmental impacts, that is, sustainable development projects also seek to make their benefits self-sustainable, enduring without input of outside organizations and institutions. This means that in addressing the needs of communities, economic advancements, in particular, should not be made at the cost of depleting environmental resources because those too are integral components of human well-being. Likewise, environmental initiatives must also take into account allegedly "external" considerations like the

economic implications for communities. A cutting-edge green energy source, for example, is untenable if maintenance costs are higher than the financial resources available to that community, much in the same way that bankruptcy is less sustainable than financial solubility.

The older, ecologically-driven model of sustainability, that is to say, problematized the sustainability of the global ecosystem, often at the cost of understanding the sustainability of local cultures and realities. As Escobar writes, it was a model that

> believed that because all people are passengers of spaceship Earth, all are equally responsible for environmental degradation. They rarely see that there are great differences and inequities in resource problems between countries, regions, communities, and classes; and they usually fail to recognize that the responsibility is far from equally shared (1994:195).

Many sustainable development scholars and practitioners have perceived that the economic activities of the poor have been quite detrimental to the environment and have "[admonished them] for their 'irrationality' and their lack of environmental consciousness" (1994:195). Yet, in so doing, they have failed to realize that increased pressure on the environment is often rooted in larger sociopolitical and economic forces, such as displacement from land or the disruption of proven subsistence habits and strategies, as well as the comparative impact of industrialized nations.

While the "triple bottom line" approach to sustainable development may take into consideration some of those limitations—challenging, for example, certain aspects of the economism of developmentalist visions that ultimately measure progress myopically in

terms of economic benchmarks—whatever the variables at hand, the common thread

nevertheless continues to be that the implementation of these strategies requires

successful scientific management (Escobar 1992). Whether it is the management of the

human-environmental relationship or the more complex sociopolitical-economic-

environmental relationship, the "we" in the idea that 'we' "need to move peoples and

nations towards sustainability by effecting a change in values and institutions that

parallels the agricultural or industrial revolutions of the past" is inevitably the "familiar

figure of the Western scientist turned manager" (Escobar 1994:193). Likewise, as

Escobar points out in a 1989 *Scientific American* special issue on "managing planet

Earth," it also becomes the responsibility of the "ahistorical young dark woman" (*ibid*) to

absorb and carry out that management, informed as it is by the ideologies of scientific

management. Escobar writes, "It is still assumed that the benevolent (white) hand of the

West will save the Earth" (*ibid*).

In addition to the imperial flavor that discourses about development continue to

carry, I argue that it is also important to understand that such discourses exist within, and

are underpinned by, a deeply historical moral imaginary. Autonomy and self-sufficiency,

in particular, are presumed ideals within many development frameworks (e.g. Carmen

1996, Escobar 1994), but the reasons for this almost always remain unarticulated. At

root, however, the value of autonomy seems to be grounded less in a purely economic

model than moral thought, particularly, in Western history, Kant's notion of moral

autonomy and Adam Smith's (1853) moral philosophy (Schneewind 1998). The latter

provides perhaps the clearest insight into the value of autonomous economic activity and still resonates with the practices of many sustainable developers and social service providers. As Smith argued in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759 [1853]), a treatise that preceded *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the pursuit of individual interest, and being capable to do so, is morally correct because it means that one does not place the burden of pursuing one's interests on family, community, or society instead.

As Adam Smith pointed out in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1853), which articulates his moral philosophy—in sharp contrast, of course, to the way in which neo-conservatives and human behavioral ecologists have represented Smith—pursuing one's individual interests (and being capable to do so) is morally correct because it means that one does not place the burden on family, community, or society to do so instead. The ideal of autonomy in community development, in many respects, follows a similar logic: overcome historical, political, economic inequities, rather than seek retribution.

For FUNDESI as well as CSD, one solution to this problematic arrangement of power has been "community" or "participatory" development. Preferring "people-centered" approaches, such as in the idea of "putting people first" (Cernea 1985, Chambers 1983), community development, for one, is organized conceptually around the idea of providing groups of people with the skills that they need to effect change in their own communities. Rather than transferring technology or creating industry, that is, community development suggests that development may occur by building political and economic power in communities, particularly through the formation of large social

groups working for a common agenda. Community development in this sense is not a commitment to infinite growth, but rather collective action for social and environmental justice and with the generation of structures of political and economic power that may be mobilized on behalf of the equality and justice (e.g. Ledwith and Campling 2005). The approach of community development, like participatory development but in sharp contrast to institutionalized development projects, begins in the everyday lives of local people and is founded on the principle of their democratic participation in projects that they collaboratively define.[5]

Working with FUNDESI and taking cue from the organization's language and ideologies, CSD refined a basic five area program of operation based on the principles of participatory, community development: (1) sustainable agriculture, (2) appropriate technology, (3) primary health care, (4) education, and (5) sustainable economic development. Yet, in conversations with d'Escoto, in particular, CSD also came to see some basic affinities between the approach of sustainable development and their own ideas of social justice. As Vanessa explains, it is especially important to make the distinction between sustainable development and charity, much in the same way that deprivation or lack of resources should be distinguished from injustice. In the world of charitable aid, that is, poverty and hunger are uncritically represented as isolated instances of misfortune, thus allowing for the gift giver, in the guise of empathy, to express moral superiority. Conversely, injustice, in its structural and distributive form, communicates that society has denied the rightful entitlements or basic necessities of

dignified, human existence, thus revealing an embedded power differential of domination and oppression. Citing Paul Farmer's book *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (2004), Vanessa suggests that, on a very basic level, "charity is something that white liberals do so that they don't have to acknowledge their own historical culpability or, really, give up any of the privilege that they have enjoyed in a broken system."

In this light, for Roger in particular, it follows that institutions that are concerned rather narrowly with works of mercy, such as feeding the hungry or sheltering the homeless, may or may not be concerned with fixing the system that keeps appropriate nourishment and shelter from billions every day. In fact, those institutions may on some level prefer that the system is not fixed so that they may continue to fulfill their roles as the providers of surcease from hunger pangs, through which, as institutions and as individuals, they find they are monetarily, emotionally, ethically, or even existentially rewarded. While charity, in this sense reinforces inequality in transfers from the rich to the poor by symbolically and politically objectifying the receiver in a non-reciprocal exchange, sustainable development, by contrast, attempts to address on a community-by-community level those very structures that produce inequality. A quotation of Father Oscar Romero, Lisa maintains, summarizes CSD's approach to ethical action, which is informed by a progressive Christian ethic of care combined with a liberation theology message about injustice:

> *Es una caricatura de amor cuando se quiere apañar con limosnas lo que ya se debe por justicia, apañar con apariencias de beneficencia cuando se está fallando*

en la justicia social. El verdadero amor comienza por exigir entre las relaciones de los que se aman lo justo.

It is a caricature of love to try to cover over with alms what is lacking in justice, to patch over with an appearance of benevolence when social justice is missing. True love begins by demanding what is just in the relations of those who love.

A central principle of community development is therefore autonomy, in the sense that achievements of projects should be thought of in terms of local social ownership. By handing over the instruments of power to community members, who take ownership of the project, that is, autonomy enables communities to pursue their own interests and depend less on external structures to sustain them.

THE HURRICANE

Between 1994 and 1998, CSD and FUNDESI collaborated on community projects, mostly having to do with city infrastructure (sanitation, water drainage, etc.) in Ciudad Sandino, but also ventured into larger scale projects intended to assist small farmers and generate employment. In conceptualizing the organization's role, CSD almost always took their cue from FUNDESI, which they assumed as a Nicaraguan organization had a better relationship to the local community. Perhaps the majority of their collective efforts during these four years went to organizing a grower-owned agricultural cooperative COPROEXNIC (*Cooperativa de Productores Orgánicos y Tradicionales y Exportadores de Nicaragua*), a loosely based network of about two thousand organic (i.e. no pesticides by choice) and traditional (i.e. no pesticides by default) small farmers, for whom the cooperative functioned as a strategic bloc by means

of which they could bypass *coyotes* (middlemen) and collectively bargain for higher prices.

In October of 1998, however, Hurricane Mitch made landfall and dropped over six feet of rain in four consecutive days, flooding farmland all over the country and making Lake Managua, on the northern border of the capital, Managua, swell to over a kilometer inland from its normal shoreline. In most cases the Nicaraguan national government's response fell very short and was limited to providing buses to move people around and leaving them without any additional aid. For example, during a memorial for the nearly two thousand people killed in a mudslide in the mountain village of Posoltega, President Arnoldo Alemán, a former official of the Somoza government who ran in 1996 on a strong anti-Sandinista platform and won, announced that his government would transport the newly homeless or bankrupt farmers to nearby plantations in Jinotega and Matagalpa so that they could "earn some money picking coffee" (Equipo Nitlápan-Envío 1998). Corruption, furthermore, reached a new height. International funds and relief materials poured into the country, but with little accountability they were often pilfered and sold, only to appear on supermarket shelves. In 1999, again, the Nicaraguan government comptroller exposed a rampant misuse of funds, suggesting that President Alemán had personally skimmed money from the treasury and used it to purchase large amounts of property from farmers bankrupted by crop loss during the storm.[6]

Meanwhile, CSD's focus consequently shifted to the critical needs of the refugee community that was quickly forming a little over a kilometer west of CSD's compound,

where the national government had decided to relocate the displaced population. CSD worked side by side with national and international efforts in Nueva Vida, as the community came to be called, like OxFam International, USAID, Doctors Without Borders, and the United Nations. USAID, for example, had plenty of emergency shelters to donate to the community but did not have the human resources to put them up, and so CSD took ownership of that task. At the same time, however, the NGO sought long-term solutions for improving conditions in the community, but did not know where to start. One of their first community organizing projects was in fact to arrange the block-by-block election of community leaders, and, having identified them, they proceeded to develop a prioritized list of projects.

It was also during this turbulent time in Nicaragua that Melissa joined the CSD community. Melissa, who identifies as a Quaker, first became aware of CSD when Lisa and Jill visited Earlham College on a speaking tour, where she was receiving a degree in Peace Studies and Spanish and where, as a Quaker college, service work is required as part of the diplona. After her junior year in 1998, she decided to volunteer with CSD in Nicaragua during the summer and fall. When Mitch hit, she witnessed farmers in the throes of losing all of their crops and thousands displaced from their their homes. "I really felt that I was called to come down," said Melissa, who spent the majority of her time building provisional housing in Nueva Vida. She had initially decided to stay for only three months as a volunteer, since she still had requirements to fulfill before graduation. But after graduation, she returned with the goal of working as a volunteer

and did not leave. "At some point in time I decided that I wanted to work to change the world," Melissa comments, "but what you eventually learn, and what I did, is that you have to focus on changing the world by focusing on one area, and this is where I live now and this is where I'm going to focus on changing."

DELEGATIONS

International news of Hurricane Mitch, in fact, inspired many church and university groups, most of whom CSD had first made contact with during their annual speaking tours in the U.S., to rush to the aid of CSD. They began to organize their own donations drives for clothes, medicine, and other emergency relief supplies for the people of Nueva Vida. Yet, practically speaking, the problem presented to these groups was that there still did not exist a reliable and cost effective way to deliver these groups without actually doing so in person. It was for that reason that, starting in 1999, CSD began hosting delegations of short term volunteers from the U.S. and Canada.

The hosting of delegations (or "brigades") is a strategy originally pioneered in Nicaragua by Witness for Peace and, historically speaking, has connected communities in the U.S. with Nicaragua in relationships of political, financial, and material support. More recently, delegations have become a feasible strategy for many NGO for building networks of support in order to implement their own development projects. Currently, the budgets of NGOs large and small in Nicaragua—such as the Council of Protestant Churches, the Center for Global Education, and even the for-profit fair trade corporation

Equal Exchange— are often dependent, to various degrees, on the contributions of such civil society groups (Fogarty 2009). For CSD, in fact, the delivery of donations has consequently tended to map onto their hosting of service trips to the country in which delegates may simultaneously gain a better idea of the needs of service-providing NGOs and even enjoy the satisfaction of witnessing their donated materials being put to use. As an organization, in fact, with a mailing list of more than ten thousand individuals, more than seventy percent of their annual operating budget comes from the approximately ten percent of whom make annual donations. CSD credits the delegations for that high percentage of independent donations, as the experience of traveling to Nicaragua and witnessing the work of the NGO, if only for a week, has provided them with a transformative, educational experience and a concrete way of thinking about the value of their continuing donations.

After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, specifically, with desperate need of medical supplies to administer in a very rudimentary free clinic they had set up as well as manual labor for constructing temporary housing, latrines, and other basic infrastructure, CSD began hosting delegations of up to twenty people, sometimes as frequently as two or three times a month, in a one-room addition to their own house that contained rudimentary, metal bunk beds. To be sure, this was a major imposition on members of the CSD community. Every time a delegation arrived, their living space quickly became communal, filled with dozens of well-intentioned but ultimately extremely high-maintenance individuals, unfamiliar with Nicaragua and often lacking basic Spanish-

speaking skills. One of the first of these delegations was a student and faculty group from Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, of which I was a part in December of 2000. Over the next three years, the Bucknell Brigades, as they were called, established a close relationship with CSD and continues to send two groups of approximately twenty people per year while also making an annual contribution of about 300 thousand dollars. The major project of Bucknell Brigades over the first ten years of their existence has been to build and fund CSD's free health clinic in Nueva Vida. At the same time, they have provided Bucknell University students with powerful service-learning experiences as they work closely with the NGO in community defined projects (Susman 2009).

More recently, recognizing that delegations are a necessary but ultimately insufficient condition for the implementation of their projects, CSD has needed to limit the number of delegations to one per month (hosting twelve per year on a rotating basis) and to construct separate quarters for volunteers, which they euphemistically refer to as their International Training Center (ITC). A two-story, concrete building, unadorned except for the ornamental tiles bearing the names of donors who contributed to its construction, the ITC, CSD staff remark, is a matter of the CSD community's sanity. Having their personal space so frequently invaded, they often remark, is psychologically "unsustainable," detracting focus not only from their own rest and relaxation at the end of the work day but also from their work on other projects. Apart from the donations that they provide during the trip itself, the most important function of delegations, from

CSD's point of view, is the work that the groups do when they return to the U.S., invigorated by their experience in Nicaragua. Since 2000, CSD's network has grown significantly, in large part because of delegations to include more than 100 churches and more than 50 college and university groups. Even when these groups are not in Nicaragua, that is, they work for CSD's causes and remit monetary donations.

The other dimension of hosting delegations, for CSD, is to provide the North American groups with an educational experience. While many church groups who visit refer to CSD as "missionaries," the CSD community actually rejects that label, arguing that, if they are missionaries, they are missionaries when they are in the U.S. *on behalf of* Nicaragua. When it comes to delegations, they see their job as not merely convincing them to support the NGO's projects but also as providing delegates with a transformative experience. For that reason, in an old school bus that was donated by a North Carolina church in 1999, they take delegates on trips to witness where people live in intense poverty (for example, the Managua dump, home to about 1,500 people of all ages) as well as great wealth (gated communities and fancy shopping malls). They take delegates to the countryside, where they learn about coffee production in a cooperative to which CSD supports. They give delegates construction projects where they work side by side with Nicaraguans, so that, by the end of the week, they may also come away with a sense of achievement and accomplishment. And they bring in speakers, who present delegates with information about politics and economics in Nicaragua at large. Delegates themselves are, of course, of all political stripes, and so CSD staff often relish the

opportunity to confront social or economic conservatives, albeit indirectly, with

information that challenges their ideologies. Carolyn recounts an example of a

conservative, ex-Air Force officer who flew missions in Nicaragua during the Contra War

and who was visiting from his Michigan-based church:

> When I found out about this guy being in the Air Force, and even having flown
> during the Contra War—because, you know, it wasn't just economic support that
> Reagan was providing, the actual U.S. military was here also, and many people
> don't know that—I was like, 'Oooh, I have someone you have to meet!' I ran
> over to the cooperative over there and got Rosa. I said, all cheerfully, 'Meet
> Rosa, Rosa was in the anti-aircraft brigade of the Sandinista army during the
> Contra War. You'll have a lot to talk about!' The guy just turned bright red, but
> you know, he worked harder than anyone else that week. He drank more than
> anyone else, but he also worked hard.

Of course, for CSD, the story of the hurricane was always compulsory education

regarding the cascading effects of poverty and the structural vulnerability of the poor

throughout Nicaragua. At the same time, however, hosting these delegations, especially

conservative ones, has often been an emotional, intellectual, and political compromise for

the CSD staff. Feeling that they have needed to cater to the expectations of delegates, or

to not reveal their own political stripes so as to avoid losing their donations, has meant

that hosting has turned into a kind of performance. Roger remembers one instance, in

particular, in which he had to bite his tongue in front of a group from a wealthy Virginia

church:

> We had just gotten back from a tour of Nueva Vida, and the group got off the bus
> for a little bit to wander around near the clinic. You know, look at the shacks and
> so forth. Some guy got his sunglasses stolen, his 200 dollar sunglasses. Well,
> anyways, later that evening the group came back to the dorm, and they were doing
> the group reflection like they always do in order to process the events of the day.
> And, one woman, when, you know, it got to her, starting telling the group about

her experience talking to a young kid who walked up to her and smiled, you know, probably asking for *un córdoba*. She said, and I remember it vividly because there I was drinking my beer, you know, and it almost sent me over the edge. She said, 'that moment was so powerful, I just *knew* that God had put that child on earth for me to have that experience [laughs] I mean, how narcissistic can you get?

Roger attempted to intervene in the conversation, but felt that he had to reserve himself because the church typically did well bringing donations down to Nicaragua. Without challenging the person's faith directly, he instead attempted to engage the group on a theological level, specifically regarding the thought that God might put a Nicaraguan child on earth and make him suffer, to paraphrase Roger, "so that some rich, white woman can have a transformative experience."

An understanding of the roles of U.S.-based delegations in Nicaragua, facilitated as they almost always are by NGOs, requires a sustained focus that is outside of the scope of this dissertation (see Fogarty 2005). To be sure, though, as a kind of mix between solidaristic action and tourism—i.e. "voluntourism" (Fogarty 2009)—the development activities of delegates and of the interlocutor NGOs are powerfully shaped by neoliberal policies as well as the particular class positions that delimit the kind of projects these groups take up, if for no other reason than the narrow time frames within which delegations are willing and able to work. From the perspective of CSD, at least, who are mindful of the limitations of making their community development projects dependent on the input of a kind of volunteer tourism, delegations are an imperfect solution to generating networks of transnational support.

BUILDING THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL

In the wake of Hurricane Mitch, perhaps the most pressing issue presented to the community of Nueva Vida, as CSD identified it, was unemployment rates topping eighty percent while at the same time state responsibility for social welfare in the post-Sandinista era continued to decline. Concurrently, during the Alemán and Bolaños administrations (between 1997 and 2007), opposition to state-supported cooperatives heightened in favor of microenterprises, which quickly became icons of the free market model (Babb 1997:163). Though the logic of market-based development was not entirely persuasive to CSD, the microenterprise model nevertheless seemed to be an inevitable conclusion. Practically speaking, with a set of firmly neoliberal economic policies enforced on a national level, it is perhaps needless to say that there existed no real political course of action for effecting redistribution on a significant scale, no economic resources in the form of land or capital to develop a subsistence base, nor a market for consumer goods (i.e. clothing, food, household items) within Nicaragua. Indeed, the Nicaraguan consumer goods market was already severely undercut by the glut of second-hand donations funneled into the country through charity organizations or by pre-CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) concessions, especially in the areas of garment and agricultural commodities, first granted in the region with the passage of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI) in 1982, affecting Nicaragua specifically after the 1990 changeover. For CSD, as for most NGOs in Nicaragua during the 1990s, it would seem,

there was no alternative but market-based development and poverty alleviation, particularly via relatively small-scale, export-oriented microenterprises.

Meanwhile in the U.S. in the 1990s, large-scale apparel producers and distributors were increasingly coming under close scrutiny, as the public attention to sweatshops as well as the anti-sweatshop movement grew sharply, particularly because of the airtime provided by newfound celebrity interest (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000, Klein 2000:129). Concern over the violations of labor laws, health and safety laws, low wages, as well as child labor threw into sharp relief the complicity of garment manufacturers, insulated by the globalization of production by their lack of legal responsibility, distance, and anonymity. In this context, the anti-sweatshop movement sought to create monitoring systems that would hold the real profit-makers (manufacturers and retailers) accountable for the conditions under which their producers are made. Yet, at the same time, limited national enforcement capacity and the absence of effective international regulatory regimes created a regulatory vacuum. In that newfound space, however, what emerged was a market niche centering around the production of goods produced in sweat free conditions (Ross 1997, Renard 2003).

As CSD was considering its employment generation and poverty alleviation options, Clean Clothes Organics, in 1995 a relatively small-scale "sweat free" clothing company from Ypsilanti, Michigan, had just expanded its own market share into organic cotton garments by earning its first major contract with Ben & Jerry's, an ice cream company that saw the anti-sweatshop movement as consistent with the company's ethics

and wished to offer employees of its growing chain of stores, as well as visitors of its

factory tour, with non-sweatshop T-shirts. Accommodating the new scale of production

required Clean Clothes to subcontract the sewing process for the first time to sew shops

in southern U.S. states (see Collins 2003).

For Emilia Poissant, the owner of Clean Clothes, keeping production jobs within

the U.S., where labor laws were much more stringent, is perhaps the most straightforward

way to run a sweat-free business, which was always a mix of profitability and ethics. On

the one hand, Emilia said, her business sense allowed her to recognize the fact that the

technical, legal, and financial costs of moving production overseas outweighed any

marginal savings that a company as small as hers might enjoy in overhead. At the same

time, the ability for her company to affix to her garments labels like "sweat-free" also

gave her an edge in an already saturated apparel market. On the other hand, Emilia

continued, is the fact that working-class issues have always been close to her heart,

deriving, no doubt, from the experience of growing up in a blue-collar family and

witnessing members of her family lose their jobs to outsourcing. It was because of this

class alignment, ultimately, and of working in an organic food cooperative early in her

life that Emilia eventually became aware of the horrors of *maquiladoras* (sweatshops), of

their treatment of workers, especially women, and of their disregard for environmental

concerns in the pursuit of profit. At the same time, however, Emilia is also charged by

the desire to make her business, which she has built from the ground up, to be a success.

In fact, Emilia remarks that, as a business owner, there is often an uneasy connection

between one's ethical principles and the desire to succeed. Frequently feeling as if she were left with no alternative except to weigh one against the other, she describes herself as a business woman first and an activist second.

The political economic climate of the apparel industry in the mid-1990s, however, soon had its own say in the matter, as emerging trade agreements known as "Super 807s," precursors to more expansive free trade measures that would allow apparel companies to locate production facilities in the Caribbean and Central America without having to pay import tariffs, were beginning to put U.S.-based garment assembly plants out of business.[7] From Emilia's point of view, these free trade agreements were detrimental not only to smaller apparel companies like hers, who experienced great difficulty finding a stable production facility to process their relatively small batches, but also to workers, for whom, she recalled, "the need for a sew shop to stay competitive made working conditions all the worse." In dealing directly with these sew shops, Emilia encountered "disenfranchised" working-class women and single mothers who had been doing the same job for so long that they had developed chronic neck and back problems or carpel tunnel syndrome. Paid by the unit or required to meet unreasonably high quotas, moreover, the workers cared very little about the quality of any one garment.

Over the next few years, Emilia began to think of the problem as less a technical or management problem and more of a problem of her company's business model. "Poor working conditions and poor pay would always mean poor products," says Emilia, "the change that needs to happen is on the much more fundamental level of the relationship

between workers and owners." She began to see the commercial success of her organic garments, in other words, as intimately linked to the ethical treatment of workers. She referred to this idea—that all workers should have a stake in their labor and should be able to see the product's success as their own success—as "ethical business." Ethical business is not only an improvement for workers' lives, she explains, it is also a better all around business model because both the quality and efficiency of production improve when workers are not disenfranchised.

The event that eventually tipped the scales and made her change the entire direction of her business, Emilia recounts, was actually the day that Hurricane Mitch made landfall in Central America. In a rainy week in late October of 1998, with frustration over the delays caused by sew shop closures coming to a head, an order of about 17 thousand of Clean Clothes t-shirts were scheduled for production in an Alabama facility when she received a phone call from the sew shop owner. Several months before, London Fog, a U.S.-based raincoat company, had moved their entire assembly line to Honduras, but now one of the main facilities had been badly flooded by the hurricane's rains. Because the company temporarily needed to move production back to the U.S., the Alabama facility had taken Emilia's garments off the line and put London Fog's much larger order on. Flabbergasted, Emilia took the sew shop owner to task for bending to the will of a corporation that had shown no loyalty to the sew shop, its owners, or its employees. "It's money," he replied, "I have to do what I can't keep the machines going."

A few months later, while attending a conference on organic certification in her home state of New York, Emilia struck up a casual conversation with a bearded, silver-haired man named Roger, who was in attendance representing CSD and a Nicaraguan agricultural cooperative pursuing organic certification. Emilia remembers this conversation vividly, because out of it the idea of a sewing cooperative was borne.

"So what are you doing these days?" asked Emilia.

"Right now," responded Roger after a breath of deliberation over where to begin,

"Trying to find employment for a population of about fifteen thousand refugees of Hurricane Mitch who are living in a muddy cow pasture."

Emilia brightened, "Oh yeah? Can they sew?"

At first glance, it may seem an unlikely partnership, given the fundamental differences of agenda between the two. As Tsing (2005) points out, however, difference does not necessarily mean antagonism, and their imperfect connection, in fact, drew them into a common project at the same time that it allowed them to maintain separate agendas, ideologies, and goals. While for CSD the project provided needed employment for the Nueva Vida community, for Emilia it provided a viable offshore, yet still non-exploitative, solution to her company's sew shop problem. And while the democratic organizational structure of the cooperative largely derived from the CSD's and FUNDESI's templates, Emilia contributed to a sensibility of profitability, market dynamics, and competitiveness in specific market niches.

This is, of course, not to say that their interactions were perfectly harmonious. Roger and Emilia recall phone calls in the early stages of the project in which the two frequently talked past each other with industry-specific jargon, and conversations sometimes turned into arguments about who was more of an expert on what. As time wore on, however, they began to learn from one another's ideas and expertise and to see their roles in the network as different but complementary. Roger and Emilia eventually learned to diffuse tensions that arose between them with humor. Emilia would joke, "It's a true wonder that a man wanting to do economic development hadn't the least sense when it came to running a business," to which Roger would normally reply that at least he wasn't a "greedy capitalist."

Along with the group of individuals who would eventually come to operate the cooperative, CSD and Clean Clothes developed a metaphor of a "three-legged stool" for the network, mention of which frequently appeared in CSD newsletters to potential donors as well as in the organics company's own press releases, advertising, and presentations to the public. In the words of Vanessa, it symbolized "the principles of equality, solidarity, and partnership, despite differences," much like the metaphor of the three-legged stool in theology (scripture, tradition, and reason) as well as in religious life (family, church, and community). In this case, however, the first of the legs was the NGO, who secured grants and donations for the project, established the broad structures of a democratic, cooperative structure, and provided constant support and direction in helping the cooperative to its feet. The second leg was Clean Clothes Organics, which,

following a commitment to ethical business, used connections with defunct sew shops to purchase machinery for the cooperative, shared technical knowledge and business knowledge about garment production, and dedicated sewing contracts to the cooperative for years to come. The third leg was of course the Nicaraguan women who founded the cooperative themselves, whose creative efforts and sacrifices—concrete contributions that they referred to as "sweat"—made the cooperative a material reality.

By 2004, collaboration between CSD and Clean Clothes led to the idea of starting another worker-owned cooperative, a cotton spinning plant, using The Fair Trade Zone as a model. Roger, of course, had bigger plans. Following the business model of American Apparel in Los Angeles, Génesis, as the spinning plant would later be named by its cooperative members, would function as the second link in a vertically-integrated, garment production chain operating entirely within Nicaragua. With financial, technical, and legal support from CSD—and with Clean Clothes as a guaranteed client—this production chain would originate with organic cotton, grown by agricultural cooperatives like COPROEXNIC and El Porvenir, which would in turn be ginned and woven into cloth by Génesis. This cloth would then be cut and sewn into garments by The Fair Trade Zone. From field to factory, in other words, the vertically integrated chain would draw on a cooperative organization of labor from beginning to end and would operate completely separate from, or parallel to, the conventional garments market. "The goal is to put the *maquiladoras* [sweatshops] out of business," explains Roger.

Practically speaking, however, the history of this production chain has been riddled with compromises. In 2007 and 2008, for example, because of delays in the construction of the Génesis cotton spinning plant and a shortage of funds for building materials due to a downturn in contributions—something called "compassion fatigue" in NGO lingo—CSD was forced to make a provisional "deal with the devil" on behalf of The Fair Trade Zone. In 2007, Cone Mills—a major, textile production company and partner of Levi Strauss originally hailing from Greensboro, North Carolina that has aggressively moved production offshore over the last twenty years—set up a massive facility in Ciudad Sandino employing almost ten thousand workers. In the same year, in dire need of an inexpensive source of cloth to complete a string of time-sensitive orders, CSD, acting on behalf of The Fair Trade Zone, reluctantly approached Cone Mills with an offer to purchase a small percentage of the facility's cotton, at least until the Génesis plant was up and running. Since then, The Fair Trade Zone has continued to rely on this discounted cloth to complete orders. While it might seem ironic that The Fair Trade Zone is frequently represented as independent from, even parallel to, the maquiladora system, in reality, the influx of inexpensive cloth into The Fair Trade Zone has in many ways allowed the cooperative to pad its profit margins and stay afloat amid the economic downturns of 2007-09.

FAIR TRADE

Many NGOs like CSD first emerged from religious organizations, for whom the model of the NGO provided political access while at the same allowing them to maintain their unique religious visions (Wuthnow 2009). In the U.S., religious charities and social service organizations have picked up the slack after the dismantling of the mental health system in the 1980s and of the federal welfare system in the 1990s. Elsewhere, especially in countries under the constraints of neoliberal structural adjustment policies, faith-based NGOs have articulated with existing political or social movements, conservative as well as progressive, integrating faith, humanitarianism, and political conviction and pressing for social change based on their particular visions of social justice.

Historically, fair trade can be understood at the nexus of a similar set of "political" influences: progressive, solidarity campaigns concerned with changing the terms of world trade on a very fundamental level, as well as faith-based initiatives, the starting point of which was instead the more philanthropic mission for a better world (Barrientos et al. 2007). In the United Kingdom, for example, Oxfam—the Oxford Community for Famine Relief, a confederation of Quakers, social activists, and Oxford academics—built the first "worldshop" in 1959, which sold the handmade crafts of Chinese refugees who had escaped the Communist revolution to Hong Kong. Remarkably successful even in its early incarnations, similar stores retailing imported Third World goods like cane sugar started popping up elsewhere. The fair trade

movement that emerged eventually developed a synergy with the cooperative movement, particularly the Co-operative Retail Group, which has been instrumental in developing more than 300 thousand cooperatives in Europe with an estimated 83.5 million members (Barrientos 2007:52). Eventually, a set of initiatives, including Max Havelaar and the European Fair Trade Association (EFTA), emerged to track the origin of fair trade goods and to confirm that the producers received a certain percentage of profits.

In the U.S., likewise, fair trade can also trace its roots back to faith-based organizations like Traidcraft, Christian Aid, the Quaker movement, and the Mennonite and Brethren, whose organizations act as both an outlet for fair trade products as well as an educational resource for revealing the "unfairness" of the world trade system (Barratt Brown 1993). Today, fair trade has grown sharply in U.S. markets in no small part because proliferation of fair trade certification systems such as Transfair and Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO), which bring fair trade goods into mainstream channels of consumption, as well as fair trade NGOs, both secular and faith-based, who on a much smaller scale seek to bring specific causes or groups to the attention of their supporters. Equal Exchange, for example, which has been historically strong in natural food stores and food co-ops, has enjoyed a great deal of retail success recently in mass markets such as Stop & Shop on the East Coast of the U.S. and Albertson's on the West Coast. At the same time, the company has drawn on strong alliances and partnerships with faith-based organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Unitarian Universalists, Lutheran World

Relief, and the American Friends Service Committee, allowing them to capture a sympathetic niche market. In fact, Equal Exchange sales to faith-based organizations reached 2.6. million in 2003, or 20 percent of total sales (Nicholls and Opal 2005:86). There seems to be a natural affinity between fair trade and faith-based organizations generally in fair trade, as market-based businesses team up with organizations seeking to do market-based development.

Until recently, however, garment production has not been eligible for fair trade certification in the same way that agricultural products have been. This is because unlike coffee, tea, chocolate, and fruits and vegetables, products with a very limited post-harvest production process, garments are produced in multiple stages and typically in multiple production facilities. In order to certify garments as fair trade, that is, distributors, sew shops, ginning and spinning plants, as well as cotton grower organizations would need to be certified individually, which is often too costly a process given the small scale. For this reason, perhaps the majority of small-producers have instead chosen to participate in the fair trade movement without use of the fair trade certification seal. Usually operating on a much smaller scale than producer communities whose products are fair trade certified, these groups instead choose to make information about production transparent, thus relying on the democratic structure of the cooperative, decision-making practices, as well as promises about the distribution of profits to tell the story of "fairness" itself.

In 2008, however, this changed as, seeking in the long term to expand the production capacity of their network, CSD and Clean Clothes initiated a "beta project"

with the Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO), one of many certifier organizations in the U.S., to pursue certification for the vertically-integrated production chain. In September of 2009, after several months of bureaucratic management and a two week examination of the facilities by Scientific Certification Systems, an independent third party certifier, the production chain received certification as "Fair Labor" under a new auditing process. Fair Labor Practices and Community Benefits, as the program is called, claims to validate socially responsible practices in the various stages of garment and other production, from agricultural production through all stages of the post-harvest process: growing, harvesting, ginning, spinning, knitting, finishing, cutting, sewing, screen printing, and distribution. The certification system covers equitable hiring and employment, safe workplace conditions, worker and family access to health, education, local and regional impacts, community engagement, and demonstrated economic stability. In anticipation of the Génesis cooperative starting production in January of 2010, as of this writing, the first of Clean Clothes' products to be offered under this new certification will be scarves made with 100 percent certified organic cotton available nationally in the U.S. at Whole Foods Market.

Up to this recent certification victory, imagining the production chain as very much part of the fair trade movement, CSD and Clean Clothes have chosen to use the language of fair trade in the absence of a certifying mark, using labels like "sweat free," "100 percent worker owned," or "fair trade." In the case of many of the cooperatives with which they work, including The Fair Trade Zone and El Porvenir, the coffee and,

more recently, cotton production cooperative, the scale of operations has made certification financially unfeasible. Firstly, certification can cost as much as three to five thousand dollars annually, meaning that, given the size of the cooperative, a significant portion of the cooperative's profits from whatever price premium they received would be paid back immediately in certification fees. Second, the relatively small scale of El Porvenir's production typically means that those who buy their coffee are already familiar with the cooperative and do not need assurance in the form of a seal. Many of El Porvenir's customers have, in fact, traveled to Nicaragua as a delegation that CSD hosted, and thus are familiar with (in some cases, might have even traveled to) El Porvenir. And third, the current arrangement between El Porvenir and the two major U.S.-based roasters, who between the two buy the crop every year, frequently guarantees the cooperative an above fair trade price premium. In fact, a Pennsylvania-based roaster pays El Porvenir $2.50 per pound up front for approximately two thirds of the co-op's annual crop of green coffee, compared to the market minimum for fair trade coffee of $1.26. The other roaster—a non-profit confederation of wealthy, conservative businesspersons in South Carolina who have organized through a church group and sell the coffee in each of their stores—pay El Porvenir $2.00 up front for green coffee and remit all profits after roasting and packaging costs back to the producers. As many scholars have noted, the bureaucracy and costs of fair trade certification, while beneficial to large plantation style cooperatives, are often not feasible for smaller producers (Jaffee 2007, Raynolds et al 2007, Fridell 2007).

Roger remembers that pursuing organics certification for COPROEXNIC, who was marketing sesame at the time, first soured him on the idea of certification:

> The certification processes are very difficult to figure out, and nothing if not complicated and convoluted. The forms to fill out, and that you have to continue to fill out, are completely ridiculous. One time, we were pursuing certification for a section of COPROEXNIC, you know, and finally got all the paperwork done and then they lost it! Apparently, after several months, they realized that they accidentally certified the wrong farms based on a technical error, and the certified ones were not the CSD co-ops. So, the organics promoter [certifier] asked me to get maps of the farms that were supposed to be certified so that she could award our co-ops the certification. Go down to the county office and get them, she said. And I was like, 'there is no office to go to! That information does not exist! There's no collection of maps!' This was, of course, before Google Earth, which you know has changed everything. But anyways, after months of paperwork that involved details down to like, soil composition and stuff, and literally thousands of dollars in fees that we paid, she kept insisting that we needed those maps in order to get any certification at all. Now imagine that you were a producer and you didn't have the help of an NGO in all this!

Roger's biggest complaint about fair trade is that it is an institution, and as an institution it is interested in perpetuating itself, through paperwork and bureaucracy as well as financially, often at the cost of the change that it is attempting to effect. In lieu of certification, then, CSD has instead relied on close links between producers and distributors, who are encouraged to visit the cooperatives with whom they work frequently. In the marketing of those products, moreover, CSD and the distributors use the tactic of "full disclosure." As Melissa explains, "There's no label to stick on that, there's no third party that comes in and checks on it...We just tell everybody everything, and let them make that decision for themselves about where we stand. And I think that as long as you can get as much of the story as possible to the consumers then you've got some kind of chance in keeping that happening."

A frank discussion with CSD community members reveals that, despite their

utilization of the strategies of fair trade—if not, until very recently, the certification

system—by no means do they think of fair trade as an optimal solution to poverty

alleviation, community development, and, perhaps least of all, social injustice. Rather, at

its best, it is an acceptable solution in significantly less than optimal conditions. At the

core of its shortfalls is the dependency of Southerners on Northerners as well as the

market that fair trade is complicit in fortifying, rather than challenging and in order to

encourage the the autonomous development of producers. Vanessa explains:

> I mean, let's look at it. You have a bunch of wealthy, typically white people, with
> comfortable lives who want to help support the poor, brown people but—and
> here's the kicker—they don't want to give up their own privilege in any
> way...What's *not* completely anti-progressive about that?

For Roger, by contrast, the matter at hand is instead that, whatever profit fair trade

remits to producers, not everybody in a community may be involved in fair trade

production. Those profits therefore do not go toward the development of community

resources, infrastructure, or any kind of industry that is not dependent on a "fickle,

international market." Rather, fair trade reproduces and reinforces inequalities within

those communities, leading to sharp divisions between those who have access to the

market and capital by virtue of fair trade and those who do not. While fair trade may be

an improvement on equitable exchange between the consumer and the producer, it does

not take into account the broader context in which producers, specifically, live. It does

not encourage progressive change on the level of the community so much as create

tensions, conflicts, and jealousy. Roger comments:

Of all the social justice issues in the world that need to be addressed, you know, you would have to be crazy to think that social justice *coffee* was some kind of salve...I mean, everybody thought that fair trade coffee was a great idea about 10 years ago, and so they invested a bunch of money in coffee production. Then that tanked, and they said, oops, well I guess we'll have to try something different. So then they started to certify fruits and vegetables and peanuts and shit, never really seeing the big picture. It's not a solution to rope people into the international market, when it's the international market that's the problem, really. As a systematic solution, you have to encourage growth from the ground up, growth that builds sewage systems and wells and all of the basic infrastructure of communities. If you just send money a little bit at a time, that doesn't work because then you're dependent on people continuing to send money.

This is all to say that CSD expresses a real ambivalence about fair trade. It is a compromise of their ideals that is made in the absence of state resources and in which the only option is market- and donor-driven development. On the one hand, fair trade appeals to a notion of co-responsibility on the part of the buyers for the situation of the producers, and thus, in many ways, escapes purely mercantile considerations. Relative to other conventional small producers, in turn, fair trade producers benefit greatly from the strategy's conventions and conditions, such as a minimum, above market price guarantee, direct dealing with distributors, and oftentimes prepayment for the harvest in the case of agricultural co-ops. However, the fact that fair trade products ultimately respond to a commercial logic from the moment of their insertion into the market has its negative side as well. For Veronica, in particular, the simple act of buying implies that the consumer has enough power to change the state of things for the producer, yet producers still do not have the power to change things for themselves. For Roger, in turn, the strictly commercial aspect of fair trade is problematic as a development strategy because what is often a matter of survival for producers continues to be beholden to the demands of the

marketplace, including the need to satisfy business-minded individuals whose

participation in the network is not necessarily driven by ideological or ethical conviction

at all but rather convenience and profit. At the same time, in Roger's view, consumers

are often encouraged by fair trade to sacrifice their own ethical principles by buying a

clear conscience and forgetting about ethical ideals:

> One way to think about fair trade is as a kind of indulgence like the Catholic
> Church offered. In exchange from absolution from sin, the sinner confesses and
> offers some kind of money payment. You know, by selling indulgences, the
> Catholic Church enriched itself off of these "donations"...when the point of
> confession to sin, strictly speaking, was supposed to be contrition, sincere
> remorse. That the real thing that changed a person's behavior and saved their
> soul. Fair trade doesn't really encourage that kind of ethical transformation,
> seriously recognizing one's complicity in injustice, it only gives people the
> illusion that they are clear.

In a sense, then, as a compromise, fair trade involves the dilution of ethical principles by

the market, and it is under these circumstances that CSD expresses doubts about fair

trade's role in inducing social change.

The real reason why CSD uses fair trade as an approach is because, at this point at

least, practically speaking it is the only market in which cooperatives like The Fair Trade

Zone can even remotely succeed. Sacrificing ideals, then, is a necessary evil because

organizations like CSD, whose only option, really, is to work within the limitations of the

marketplace, do not often have the luxury of purist positions. Neoliberal economic

policy in Nicaragua since 1990 is of course one of the primary reasons for the

proliferation of NGOs in the country, but it is also the reason for the absence of initiatives

directed at the improvement of infrastructure like sanitation, transportation, and access to

adequate health care. CSD is dependent on a market of donors for its budget, as, inevitably, the projects that the NGO supports are dependent on the market for their successes.

CONCLUSIONS

There is no denying the strong linkages between the emergence of NGOs and the transformation of capitalism in the late twentieth century, a realization that has led many scholars either to demonize them as handmaidens to neoliberalism or to lionize them as bearers of democratized civil society. Yet, in this context, the conceptualization of the great variety of organizations as *agents* of neoliberalism has led to a problematic oversimplification of the equally great variety of their roles, activities, and intentions and the reasons for taking up projects like micro-enterprise development, international solidarity campaigns, or fair trade. What the case of the CSD demonstrates is that NGOs may in fact be deeply ambivalent about their own strategies, about the constraints of political and economic structures, and about the necessity or utility of compromising what are oftentimes well-developed ideals of social justice for reasons of practicality. In the case of CSD, the uneasy relationship between ideal and real is perhaps most visible in the progressive institutionalization of CSD as a faith-based community into a non-profit and later as an NGO, replete with budgets, staff, and achievable project goals.

In this respect, anthropologists may make an enhanced contribution to the understanding of transnational political economic structures such as neoliberalism by

making those transformations particular and by understanding the emergence, construction, and narration of the resulting social forms within specific groups. As the case of CSD shows, it is possible to separate out the activities and intentions of NGOs from a set of political economic structures, responsible for enabling their existence, and therefore to see the actors as something other than mere functions of systems that are not of their making. At the root of this important realization—which amounts in many ways to an ethnographically-grounded resistance to the overdetermination of subjectivity—is that human consciousness is never isomorphic with the things upon which it fastens. Indeed, the selves which social structures and social interaction construct do not become seamless monads, encapsulated by skin and possessed of conceptual unity. People *deal* with those structures rather than *become* them. Quite capable of holding in their heads at the same time the seemingly contradictory ideas of social justice through structural change, on the one hand, and what is reasonable, practical, or achievable, on the other, CSD, to paraphrase Marx, are agents of their own history, but not in circumstances of their own making. Looking back on the intentional community's thirty year process of social, political and religious radicalization and, simultaneously, professionalization, CSD's ambivalence stems from a context that disallows the luxury of purist positions. On the one hand, CSD community members understand their political and social consciousness as powerfully shaped by what have often been painful realizations about their own privilege, the connections between structures of race, class, and gender, the contradictions between ethical action and religious practice, and the consequences of

Washington D.C. as close to home as Statesville, North Carolina, and as distant as

Nicaragua. Yet, simultaneously, CSD's NGO-ization has not entirely been a co-optation

of those ethical convictions, even if it is sometimes a de-politicization of their agendas.

As Roger puts it:

> I was as reluctant as anyone about making CSD an institution. But we have not
> *become* an NGO, it is a tool that we've acquired. Sure, it's not an ideal situation,
> but the real world is not like that. What we've learned is that—what we've
> become conscious of over the years—is that in order to cause real change, you
> have to learn how to do things like write grants with words like sustainability this
> and accountability that. It doesn't mean that you have to believe it. It just means
> that you have to be conscious of those things in order to get money from people
> like, say the Inter-American Development Bank.

The utility of the language of "subjectivities" in this context is to communicate

that identities and the related sets of actions are not given, but made, bracketed, reshaped,

and unmade, oftentimes existing in tension with one another and without resolution, even

within the self. If we understand consciousness, then, as the interrelationship between

those multiple subjectivities as well as the objects upon which the subject focuses, then it

becomes possible to challenge the all-too-easy conflation of action constrained by

structural limitations with the perpetuation of that structure.

At the same time, CSD's understanding of fair trade, in particular, as a practical

solution to poverty alleviation is itself revealing of a deeply rooted hegemony.

Positioning fair trade (as a form of market-based redistribution and development) as a

reasonable strategy for empowering producers by appealing to the ethical concerns of

well-intentioned individuals is also to define the limitations of what is impractical and

impossible, inhibiting alternative (perhaps even more effective) strategies for more fully

realizing economic justice. At the same time that CSD is displeased with the options

around them, it is also true that the constellation of ideas—fair trade, micro-enterprise

development, and the form of the NGO—becomes taken-for-granted and

commonsensical, thus entering the realm of hegemony so eloquently discussed by

Antonio Gramsci (1971). This hegemony, however, is not the dissolving of the subjective

in the unity of discourse ("A face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea," as Foucault

[1979:387] put it), nor the collapse of the subjective into habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant

1992:127), nor the intrusion of the public world of cultural symbols upon the subjective,

synonymous with inwardness and affect (Geertz 1973). Rather, it exists in the very

conditions of possibility, in the case of CSD manifesting in that uneasy space between

what real economic justice looks like and what is practical and reasonable, given

significantly less than ideal circumstances.

NOTES

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[2] The concept of Jubilee was used occasionally in the U.S. by abolitionists (Timpson 1834). More recently, it spawned Jubilee 2000 movement, which was an international coalition in over 40 countries that called for the cancellation of third world debt by the year 2000, a date that coincided with the "Great Jubilee" in the Catholic Church. After 2001, the movement split into a number of national and regional organizations, coordinating their activities through a loose global confederation.

[3] Carolyn Miller (1992) argues that "*kairos* appears as a critical occasion for decision or action (or revelation, as in the biblical uses of the term), an occasion that is objectively presented or divinely ordained." In this sense, *kairos* is more than responding to an immediate occasion, it is also a tool for social change. Similarly, Isocrates civic notion of *kairos* is rooted in social exigencies and fuses popular beliefs and knowledge to the demands of a civic problem, such as when one draws on the common value of "fairness" in order to critique unjust laws and make a case for revision (Poulakos 1997)

[4] One of many implications of the focus on ethical action was that he believed that the work of the Church is often done by those who do not acknowledge the Christian faith.

[5] Community Development Exchange, a community development NGO, defines the approach as: The process of developing active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about influencing power structure to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. Community workers (officers) facilitate the participation of people in this process. They enable connections to be made between communities and with the development of wider policies and programmes. Community development expresses values of fairness, equality, accountability, opportunity, choice, participation, mutuality, reciprocity and continuous learning. Educating, enabling and empowering are at the core of Community Development. [FCDL 2009]

[6] In 2002, these charges of corruption came to a dramatic climax, and Alemán was finally tried and convicted for stealing a total of 100 million from the country's treasury. On December 7, 2003 he was sentenced to a 20 year prison term for money laundering embezzlement and corruption. On December 20, 2003, due to health problems, he began serving his term under house arrest. In June, 2005, house arrest became "municipality arrest." And on January 16, 2009, Nicaragua's Supreme Court overturned the 20-year corruption sentence of Alemán, who had been named by Transparency International as the ninth most corrupt leader in recent history.

[7] Super 807s, Emilia explained, were initiated by the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), a unilateral and temporary U.S. program initiated in 1983 by the "Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Act" (CBERA) and were made permanent and expanded to certain Central American countries by the "Caribbean Basin Economic Recovery Expansion Act" (CBI II), which was passed in 1990. Once the U.S. entered into the NAFTA agreement in 1994, however, Mexico's textile and apparel industry gained a comparative advantage over other countries enjoying CBI status, and so in 2000 President Bill Clinton signed into law the Caribbean Basin Trade Partnership Act (CBTPA) as part of the Trade and Development Act of 2000. CBTPA extended preferential tariff treatment specifically for textile and apparel products assembled from U.S. fabric (USTR 2008), and proliferating export processing zone (EPZ) legislation functioned to eliminate many tariffs and taxes for foreign owned companies on Caribbean and Central American side (Robinson 2003).

CHAPTER III

DIGNIFIED WORK, MOTHERWORK,

AND THE LOGIC OF SWEAT IN THE FAIR TRADE ZONE

One question that has consistently vexed fair trade scholars, as well as developers, experts, and advocates who traffic daily in the industry, is whether or not fair trade is capable of affecting social change by transforming global consumption patterns (Simpson and Rapone 2000). For practitioners, on the one hand, this question has hinged on fair trade's ability to create a market niche by appealing to the ethical concerns of "conscientious consumers," to effectively direct the power of the market toward social justice. For scholars, on the other, interest in this question has often revolved around the theoretical matter of the commodity fetish, the peculiar, anonymous nature of the market system and the vast rupture between the factories in which the commodity is produced and the private homes in which they are finally consumed—as if revealing that inequality would itself generate new forms of equality. Stemming from the broader project of gauging the extent to which fair trade challenges existing capitalist market structures, the deliberation over the commodity fetish is essentially about whether fair trade, in addition to providing producers with a premium for their goods, has the power to shape consumers' consciousness, to reveal otherwise hidden relations of production, and to

enable consumers to recognize their complicity in forms of social and environmental destruction.

Regardless of where one lands on this issue, the commodity fetish question, though theoretically provocative, exemplifies the unfortunate tendency to weight fair trade research toward the "consumer-oriented" perspective, to use Veblen's (1973) term (see also Tugwell 1927, Patten and Tugwell 1924). From a survey of the fair trade literature, that is to say, one could easily come away with the impression that the ongoing social process of commoditization, which fair trade scholars have puzzled over for some time now, impresses only upon the consciousness of consumers, that it is the fair trade consumer who (ideally) may be liberated from the mystification of production, and that it is ultimately that consumer who is capable of affecting social change by modifying their consumption choices. This fixation on the consumer end of the commodity chain, while revealing a great deal about the way in which people factor ethical concerns into their consumption choices, has also had the negative side effect of short-circuiting the same level of insight into other, equally important aspects of the commodity chain—for example, those that lay beyond consumption in the realms of distribution, marketing, and production.

As anthropologist Sarah Lyon (2006:459) has observed, the lack of research concerning fair trade production, in particular, continues to be this body of research's most glaring weakness: How do producers conceptualize fair trade differently from consumers and retailers? Do their experiences mesh with the claims of the movement,

both generally and in the specific advertising of products? What are the real costs and benefits of fair trade, apart from the premiums that producers receive? Market access (Tallontoire 2000:175)? Capital (Schreck 2002)?

Based on a research platform similar to Lyon's (2006), this chapter's goal is to shift the empirical and analytical approach to fair trade production. This standpoint, I argue, while of course shedding light on an underreported dimension in fair trade scholarship, demonstrates that production and consumption, far from being separate spheres of intellectual or economic activity, are in fact intimately (if not always harmoniously) connected. The activities of fair trade producers, that is to say, are constrained by market structures and the social institutions that back them at the same time that they are capable of affecting incremental change within their immediate circumstances, within the fair trade movement, in consumption patterns.

As a way to understand the relationship between structure and agency among fair trade producers, one possible entry point might be to reformulate the question of the commodity fetish in recognition of the fact that, despite its conventional application to consumer products, the social processes of commoditization and fetishization often manifests every bit as much in labor as in the final product of labor that is circulated and exchanged. Like the product of fair trade labor, that is, labor itself is submitted to a social process of commoditization: it is homogenized and reconfigured into as an abstraction. And like that commodity, labor is also fetishized: it gains a value that appears as if it were inherent in itself, seemingly independent of any particular set of

social relations. Yet, at the same time, it is also true that the meaning of labor for those whose labor it is is laden with with a whole range of values apart from either its use value for production or exchange value in a labor market.

The focus of this chapter is fair trade production instead of the meaning of fair trade consumption. As such, the question becomes, is fair trade capable of challenging for producers the anonymous nature of the market and the vast rupture between them and distant others who consume the products of their labor? From this view, it may become apparent that fair trade is not as revolutionary as it might first appear. Though consumption may be invigorated by a humanization of the economy, for producers, the activities of work may continue to be projected back to them as if through camera obscura, as a strangely alienating, even uncanny, externality.

Continuing the broad, conceptual approach of the "commodity chain," this chapter tracks the social, political, and economic relations involved in the production and distribution of fair trade garments to The Fair Trade Zone, a sewing cooperative in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua that was founded in 2000 by twelve women from the former refugee community of Nueva Vida. Driven by semi-structured individual and group interviews as well as life history interviews conducted in three separate field seasons between 2005 and 2008, I seek to bring into ethnographic focus the labor of these twelve founding cooperative members (*socias*) in their efforts to construct the cooperative from the ground up as well as in their subsequent work as the owners of the first worker-owned free trade zone (*zona franca*) in the world. Taking a page from the substantivist school of

economic anthropology, my approach to the ethnography of labor brackets labor itself, or

at least the activity that is so termed in microeconomics. Instead, I begin with essentially

non-economic norms, rights, obligations, institutions, and meanings, all of which are

inextricable from economic phenomena—a position that reflect the field's and my own

opposition, in theory as well as method, to the impulse to make all forms of behavior

appear as self-interested calculations of efficiency and gain (Frerejohn 1991:279, Booth

1993:653).

In order to understand these many dimensions and values of labor, I argue—the

meanings and motivations that emerge from labor as a situated human activity as well as

the social processes that produce the commodity fetish or that tend to reduce the concept

to a single dimension, measured in the favored terms of discrete tasks, hours, and

ultimately exchange value (Simmel 1907)—it is necessary to take the flexible approach

of ethnography. As anthropologist Daniel Miller (1998) has lucidly demonstrated in his

material culture studies, while commodification is surely a noteworthy aspect of things

that are produced, traded in markets, and consumed, to be sure, it is also only one

dimension of the wider social world in which they exist (see also Appadurai 1986,

Kopytoff 1986, Douglas and Isherwood). While an item may at points be transacted

through the market, integrating that item into a system of exchange values, people also

grow attached to things, imbue them with sentimental value, use them to express

identities, and sometimes even make them into containers for ethical significance. The

same insight, I argue, can be applied to human economic activities. Far from an abstract

concept, labor is at once valued for its exchange and made meaningful by personal experience and socioculturally constructed and historically particular ideas about, for example, one's obligations to other people (including children, family, community, or strangers) or one's rights to a certain quality of life, standard of living, or degree of ownership of the fruits of one's toil.

In this expanded view—in which the term *labor* may in and of itself be a mystifying concept, sustained by the illusion that it is may be separated out from other social activities (Graeber 2001:45-6)—productive activities are structured simultaneously by local, national, and transnational forces, enacted by multiple actors within both disparate and shared frameworks of meaning.[8] While labor is a matter of the ideas and experiences of laborers themselves, so too is it shaped by the broader context, such as reigning ideologies about capital, exchange, formality and informality or even, in this case especially, ideas of "fairness" persisting among transnational fair trade practitioners and sustainable developers, or even those encoded in Nicaraguan law. The ethnographic approach to labor finds enlightenment in these "actual experiences," rather than the *a priori* categories with which they are often confused, as Lila Abu-Lughod (1991) puts it, imbued by the particular social processes and practices of particular people in particular settings.

Situating the labor of the twelve poor and working-class women and mothers who became the founding members (*socias*) of The Fair Trade Zone within its meaningful context is certainly no easy task, and I make no claim to "capturing" that experience in

anything that I write here. The reason for this is very much along the lines of the politics of location that postmodern and feminist anthropologists have drawn our attention to: social location shapes knowledge production, and ethnographic representations are necessarily partial, constructed, and situated (Abu-Lughod 1990, Behar 1993, Clifford 1986, Visweswaran 1994). In my research, the process of conducting fieldwork has very much involved my own social and cultural biography—"the processes of identification (and lack thereof) that inform description" (Visweswaran 1994:74)—and has been intimately involved in the negotiation of power relationships while in the so-called "field." Drawing on the insight of feminist ethnographers, especially, it is within the framework of my situated knowledge of socias' (cooperative members') narrative accounts—by in large as a listener, not a participant in the history and labor of the cooperative's construction—that I seek instead to provide only one of many possible perspectives on the meaning of labor (Haraway 1988).

I attempt to do so by unpacking three interconnected idioms that socias draw on to refer to their own activities and experiences of labor. The first, *trabajo digno* (dignified work), refers to the standards by which cooperative members measure the "fairness" of fair trade from a producer-bound frame of reference. The second, *la obra madre*—a phrase that I choose to translate as "motherwork" (c.f. Collins 1994, Collins 2006:131)—points to the constellation of identities, relationships, ideas, and desires that socias identify as central to their work in the cooperative in the capacity of mothers. The third, *sudor* (sweat), refers to the shared, embodied experience of working to build the

cooperative and ultimately the criterion for becoming a member of the cooperative. Because "sweat," as I will show, communicates a social struggle as much as a physical exertion, the analysis of it reinforces another important project in feminist ethnography, one that Visweswaran (1994:76) articulates as the relationships that women have to women, including the power differences between women.

Understanding these often overlooked, and sometimes suppressed, dimensions of labor is a critical part of overcoming our own fetishization of the concept of labor, of coming to terms with the meanings and motivations that often lie hidden, and, ultimately, of rescuing from the dismal science those whom it has described in such dismal terms. Or to put it slightly different, when we translate the activities of people into the vocabulary of "economizing"—a translation that relies on converting the non-market idioms, such as care for one's children, into market idioms—it may happen that, as Clifford Geertz (1983:10) has said, "things get lost," perhaps some very important things.

TRABAJO DIGNO / "FAIR TRADE"

When I first approached the topic of producers' understandings of "fair trade" during field research with The Fair Trade Zone in 2005, it seemed unproblematic to me that I also use the conventional translation of the term used by Spanish-speaking members of the fair trade industry, *comercio justo*. While socias were of course very familiar with the term and its intended referent, I eventually realized something that I probably should have known all along: that the language of comercio justo on its own, as

well as the list of prepared questions ultimately sought an answer to prompt "What makes fair trade [comercio justo] fair?", would only get me so far. Frustrated that the interviews I conducted in my first field season were only producing, time and time again, the same prosaic statements—that fair trade is a particular system of exchange whereby as producers they are guaranteed an above-market price for their goods—I eventually dropped interviewing altogether.

Ironically, however guilty I felt for no longer doing "work," it was probably the best thing that I could have done for myself (c.f. Roberts 2008). My way of thinking about fair trade had admittedly been dominated by non-fieldwork-related activities—i.e. reading literature that detailed the legal and institutional ins and outs of the movement, on the one hand, or positioned fair trade within the grand theoretical treatises about a challenge to a "global" system of capitalism—that I had nearly forgotten the central role of ethnographic research in the matter. That is, ethnographic fieldwork is not about validating theoretical conceptions—and, by extension, the language that theory brings to bear on real-world situations—but rather amplifying the many forms of knowledge that are subjugated to and hidden behind official knowledge (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006:ix, Hesse-Biber 2008:359). When I finally arrived at that realization, I found that beneath the surface of those terse responses to my questions about fair trade lingered at least two meanings distinct from that of the movement itself.

The first, comercio justo—also referred to around the cooperative as *comercio alternativo* (alternative trade) and *comercio solidario* (solidarity trade)—refers in a much

broader sense to the buying and selling of goods in relationships of more or less equal exchange. As Jacinta, a Fair Trade Zone socia, explained when I accompanied her on an errand to the local Ciudad Sandino market, it is a *quid pro quo* that, apart from the movement of "fair trade," one could witness all around us. In this market, transactions are often far from anonymous, buyers and sellers in fact know one another, and are in some cases even capable of heeding the other's needs. Thus, if you want to buy corn, and one seller is having a hard time this month, you buy from that person as opposed to the person who is doing fine. Likewise, from the seller's point of view, if a buyer is out of work this month, you would do well to discount the price or perhaps even give them some credit, in light of the fact that you know when the time comes around it will be repaid in turn.

Making use of the concrete, social context that Jacinta had just established for me, I decided to ask once again, "What, then, makes fair trade [comercio justo] fair?" This time, she responded, "Comercio justo refers to a kind of clean [limpio] and balanced [balanceado] trade. I mean, in the cooperative, we also work in fair trade. What it means there is that we aren't against trade, we're against *unfair* trade." When I pressed Jacinta further on the meaning of "unfair trade," Jacinta responded that it was perhaps best exemplified by *capitalismo salvaje* (savage capitalism)—a term, it is commonly thought, that was popularized in Nicaraguan parlance by Pope John Paul II's use of it in his 1996 visit to the country.[9] Wholly unbalanced, as Jacinta framed it, capitalismo salvage is in many ways comercio justo's opposite. Instead of the kind of trade that is mediated by

considerations for one another's needs, she said, capitalismo salvaje refers to "the giant corporations who set up shop in Nicaragua and exploit workers in order to make astronomical profits." She continued, "In the Fair Trade Zone [Zona de Comercio Justo], we fight against these companies because they exploit, they steal, create suffering, and leave nothing behind."

Even though I had just experienced a threefold increase in my conceptual vocabulary for fair trade, I nevertheless felt as though something were missing from the full range of ideas that one might consider to fall under the heading of fair trade. While the meaning of comercio justo takes the standpoint of exchange and is fleshed significantly out by metaphors of balance—the equitable distribution of profit and power in transactions—I returned in a second field season in 2006 to discover that there was yet another way of talking about producers' ideas and experiences of fair trade: *trabajo digno* (dignified/decent work). If comercio justo is about the fairness and balance, for lack of a better phrase, of economic transactions and of the social relationships that those transactions imply, trabajo digno is instead about the many private moments of commerce, the ones that only secondarily factor into those transactions and that require the additional understanding of the emotional, psychological, and material satisfaction achieved through work.

Sharing a lunch of rice and beans and *tostones con queso* [fried plantains and farmer's cheese] with Andrea, another Fair Trade Zone socia, one afternoon in July of 2006, I decided to find out where a discussion of trabajo digno might instead lead.

Andrea paused to think, her tostone in mid-air, and proceeded to tell me about how her

mother had worked all her life, ever since she was a little girl, trying to make ends meet

when her father left. She took in extra laundry when she had free time at home, she

cleaned other people's houses, she sold candies on the bus, and she even worked picking

beans during part of the year, all with her two children in tow. On Andrea's fifteenth

birthday, a coming of age celebration in Latin America called the *quinceañera,* her

mother had gone out to see about buying a cake for her daughter, even though money was

short, and did not return. Andrea and her brother received news several days later of her

heart attack, brought on by stress, and her subsequent death. Telling this story, Andrea

teared up, and I followed in suit. Her voice cracked as she explained:

> So when I think about decent work [trabajo digno] of course I think about that.
> There are certain things that a person deserves in life. A person deserves to be
> able to take care of her children, to make sure they have a better future than she
> did. And she also deserves to see that child grow up to be the person that their
> love and care made them into.

If comercio justo is about the fair distribution of resources, then trabajo digno is about the

purpose of those resources within a particular person's life. The resources achieved

through work, and how equitable that distribution is, is of course a core matter in any

discussion of fair trade. Frequently overlooked, however, is that the purposes of those

resources and the context in which they are acquired are by no means a superficial matter.

For Jacinta, dignified work is no simple matter of being able to meet her

responsibilities as a mother, such as having the time and resources to fulfill their material

and emotional needs. It is also a matter of doing so in such a way that she may continue to be a role model for her children:

> You know as a mother what you have to do. You have to make sure your children do not go hungry, and you have to be there to make sure that they grow up to be good human beings. But, you know, sometimes it's hard to do both of those things all by yourself...Many mothers are so desperate that they will walk the streets in order to get that extra bit of money, then they go home to face their kids. Some people don't have sympathy for these women, they say it's sinful, but I do. They're desperate, and it's either this or their children go hungry. But then, you know, they have to face their kids when they go home.

Jacinta later continued, explaining what dignified work means:

> The sin is not that fact that some people do immoral things. The sin is when these people are put in positions of desperation, so that they are forced to debase themselves by doing something that is beneath their own ethical standards....For example, a person can almost always find money, maybe you steal, or because you are with a man for money, or, maybe you destroy the environment in order to make that money. Dignified work, to me, means that you should be able to feed your children and also be able to be a good role model and do good things.

Dignified work, in other words, is not merely work that allows one to make ends meet. It is work that also allows a person to maintain her moral values or be a good example to her children, while also working to maintain the conditions for them to have a good life as well.

Comercio justo and trabajo digno are both normative statements about what "should" be in economic life. In contrast to certain ideologies which excuse or even valorize the pursuit of self-interest as the proper organization of economic relationships, the concept of comercio justo suggests that they may instead run a gamut—in this case, as Jacinta put it, from "balanced" and "clean," on the one hand, to "savage" [salvaje] and exploitative, on the other. There are, of course, many possible ways to think about this

rendition of fair trade, each of which may do well to shed light on the fair or unfair conditions under which producers exchange their labor with fair trade retailers or consumers in the global North—a topic which I explore in greater detail in Chapter IV.

Perhaps a bit closer to home for most producers, however, is the matter of producers' fair or unfair experiences of work, a matter of what goes on behind the scenes of the fair trade transaction, particularly among those producers who, by virtue of fair trade, are imagined to experience fairness in their lives and work. This concept of trabajo digno can also be thought of as a normative statement about the "should" of economic life, deeply entangled with moral principles and often intractable dilemmas. It is, in other words, a statement not about work in and of itself, but about the purposes of work, the possibility of a better way of life, and the idea that the qualities and conditions of that work is intimately connected to visions of just such a good life for not only oneself but also others.

As British social anthropologists have been wont to point out, the task of translation is of course a very provisional way of coming to terms with not only the foreignness of words, sentences, and languages but also concepts (Leach 1973:772, Asad 1986). Fair trade is of course not immune from those complications, as the difference between the terms *comercio justo* and *trabajo digno* is perhaps something that is too often lost. Nevertheless, it is a terminological distinction that reveals a conceptual gulf. I am hesitant to apply the terms "public sphere" and "private sphere" to the concepts of comercio justo and trabajo digno, respectively, because the public and private, like

exchange and labor, are so intimately connected. As Nancy Fraser (1990:14) puts it, "there are no naturally given, a priori boundaries" between matters that are generally conceived of as private and those that are labeled as "common concern."[10] Yet, there should also be no doubt that the trabajo digno and comercio justo communicate recognizably different, if interpenetrating, ideas about social relations: the first having to do with relationships with, and perhaps even responsibilities toward, strangers, distant others, the community, neighbors and acquaintances in the domain of exchange, and the second having to do with friends, family, children, and the self in the domain of work. In order to further flesh out the meaning of the latter within the immediate historical, social, and cultural context of The Fair Trade Zone, it is necessary to turn to the concept of "motherwork."

LA OBRA MADRE / "MOTHERWORK"

In Latin America the image of a suffering and powerful mother has been at the center of a gendered political and economic discourse for some time. This discourse has of course had historically particular consequences in Nicaragua, shaping the perception of women's participation in the political and social transformation of the country as a whole. Yet, given that there exists no single set of experiences for either women or mothers, it stands to reason that the discourse has also functioned to shut down alternative considerations of the roles and positions of either group. Before turning to the meaning

of motherwork within The Fair Trade Zone, it is useful to first establish historical context of this image.

In Nicaragua, the formalized women's movement is usually traced back to the *Asociación de Mujeres frente a la Problemática Nacional* (AMPRONAC), which was founded in 1977. Premised on the demand for basic human rights in the years leading up to the revolution, AMPRONAC mobilized thousands to demonstrate in the streets of Managua with aprons and pots, thus utilizing the moral authority of motherhood to protest the Somoza regime's corruption and violence under the slogan "Our children go hungry." The repression and brutality of the Somozas, the argument goes, threatened their children, and it was this matter that first provided women with a firm basis for their participation in politics (Chinchilla 1990, Randall 1981). By 1979, AMPRONAC had forged formal ties with the FSLN and joined the revolutionary organization's condemnation of the Somoza regime. It also grew sharply to include people from many different walks of life: urban workers, bourgeois intellectuals, homemakers, and campesinas (Chinchilla 1990, Maier 1985:70-1). Certainly a milestone in Nicaragua's women's movement, AMPRONAC was instrumental in clearing space for the expanded role of women in political struggle as well as in registering a general challenge to the gender ideology embedded in Somocista discourses of traditional Catholicism while of course also perpetuating them: the man as the master of the home, exerting authority over a dutiful and, above all, compliant woman.

One of the political roles that this alternative gender ideology supported was military action. Nicaraguan women actually came to represent twenty-five percent of the insurrectionary forces that eventually deposed the Somoza dictatorship. As many scholars argue, however, this massive and historically unprecedented degree of participation should not be simplistically thought of as an epochal shift or sudden break with the past that ushered a heretofore apolitical group into Nicaragua's political realm (Chinchilla 1990:423, Chuchryk 1991:145, Collinson 1990:154). Rather, change occurred incrementally as the routines of daily life were disrupted, women left the home to train in militias, fought on battlefields, or kept late hours attending clandestine organizational meetings. Little by little, they carved out political space for themselves— however temporary—often despite a recalcitrant, male-dominated political elite. While the majority of course suffered from the hardening of gender roles at the excuse of war, in so doing, the way that some women understood themselves and the possibilities afforded to them in their lives slowly changed as well. A few chose to forego motherhood entirely and pursue alternative life courses. Others gave up domestic roles in order to become community leaders or political office. And still others chose to invest their energies in children and in teaching these future generations different ideas about men and women and the possibility of alternative identifications. As one Nicaraguan woman explains in Margaret Randall's *Sandino's Daughters,* one of the implications of this transformation was to frame the image of the suffering, yet demure, mother figure as only one of many possible configurations of identity:

We don't see ourselves simply as housewives, caring for our children, attending to the duties of the home and subordinating ourselves to our husbands. Women are the centers of their families—emotionally, ideologically, and economically. This is particularly the case for working class and peasant women. [1985:20]

To the extent that women broke gender stereotypes as combatants, commanders, and revolutionary cadres within the FSLN, so too did they clear the way for their increased participation in the male-dominated political apparatus of the revolutionary government. Specifically, it became possible for the first time to raise women's issues as revolutionary issues with the formation of a formal revolutionary organization within the FSLN, the well-known AMNLAE (Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses 'Luis Amanda Espinoza,' named for the first female to die in the struggle to overthrow Somoza). Closely tied to the FSLN, AMNLAE pursued gendered, revolutionary interests using revolutionary language and concepts (Kampwirth 2004). They did not, however, always cow to the revolutionary elite. In fact, seeking to challenge many of the historical discourses of motherhood propagated by FSLN officials, AMNLAE leaders frequently challenged the overwhelmingly male-dominated vanguard, who, in the context of the Contra War, frequently placed the notion of women's equality on the back burner (Metoyer 2000:4).

In response to AMNLAE's challenges, FSLN officials reasserted their own vision for the role of the women's organization and for women in general in the task of preserving the revolution. In 1984, for example, Daniel Ortega, president of the Sandinista leadership, made a statement to an audience of AMNLAE members that, in order to "defend the revolution," women's roles were to be regarded as much less active

than during the revolution. For him and others of the Sandinista vanguard, AMNLAE

would function to "strengthen the consciousness of the mothers who in a very egoistic

way oppose the defense and hinder the integration of their sons in the revolution

work" (*Somos* 1984). Women, in turn, would no longer be included in the standing

Sandinista army, but would instead give higher priority to motherhood. Fighting for the

country, in other words, to which the Sandinista government gave its highest praise, was

to be considered a predominantly male phenomenon. Women were to be praised only in

terms of their auxiliary function to nurture and to sacrifice themselves, to birth (male)

children and then to send them off to war.

Official rhetoric, it is perhaps needless to say, was far from supportive of gender

equity. Discourse tended instead to reify the role of women as "Sandinista mothers"— an

official term that most frequently referred to poor women who lost their children during

the insurrection or the ensuing Contra War. Sandinista mothers experienced a

transformation of status with the death of their son or daughter, and their contribution to

the revolution was acknowledged in precisely those terms. They were not valued for

their own activity or agency, but rather in terms of their sacrifice to the national cause. In

Sandinista discourse, mothers were first and foremost categorically altruistic and self-

sacrificing, and when they spoke publicly it was only with the authenticity of *el dolor de

una madre* (a mother's pain). Second, they were praised as reproducers insofar as they

fulfilled their duty to replenish the great losses of war.[11]

Though the revolution had of course opened up a new space for women, AMNLAE became split over the most effective way to pursue the organizations goals. Some believed that the best route was to continue to support the FSLN. Others saw the need to break away from the party that was now only hindering the feminist organization's growth and its ability to address many issues central to the feminist cause like abortion. As a result, while some chose to lobby for greater autonomy within AMNLAE, splinter groups emerged from AMNLAE in the mid to late 1980s, such as a smaller group of women who called themselves the Partido de la Izquierda Erótica (PIE) and whose goal was to address many issues that were excluded from AMNLAE's agenda: violence against women, voluntary maternity and abortion, sexuality, freedom of sexual choice, and the right to political participation (Stephen 1997:60).

AMNLAE and other Nicaraguan feminist groups of course resisted the roles given to them by the FSLN elite, and they oftentimes suffered politically for it. In September 1987, for example, at the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the founding of AMNLAE, as thousands of women gathered in Managua, President Ortega spoke with shocking enmity about many of the concerns expressed by AMNLAE over the past few years, claiming that in the context of U.S. military aggression "one way of depleting our youth is to promote the sterilization of women in Nicaragua...or to promote the policy of abortion." In a rather divisive tactic, he claimed that some women in the crowd who were "aspiring to be liberated"—meaning the middle-class Managuans who had decided

not to bear children—negated their roles in ensuring the "continuity of the human

species" (The Militant 1987).

AMNLAE responded to this antagonism by renewing its efforts to return to the

grassroots, formulating a new and independent agenda based on the needs and interests

expressed by grassroots women, and asserting their independence by establishing

pathways of power that bypassed the FSLN leadership (Bickham Mendez 2005).

AMNLAE representatives held town meetings in order to encourage women to express

their concerns and demands, and, not surprisingly, these women raised important issues

beyond working in support of the FSLN and war, such as discrimination in the

workplace, access to birth control, women's unpaid labor, and domestic violence (Isbester

2001:77). Seemingly the final straw, in 1989 the FSLN leadership abruptly removed the

AMNLAE's national leadership, ignored demands for a democratic process, appointed

their own candidate, Comandante Doris Tijerno, who was at the time the national police

chief and whom, as a staunch party loyalist, they perceived would hold a more traditional

view regarding AMNLAE's relationship to the party.

In 2008 I sat down for a brief interview with Dora María Téllez, a commander of

the Sandinista army during the revolution and founder of the Sandinista Reform

Movement (MRS), and asked her about this event and about the image of the Sandinista

mother that many FSLN leaders supported. Téllez tied this early rejection of elections

with the reluctance today to accept renovation of the party today, and thus the need for

Nicaraguan women to stake out their own, independent territory. Téllez explained:

> AMNLAE was there, and still is there, to make sure that the benefits of the revolution were shared by women. What [the removal of the leadership] looked like from within the FSLN organization—which was, you know, huge—was, you know, something we were very used to by this point in time. A certain group forcing through its agenda. And, you know, to the many of us who were not just mothers of revolutionaries, who were in fact active in the revolution, we knew that it was always something that we had to fight against...I was 23 at the revolution's triumph, and I thought we would have eliminated poverty in ten years. If they told me that it couldn't be solved in 40 years, I wouldn't have believed them. The same is true for the women's movement. We are still fighting for our causes. The way that I have gone about it is to continue to support the ideals of the revolution, but rejecting the Leninist approach, *caudillismo* [the strong-man phenomenon], in favor of representative democracy.

In Téllez's view, it is perhaps fair to say, the image of the suffering mother is symptomatic of the male-dominated FSLN vanguard's perception of their own central role in the revolution and in Nicaraguan history in general.

The year after the FSLN removed AMNLAE's leadership, the FSLN met its own electoral demise, losing to the opposition party leader, Violetta Chamorro, who many have argued played the role of "matriarch of Nicaragua" during the election. It was a watershed moment, as Florence Babb (1997) writes, that set the stage for the emergence of an independent women's movement, which had "clearly staked their ground and claimed a new social space in which to build a movement" (1997:59). Generally speaking, linked so closely for so long with the FSLN, that is to say, AMNLAE as well as other feminist organizations sought not to simply redefine maternity and reproduction in positive terms, but rather to break away from that image entirely and even challenge the rigid dichotomy that, as Jean Franco (1988:506) puts it, associates masculinity with the

mobile, active, productive, and political and femininity with the immobile, passive, reproductive, and apolitical (Criquillón 1995:224).

Ironically, Chamorro's own attempts to break with the Sandinista past, particularly to reactivate the country's economy by moving from the mixed economy model to an export-model based on neoliberal principles, placed a heavy burden on Nicaraguan women. Chamorro agreed to International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programs in 1991, and by initiating a broad reduction in the public sector based on the notion of shifting the responsibility for survival (ideologically speaking) from the state to the individual, the policies, in reality, placed the burden on the household instead. Cutbacks in social spending supporting things like education and healthcare, that is, coupled with the repeal of price controls on basic goods, required households to assume a greater share of the cost of living. Within Nicaraguan households, women—rather than men, children, elderly, or the rich—have by in large taken upon themselves the responsibility of picking up the slack. In this context, it is not surprising that the image of the suffering mother has had a great deal of staying power. Though no longer training in militias, women in Nicaragua, as elsewhere, are said to bear the "double burden" of work both inside and outside of the household, caring for children, maintaining and cleaning of houses, preparing food, while also generating extra household income (Chuchryk 1991, Hochschild 1989, Elson 1991, Babb 1996, Benería and Feldman 1992, Afshar and Dennis 1992). Moreover, their strategies for doing so by

in large involve "individual belt-tightening" (Stephen 2005:253), the tendency to confront hardship alone through self-sacrifice.

As many scholars have pointed out, however, the trope of the suffering mother also tends to perpetuate universalizing, homogenizing, and ethnocentric assumptions about women and the actual roles that they play in family and in society (Mohanty 1991, Kaplan 1994, Ragoné and Twine 2000). Not the least of these oversights is the equation of women with mothers. On the one hand, this assumption problematically charts a predetermined life course for women that forecloses on the possibility of women playing other roles. On the other, the notion that maternal practices are something that all women have in common, as Alison Bailey (1994) suggests, has not only silenced discussion of the diversity of maternal practices but also marginalized theoretical questions that emerge from differences among mothers. U.S.-based black feminist scholarship, for example, has challenged "traditional" definitions of mothering (i.e. those that derive from white, middle-class perspectives), aiming instead to place the maternal experience of African-American women at the center of feminist analysis and research. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2000), for example, the field of reproduction and the experience of mothering for many of these women is a space for survival, identity, and empowerment. She asserts that, in contrast to white middle-class children, the survival of non-white children cannot be taken for granted. Motherhood thus means mediating on behalf of one's child in a hostile society and helping children to develop meaningful identities despite a society that devalues them. Latin American scholarship, by contrast, has instead

tended to emphasize the role of mothers in the political sphere. Though of course motherhood takes a great variety of forms, the social action of mothers has been intimately linked with guerilla movements, church-linked women's groups, and human rights movements to protest over public services (Lobao 1990, Nash and Safa 1986, Alvarez 1990, Westwood and Radcliffe 1993).

Economic perspectives on the role of women and mothers in the transformation of Latin American societies have unfortunately lagged far behind. Common phrases like "making ends meet" or "eking out an existence" often make these individuals appear as if their activities were rooted *merely* in subsistence. Certainly, many poor and working-class women and mothers in Latin America have responded to economic crisis with survival strategies that involve incorporation into the paid workforce or participation in what has been problematically labeled "the informal economy." And certainly, as Nash (1990), Safa (1990), and others have additionally shown, many of these women and mothers have justified their entrance into these formal or informal economies in terms of their responsibilities as mothers or domestic workers, sometimes even re-articulating them as the basis for political demands. By organizing on behalf of the survival and well-being of children and families, they transform domestic space into political space. Yet, what remains to be fully recognized is the fact that quotidian economic activities are not just political, they are also creative. As Ruth Behar writes in her critique of the long-standing trope of Latin American women as "beasts of burden"—the two-dimensional

figures of mothers, wives, or even guerilla fighters—"Latin American women can emerge

as thinkers, cosmologists, and creators of worlds" (1990:225).

Among twelve founding members of The Fair Trade Zone, the concept of *la obra*

madre ("motherwork")—a term that Patricia Hill Collins defines in her own research as

"[consisting] of a cluster of activities that encompass women's unpaid and paid

reproductive labor within families, communities, kin networks, and informal and formal

local economies" (2006:131)—has emerged as a salient idiom for talking about precisely

this creative potential. As Marilyn Waring (1988, 1990) and other feminist economists

have pointed out, one major shortfall of economics has been the tendency to discount this

domain of activity as contributing to the economic process as a whole—a phenomenon

that is perhaps most visible in the observation that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

counts oil spills and wars as contributors, but deems housework, childcare, and eldercare

as valueless. It is not enough, however, to point out that traditional economics fails to

take into account the value of unpaid, or non-monetarized, work. Rather than "thinking

about the economy as a Weberian 'iron cage' or a Habermasian 'system'—cold, stark,

mechanical, and instrumentally driven" (Nelson 2006:1052), economies are part of social

life and hence influenced through and through by such human factors as sexism, power,

and ingrained perceptions about the value of different kinds of work. Moreover, the idea

that there exists a real relation between economics and human values, and the idea of a

naturally rational, greedy, self-interested human being—a model that continues to lie at

the center of so much economic analysis—belies a masculine bias (Nelson and Ferber 1993).

As Arturo Escobar poses it, the question is how does one formulate an idea of labor "in which household survival strategies are part of this creativity?" (1995:177). In The Fair Trade Zone, a historical account of which I turn to below, the concept of motherwork captures this meaning well. More than the one-dimensional trope of "making ends meet," motherwork brings to the fore some of the most salient meanings and values of socias' work as they intersect with equally specific changes in circumstance in emergent and creative ways. Motherwork is not just an economic activity and a source of subsistence for families. It is a critical metaphor by and through which socias think about themselves in relation to other people, a foundation for important processes, roles, identities, and relationships that extend far beyond the purely commercial consequence. In contrast to the one-dimensional category of work, the values of motherwork— understood as plural and nested—intersect with and sometimes even override the narrower commodity value of work insofar as they structure the range of statuses and obligations of persons, the meaningfulness of relationships, and the sense of self generated. Yet, at the same time, these values are not always perfectly compatible. As motherwork also reflects, these multiple and nested values are not always compatible and often encounter one another in relationships of conflict, not just about more favorable allocations of resources or about greater material gain, but also about *what kind of* value —security, dignity, hope—should prevail in particular, often changing situations.

Far too often, political economy, like rational choice theory, allows the notion of value to remain largely unexamined and underdeveloped, implicitly and uncritically assuming that "equality" and "exploitation" form the unassailable bedrock of "the good" (Sayer 1995, 1997, Hodgson 1995, 1997, 1999). Yet, once given critical thought, it becomes abundantly clear that political economy's notion of equality, itself, is a value among values—e.g. dignity—implying the possibility and, indeed, desirability of a better way of life (Graeber 2001:222, Robbins 1994). And, recognizing this, it then becomes necessary to define the dimensions of that equality. Should equality between the work of men and women, for example, take the form of a "universal breadwinner" model, so that women take on the social roles of men? Should it take the form of a "universal caregiver" model, so that men take on the social roles of women? Or perhaps something else (Fraser 1997)?

Seen in this light, motherwork is not simply the objective *what* of economic activity, like the labor of the two-dimensional suffering mother figure, passively bearing the burden of circumstance. It is also the creative negotiation of normative questions about (often conflicting) forms of value, informed as they inevitably are by social roles and relationships and interpretations of what is good, right, and just: What responsibilities does a person have to children and future generations? How should one discharge responsibilities to others, and how should those responsibilities be allocated between men and women, parents and non-parents, rich and poor? Toward what end should economic

resources be put? And what standard of living should does a person have the right to expect?

THE ORIGINS OF THE FAIR TRADE ZONE

For most of the people involved, the history of The Fair Trade Zone starts with the story of Hurricane Mitch. In October of 1998, Hurricane Mitch lashed Nicaragua as storms do almost every year. In the narrow, meteorological view, however, this one was unique as ocean temperatures and wind currents stalled Mitch over the Central American isthmus, where the storm proceeded to drop over six feet of rain in four consecutive days. Yet, in a broader view, it is equally true that social, political, and economic conditions allowed for that disaster to take its toll. By the time that those rains finally abated, almost four thousand people had died, and nearly a fifth of Nicaragua's most vulnerable were left homeless.

For a brief moment at least, the depths to which inequality and structural violence run in Nicaragua were revealed. In the countryside, widespread crop failures devastated small-scale farmers, a situation that was further complicated by some seventy-five thousand live land mines remaining from the Contra insurgency of the 1980s that were uprooted by floodwaters. In the capital city of Managua, Lake Managua (also known as Xolotlán), which forms the city's northern border, swelled to over a kilometer inland. Many of the individuals living the shoreline area were already living at the bottom: they lacked title to the land, they lacked access to health care, education, or other sources of

professional training, and they had little in the way of employment and earnings opportunity or were stuck in cycles of low-wage work. After Mitch, matters were made significantly worse. They found their homes and all of their possessions suddenly under water and were sent trudging through the muddy streets with only what they could carry in their arms.

Ironically, the disaster actually enabled the Alemán government, whose economic policies were based on the neoliberal model, to proceed with a national tourism development plan already several years in the making that involved rehabilitating the waterfront area and relocating the already impoverished population to a site a few kilometers west of Managua near Ciudad Sandino in a resettlement community called Nueva Vida. According to the mayor of Ciudad Sandino, this plan also detailed Nueva Vida's important role as a labor source for a cluster of industrial maquiladoras in the area. The national government, as the plan went, would eventually build a mass transport railway to shuttle workers to and from the worksites everyday.

With Hurricane Mitch, however, fifteen hundred families began to set up their homes with government allotments of black tarp and small plots of muddy pastureland, measuring about ten feet by fifteen feet each, laid out in grid form such that dirt roads eventually emerged from the borders. Between 1998 and 2002, with basic infrastructure in the refugee community like running water, sewage, trash removal, and access to basic health care still substantially lacking, the Ciudad Sandino mayor's office estimated that Nueva Vida suffered from above eighty percent unemployment.

Among the unemployed were the women and mothers who would eventually form
Nueva Vida's first worker-owned free trade zone. Andrea, who lived with her family and
children on the eastern side of the lake near Estelí before the hurricane, lost all of her
material possessions to Mitch. "When we came to Nueva Vida, we only had the clothes
we were wearing." Yet, she says, "I thank God that I didn't lose anyone in my family."
Julia, who has six children between the ages of 13 and 25, had left her family on
Managua's shore a year before the hurricane and had gone to find work in Costa Rica as a
cook. Like Andrea, Julia's family lost all of their belongings to Mitch:

> When Mitch came I almost died trying to get back to Nicaragua. My son almost
> lost a leg, and my mother almost died from cholera. After that, I went one more
> time to Costa Rica, but I couldn't continue to live and work there because my
> family was here, struggling to build a house with scraps and donated materials.

Although Zulema did not consider herself to be amongst Nicaragua's poorest
before the hurricane—she was in fact studying to be an executive's assistant with the
financial help of her husband, who owned a mechanic's shop—"everything changed
because of Mitch....We lost everything because of the hurricane, and came to Nueva Vida
with only clothes and our three children." Like many of those who became residents of
Nueva Vida, the effects of the disaster were emotional as much as they were economic.
As Zulema said, "It was a devastating situation...there was no hope, no work, and no way
out."

For the first year, pickup trucks sporting OxFam International, Doctors Without
Borders, or United Nations logos were commonplace in the emerging community. Their
emergency teams provided important short term solutions for the provisioning of food,

clean water, shelter, and medicine. But they eventually moved on, and, in the absence of sustained government action, it was left to more durable presence of local and international NGOs to pick up the slack. One of these, as I detailed in Chapter 2, was the non-sectarian, faith-based community originally from North Carolina, the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), whose focus, with the landfall of Mitch, shifted dramatically from sustainable development projects, including cooperative development to the refugee community that was quickly forming down the road. CSD worked side-by-side with national and international relief efforts, including in the development of a free health clinic. Yet, they also actively sought out long-term solutions for more enduring, structural problems taking root in the community, which eventually materialized with the idea of organizing a worker-owned sewing cooperative.

For the most part, the laborious task of organizing the project—which involved learning how to establish a cooperative as a legal entity, defining the framework for the cooperative's constitution, called the *Acta Constitutiva*, developing a business plan, and even drawing up blueprints for the factory itself—was CSD's and Clean Clothes' shared domain of activity. Their constantly evolving template, recognizing their limited resources, in turn delegated to the socias (cooperative members) the legwork of building the cooperative from the ground up, in the process of which they would learn by trial and error to develop their own administrative, managerial, and decision-making structures. This also meant that it fell to the partnership between CSD and Clean Clothes to interpret Nicaraguan cooperative law and to establish the broad guidelines for membership in the

cooperative, such as the idea that membership would be based on the contribution of a pre-determined amount of labor-hours ("social capital") toward a "buy-in" of 500 dollars.

While the partnership between CSD and Clean Clothes could aptly be characterized as collaborative, each recognizing the other's unique contributions to the project, the same cannot be said of their relationship with the women and mothers who eventually became the founding members of The Fair Trade Zone, to whom, in the context of this project, the two organizations consistently applied the revealing term *population*. In everyday parlance as well as in social scientific discourse, population is often treated as an empirically existing entity, given to social research or scientific discovery (Hansen 2007:48, Curtis 2002). In this case, however, it is more useful to say, as Curtis does, that "Population is not an observable object, but a way of organizing social observations" (2002:24). The statistical approach to population research, for example, configures individual, social, or cultural variation in such a way that they are knowable in quantitative terms. Population, in other words, is a discourse that has its roots in a historically important development of thought that attributes a shared, abstract essence to subjects and thus allows for the possibility of imagining a practical equivalence between otherwise very different people as well as the management or engineering-type control over those people (Foucault 2007). Intentionally or unintentionally, application of this term to potential cooperative members has functioned to define not only the relationship between CSD and Clean Clothes, on the one hand, and the project's participants, on the other, but also the role of those participants in the

definition of the project. For CSD, that is, the discursive construction of Nueva Vida residents as an undifferentiated, depersonalized development population functions also to determine the role of the development agent as "interpreting" that need (Fraser 1989, Hansen 2007:246). For Emilia, similarly, the conceptualization and treatment of this population as a "labor force" in the task of sewing garments speaks to a vision in which participants' roles are essentially to work.

Marx's distinction between "abstract" and "concrete" labor is useful for further unpacking this imagination of cooperative members as well as the characterization of their relationship with CSD and Clean Clothes as a "partnership." As Marx writes, "all labor is, speaking physiologically, an expenditure of human labor power, and in its character of identical abstract labor, it creates the forms and value of commodities" (1930). Instances of concrete labor—a category, following from Hegel's notion of the concrete, that refers to particulars rather than essences—are distinct from one another by virtue of the specific bodies and minds doing the labor, the specific spatial attributes of labor (Harvey and Smith 2008:113), the specific conditions of labor, the specific, subjective experiences of labor, and the specific value that it has for laborers (Marcus 1986:173). Yet, at the same time, when they are brought together in the exchange process of the market, one instance of labor can be made commensurable with another, an equation that rests on the construction of a single kind of abstract labor and an assignment of a general form of value. It is this view of labor that allows Emilia to see a practical equivalence of labor-power (i.e. the ability to do labor) in her idea of a "labor

force," in CSD's market-based solution to unemployment in Nueva Vida, or, really, any mode of production in which the concept of "labor" may be separated out from every other domain of social life. This is not to say that ethical concerns are merely epiphenomenal. Rather, such concerns may indeed factor in without having to do away with the basic, organizing principles of development and commerce, either by personalizing transactions or "humanizing" development strategies (Carmen 1996).

It is worth noting that, after news of CSD's plan to organize a sewing cooperative circulated through Nueva Vida and over fifty women showed up to the first informational meeting, the idea of the cooperative was already in the advanced stages of its formulation. Through their collaboration in these early stages, CSD and Clean Clothes developed a business model for the cooperative organized around fair trade, a plan for building the cooperative, an organizational structure for its operation, and a model for membership based on the idea of the "buy-in." In the process, they also originated the metaphor of the network as a "three-legged stool," an image which appears dozens of times in CSD newsletters to potential donors and in the organics company's press releases, advertising, and presentations to the public. Symbolizing, in the words of one CSD staff member "equality, solidarity, and partnership, despite differences," the first of the legs was the NGO, who secured grants and donations for the project, established the broad structures of a democratic, cooperative structure, and provided constant support and direction in helping the cooperative to its feet. The second was Clean Clothes Organics, which, following a commitment to ethical business, used connections with

defunct sew shops to purchase machinery for the cooperative, shared technical and business knowledge about garment production, and dedicated sewing contracts to the cooperative for years to come. The third was of course the group of twelve founding cooperative members themselves, whose creative efforts and sacrifices—concrete contributions that they refer to as their "sweat"—belie their one-dimensional role as a population and in fact made the cooperative a reality.

LEARNING THE BUSINESS

Cooperativa Maquiladora Mujeres de Nueva Vida Internacional

(COMAMNUVI) was officially incorporated three years after Hurricane Mitch in 2001. While this was a milestone for the entire network of people involved, the moment that socias recall perhaps even more vividly was the hot, blustery day that the diverse group of poor and working-class women first sat down together under the shade of a mango tree in Ciudad Sandino to contemplate the strange and exceedingly unfamiliar task at hand: having been solicited by a locally-known NGO to be the founding members of an all-women sewing cooperative, now their job was to find and purchase a plot of land, construct a factory, learn to operate industrial sewing equipment, and eventually build from the ground up an international garment export business. "We had little more than 40 *Córdobas* [two dollars] between us," remembers Lucía, "and yet there we were talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars."

By raising an initial sum of several thousand from church and university groups in the U.S., CSD enabled the socias to purchase a vacant lot located next to their own compound in Ciudad Sandino. The rest of the budget, slim as resources were, trickled in slowly and afforded only the cost of basic building materials, so that nearly all of the construction work had to be done by the socias themselves. Initially at least, many of the women claimed inexperience in this kind of labor, as the physically arduous task of construction is typically something done by men. Nevertheless, the socias knew themselves to be capable, and so picked up a shovel and immediately broke ground on the project. "The thing is, we are more entrepreneurial than men," explains Andrea, "If someone says, 'Look, this has to be done,' then we do it. You have to do anything for your children." Andrea continued:

> In Nueva Vida, we have a phrase for a mother who is the center of her family and sweats for the good of their family: *la roca* [the rock]. La roca fights for her family so that her children grow up healthy, even if nobody will help her...she does *la obra madre* [motherwork].

One way of looking at the investment of the socias in the cooperative was that they worked approximately 640 hours—20 hours per week for two years—without pay, only the promise that their contribution would count as their "buy-in" for membership. This work ranged from training sessions in the philosophy of cooperativism (sponsored by the Center for Sustainable Development and FUNDESI) to more technical training sessions in industrial sewing (sponsored by Emilia Poissant, from Clean Clothes Organics), to the arduous manual labor of building the factory itself. In this massive undertaking they learned not only about construction techniques, the basics of sewing,

and cooperativism in the abstract, but also how to work together as a cooperative. The latter involved the much more difficult tasks of coordinating the activities of a large and diverse group of people, working as a collectivity with a shared goal, and shedding the individualist mindset that you do what you can (independently) when you can (according to your own schedule).

Yet, such an account of socias' activities, framed in terms of so many hours, does little to capture the full experience of the project, which extended into virtually all domains of life. In fact, the long-term goal of creating stable economic opportunities for themselves frequently meant short-term sacrifices. "The hardest part was not actually building the cooperative," says María, "it was working without a salary, because sometimes that meant that we didn't have anything to feed our children." Because all socias were mothers, and most were in fact single mothers, they typically left their children in the care of family members or brought them with them while they typically worked the morning half of the day mixing cement, digging post-holes for structural supports, or lifting 200 pound slabs of concrete, referred to as *losetas*, over their heads to erect the facility's walls. In the afternoon, they would all walk the dirt road back to Nueva Vida, lunching on mangos picked from trees along the way (oftentimes the only meal that they ate until dinner), to start the second half of the work day at home. They would clean and do the wash, and sometimes take in other people's laundry for extra cash to make ends meet. They would cook for their children or husbands, and sometimes even prepare extra candies or pastries that they would sell later that afternoon in the market or

on the street. Some even set up *pulperías* (small stores typically run out of a person's home that sell tortillas, rice, beans, sodas, cigarettes, or other small items) or *comedores* (small, informal restaurants run out of one's kitchen) that they managed in between all of their other tasks.

While the socias learned to view the work they did every morning as their "sweat-equity" investment in the cooperative, giving them right to partial ownership, the equally taxing work every afternoon continued, for many, to be in the capacity of women and mothers. Surely, phrases like self-sacrifice, as they have been applied to the double burden of women in difficult economic times, do not even begin to capture the onerous undertakings of this group. They were the primary care givers, emotional supports, and financial providers of their households, but so too did they become the primary "hope-givers" of their families as well. They worked to build the cooperative, as they so frequently professed, in order to secure "a future for our children."

Although strategies for getting by certainly involved the tendency for women to confront hardship alone through self-sacrifice, they also developed other ways of decreasing the burden on themselves and others. Close working relationships within the cooperative quickly turned into friendships, and support for one another, driven by feelings of solidarity and mutual care, routinely extended beyond the cooperative. "When *compañeras* came home to their families having no food at all," recalls María, "we would share, even if we had just a small bite." Or when others were sick or overburdened, they lent a hand cooking, cleaning, or doing the wash. Some socias even

struck up creative business arrangements with one another, such as running *pulperías* or *comedores* jointly. Others came to arrangements where one prepared the food or candies at home and the other took them to the market to sell, and together they would share profits and risks. Indeed, "entrepreneurial," as Andrea observed, is a good description for the resourceful strategies of these women in hard times.

Of course, this is not to say that going to work in the cooperative every day was not a major source of friction within households. Socias regularly suffered criticism and ridicule from husbands or other family members who mocked their naiveté for not finding "realistic" sources of income or for believing that the gringos were in the project without profit to themselves. Lucía, likewise, remembers how skepticism sometimes crept in, as she occasionally thought to herself, "no one is going to start an NGO if they can't make money on it." In other cases, the disruption of domestic routines or the perceived reversal of gendered divisions of labor had the potential to escalate to domestic violence. Asking husbands to fill in by cooking, cleaning, or caring for children, even if they were otherwise unemployed, proved threatening to some men. In order to avoid that conflict, a common solution was for the socias to try to take on all the obligations themselves.

When such conflicts at home could not be resolved, participation in the project sometimes precipitated the breakup of marriages or other unions. Dora remembers that, in her case, her decision to leave her husband was a necessary sacrifice for the well-being of her children:

My husband said to me, 'Look, this is never going to amount to anything, you're crazy.' Some even left us because they said that we were working for nothing, that we should be trying to bring a some money into the household instead...They said, 'Where have you ever seen someone who goes to work without earning any money?' In my case he left me because I said that I'm going to see about a future for my children. You know, a man can be with one woman today, and tomorrow it might occur to him to leave. But as a mother, your children are always with you. So one has to look to the future, and this was what I was trying to create with the cooperative, a future for my children.

For others, the result of conflict was just the opposite. Domestic situations, including both economic and social pressures, forced them to drop out of the project and find temporary work elsewhere. Somewhat ironically, these were typically the women who already had some sewing experience before they entered into the cooperative because they had a much higher chance of finding work in one of the many maquiladoras around Ciudad Sandino. Those who did not have such resources to fall back on, on the other hand, had significantly fewer options and were actually more likely to stay with the cooperative. For this latter group, having support in their daily routines from parents, siblings, partners, friends, neighbors, children, or other members of their social networks was essential for them to continue. In the end, however, even with those relationships of support, it turned out to be an exceedingly stressful and unstable situation, and the many obstacles that the socias faced every day both inside and outside of the cooperative were so formidable and exhausting that, of the fifty women who attended the original meeting, there remained only twelve by the end of the year.

For these twelve individuals, however, this is certainly not to say that their collaboration in building the cooperative always went smoothly as well. Conflicts

emerged consistently over the quality or duration of people's contributions. The flexibility that socias generally accorded others to deal with unexpected issues that came up at home, such children getting sick, for others had the tendency to be abused. And though socias had in the early pre-cooperatives stages designated a *junta directiva* (executive board) for the purpose of coordinating the construction process, those members were also prone to occasionally overstep the roles circumscribed for them, confusing what were effectively bureaucratic roles with leadership roles. Oftentimes, these conflicts emerged along the already existing fault lines, such as educational background. One socia, for example, citing her high school education and her certificate in accounting, caused problems in the early stages of the cooperative by positioning herself as the overseer of the cooperative's budget and the "manager" of the other socias' schedules. Ines remembers, "She was always making sure that we didn't take too long for lunch, that we didn't leave early, and that we didn't waste resources like cement. We eventually taught her that she was not our boss, and we were not her employees. And although she is more educated than a lot of us, it took her a long time to understand that."

In the case of these socias, it is clear that dividing different aspects of social life into separate spheres, such as "the public sphere" or "the private/domestic sphere," functions more to obscure than elucidate an ethnographic understanding of how different kinds of economic and social activity are in fact intimately connected. Though the *casa-calle* distinction, as the Nicaraguan idiom for the public-domestic split goes (see Babb 1997), is historically relevant for charting the transformation of roles and the imagination

of space, for the women who started this cooperative, it is by no means the most important feature of their participation. Whether non-remunerative or remunerative work, domestic work or work at the cooperative, or work in paid positions or the informal economy, the exertions of these socias, as they consistently frame it, have taken place within the informing context of a commitment to family and children.[12]

Likewise, setting aside the political charge associated with inverted "spheres" of activity, the more ethnographically relevant point, I think, is that socias' involvement in the cooperative has involved the active adoption of political identities and the re-conceptualization of oneself as an agent of change. For some socias, of course, this was not a seismic shift in identity. Rosa, for example, already considered herself a political actor before coming to the cooperative and found the *lucha* (i.e. battle, struggle) of the cooperative to be continuous with the socias' past political experiences. She was 18 years old when she joined the Sandinista revolutionary army in the fight against the dictator Anastasio Somoza. During the 1980s she fought on the side of the Sandinistas in the Contra War and ascended to a leadership position in the anti-aircraft artillery brigade. Today, Rosa is studying English at the University of Central America while also working at the cooperative so that she may better communicate with clients. "The *lucha*," she says, "is of course a different one today, it is a different one every day. But I like to think that I exchanged my rifle for a sewing machine and a notebook."

Others, on the other hand, have marked the struggle of building the cooperative as the motivating force for imagining themselves as capable of affecting real change and for

thus taking on larger leadership roles in their families, neighborhoods, and communities. Through activities in the cooperative, that is to say, these women claimed "the right to be heard" by their families, by their communities, and by society at large (Poole 2007). They claimed space for articulating visions of justice and equality that challenge not only the validity of certain entrenched institutions in society but also a social status quo that, up to this point, they had learned to expect even within their own lives. This social, political, and economic work has often been at the tremendous sacrifice of their own well-being, but it is a sacrifice, socias argue, that is nonetheless justified by the love toward children and family that it demonstrates.

Motherwork is not simply a matter of that "cluster of activities," in Collins phrasing, that encompass women's unpaid and paid labor and the context of familial obligation toward which resources as subsequently directed. While such a view expresses many dimensions of the roles that these mothers often take upon themselves, where it fails is in its inability to capture the agency that these women also possess. As mothers, socias are also capable of subverting, modifying, or reframing the roles and responsibilities ascribed to them by choosing to dissolve marriages and unions, by disrupting domestic routines, and by politicizing those roles as agents of change in wider communities. In the context of The Fair Trade Zone, the meaning of motherwork, *la obra madre,* is as much about being the hope-givers of the family as the primary care givers, emotional supports, and financial providers. In other words, if we take the meaning of power to mean something like a reality-creating capacity—recognizing, as

Sapir put it, that "[c]reation is a bending of form to one's will, not a manufacture of will *ex nihilo*" (1924 [1949]:321)—being a hope-giver is every bit as much the role of a mother as a transformative capacity.

By May of 2001, the doors of the cooperative's new factory were opened to business. It was an inspiring moment for the socias, representing the fruition of all their sweat so far. In Zulema's words:

> You know what it means to start your own business from nothing, and you know that it is difficult and requires a lot of work. Now imagine that you are going to start your own business as a worker-owned cooperative of poor women, only one of whom has a high school education…women who up until now have been street vendors or have taken in washing, women who have always had to struggle, daily, to feed their children. This is the situation that we have lived through in this cooperative, and now we are the owners of an international export business.

Over the next six months, the socias received their first orders from Clean Clothes Organics. Emilia also made her first trip to Nicaragua, where she positioned herself in the production line with a translator from CSD, offering technical advice and encouragement, chatting with cooperative members, sharing lunch with them, and even visiting some of them in their homes in Nueva Vida. Doing so, says Emilia, was important not just because it established a business relationship with the socias but also in a personal and emotional capacity because, through these interactions, the project in which she had invested so much mental energy and in which she had risked so much capital for the first time became real. The socias that up until this point she had only heard about through CSD likewise became "less abstract figures as [she] was able to put faces to names."

Emilia also took this opportunity to teach the socias different technical operations on the sewing machine in preparation for a new line of Clean Clothes Organics t-shirts emblazoned with the English translation of the logo and slogan socias had debated for some time and finally chose for themselves: "Our Sweat, Our Sale, Our Success" in English, silhouetted with the outline of a woman triumphantly holding a sewing machine over her head.

Immediately after an initial trial of fifty t-shirts—which took the cooperative a full month to produce—Emilia gave the socias their "first real challenge," a sizable order of three thousand, yet this time with an important difference: a hard contractual deadline of three months. Emilia explained that this deadline was meant to give the socias a "learning experience...that production schedules are part of contracts, that they typically carry financial penalties, and that meeting the conditions of a contract is the key to success in the business world." Though socias certainly did learn from it, this venture was also wrought with more foul-ups and slowdowns than perhaps any of their other orders past or present.

None of the socias were yet proficient at cutting cloth, and so they were forced to hire on their first contracted laborer (referred to as a *mano de obra*), a young man from Ciudad Sandino who had worked for many years in a free trade zone (*zona franca*) run by the Levi-Strauss company. The socias were initially very uneasy about the decision to employ someone who had no stake in the cooperative, and although they eventually

became accustomed to the idea, the habits that he had developed working for a multi-national corporation proved very damaging, as he wasted mountains of expensive fabric.

Far behind schedule, out of cloth, and already running in the red, the socias petitioned CSD to set up a low-interest revolving loan program through the NGO so that they could purchase more cloth. While they also raised the possibility of hiring more contracted workers as a way to make up for lost time, CSD did not see a place for these laborers in the model of the cooperative and so they refused to lend money for those purposes. All twelve of the socias consequently worked the machines for as long as fifteen hours a day to complete the order, still paying themselves the basic daily wage of two dollars. In the final forty-eight hours before the deadline, they were joined by a handful of CSD community members, and the two groups worked continuously, without sleep, preparing the final stages of the order for shipment to Michigan. Despite those best efforts, they missed the deadline by nearly a week. When Emilia subsequently called to congratulate the socias on finishing their first major order as a cooperative, Roger regaled her with stories of foul-ups and slowdowns. As socias waited in anticipation of news from Emilia of the financial penalty for missing the deadline, meanwhile, finger-pointing commenced, provoked by their frustration with one another and by the damaging effects of the executive board's decision to hire the contracted worker. Upon hearing that the cooperative had already lost such a substantial sum of money on the venture, however, Emilia decided to forgive the fine that would inevitably

come out of socias already meager paycheck—provided, of course, that the socias "learned their lesson."

While there is frequent talk within the CSD community about how much the socias learned in these early stages of the cooperative, they seldom mention how much they learned themselves. Discussions of the cooperative and perceived organizational difficulties, for example, were frequently framed as "cultural difference," but always with a sincere and abundant reservoir of respect that they had for "the women," as CSD came to refer to the socias in shorthand. Not only were CSD community members impressed by the socias' work ethic, they were also moved by the socias' desire to create a better life for themselves and their families against so many odds, especially as they came to know them in more personal terms. CSD also began to see their organization's role more clearly as guiding the cooperative along the right course, what they saw to be the "correct" path toward running an economically independent, sustainable, and democratic enterprise. These *cheles* (light skinned persons), as the socias called them in reverse, therefore made a habit of working closely with the cooperative, not only by functioning as translators for their U.S.-based clients but also by stepping in occasionally for quality control checks or even helping to organize production.

Despite the disastrous third order, Emilia soon informed the socias that she was awarding them the contract for her company's line of "Organic Bliss" camisoles, a sleeveless, tight-fitting garment that requires a soft touch and high quality stitching. This was actually against the advice of her colleagues in U.S.-based sew shops, who doubted

that a small, inexperienced cooperative in Nicaragua would be able to pull it off, especially given their relatively low-tech equipment. Emila remembers rationalizing the decision, however, by repeating to herself, "If I am eventually going to make this cooperative my primary sew shop, then eventually they are going to have to learn how to produce more than just t-shirts." Her "second challenge" to the cooperative, then, which also represented a significant gamble for herself, was intended to push the limits of the socias' abilities and have them rise to the challenge. Two months later, when the finished products arrived in Michigan, Emilia remembers placing her hands on the first of the boxes, tentatively, her heart racing with apprehension. When she finally forced herself to open that box, she recalls, she cried. "To see the care and tenderness of each stitch, each fold," said Emilia, "I realized that the women had actually sewn beyond the capabilities of their own machines."

In the long view, learning the cooperative business was a series of hang-ups, miscommunications, conflicts, challenges, and pressures from the outside. From the perspective of CSD staff and Emilia, on the one hand, these frictions were learning experiences, empowering socias, as a kind of "rite of passage," as Emilia phrased it, to become cooperative members and business owners. For socias, on the other hand, the experiences were of course different, but no less transformational. Learning the business enabled some to begin to participate in different levels of local, regional, and sometimes state-level politics (e.g. I. Castro Apreza 2003:203-4, Tice 1995:107-8). Others acquired new decision-making, production, and distribution skills (e.g. I. Castro Apreza 2003:199,

Eber and Rosenbaum 1993:169, Grimes and Milgram 2000:5, Nash 1993:147, Tice 1995:110-11) or training in accounting and marketing (e.g. Y. Castro Apreza 2003:205). Still others developed more direct links to markets, including other businesses or suppliers (e.g. Bartra 2003, Eber 2000:53, Eber and Rosenbaum 1993, Ehlers 1993:190-1, Grimes 2000, Lynd 2000, Rosenbaum 2000:96-9, Rice 1995:112-13). Perhaps for still others, working in the cooperative with some success meant escaping confinement at home, forming relationships of solidarity, support, and friendship with others (e.g. I. Castro Apreza 2003:205). While socias experienced transformations in themselves, that is to say, ownership did not yet mean control over the cooperative's future.

They still very much relied on—and, indeed, yielded to—the input of both CSD an Emilia. On two separate occasions, in fact, with the cooperative's coffers empty and socias deadlocked in heated conflict, they turned to CSD, granting the NGO temporary powers to set things right. To the surprise of many, CSD discovered rampant theft and product loss occurring within the cooperative population as well as members of the cooperative leadership who were violating the organization's by-laws by bypassing established protocol in acting on behalf of the cooperative and even holding secret meetings to strategize against other voting blocs At one point, CSD identified a particularly divisive leader and, despite the protests of many, decided to eject her from the cooperative. Though that socia eventually rejoined, that series of events has been a source of a great deal of conflict with CSD and the socias who sided with the decision.

Social strains were of course coupled with organizational and technical complications, especially given the fact that, by the following year, the small cooperative had transformed into a full fledged sew shop. Newfound financial autonomy from considerable profit margins allowed the socias to employ sixty-five contracted laborers in the production of a full shipping container of twenty-six thousand cotton t-shirts for Clean Clothes. Newly hired laborers had to be trained from the beginning, however, and conflict often flared up between socias and contracted workers as male workers refused to take the women seriously as bosses and showed up to work at their own convenience. The socias also split those workers into two shifts for the first time, requiring that they take on managerial roles and learn not only about efficiency and streamlined production but also about delegating authority. Bottlenecks vexed different stages of the production line, and production therefore came to a standstill as the socias were still working out many of the finer points of simultaneously managing an entire workforce, dealing with payroll, and coordinating seven distinct production stages across multiple shifts. These personnel issues also fomented conflict among socias, as some had arranged for family members to be hired on for periods of time, then pled for those family members' retention when it came time to release those workers, claiming difficult economic times for their families.

In retrospect, many socias reflected on this moment as a turning point, for better or worse, in their project's history. On the one hand, the challenges and learning experiences aided in the emergence of strong leaders. On the other, conflicting ideas and

practices, especially with regard to the reliance on contracted labor to meet deadlines, foreshadowed tension and conflict with other members of the network. From CSD's perspective, particularly, the progressive abandonment of the idea of worker-ownership was a situation in which they increasingly saw it fit to intervene.

BECOMING A FREE TRADE ZONE

Until 2003, the Fair Trade Zone functioned mostly as a "cut and sew" shop, meaning that clients were required to provide materials while the cooperative assembled them into garments. For the cooperative, lacking the resources to purchase cloth when there were no pending orders made production irregular and wages unpredictable, as socias were really only able to work four to five months a year. Months at a time would pass without a substantial order, while at other points the cooperative had only a month to sew an entire container. The inflexibility of their general work schedule also meant that they frequently had to hire on, train, and then release waves of contracted workers. When the next major order came in, the process would start all over again.

This changed, however, in October of 2003 when CSD received a substantial grant from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) totaling almost two-hundred thousand dollars over two years for legal, technical, and administrative support in establishing the cooperative as the world's first worker-owned fair trade zone (*zona franca*). Part of the financial package enabled CSD to increase the size of its revolving loan system so that the cooperative could instead function as a "full service shop" in

which they bought their own materials and charged clients for the package. This

arrangement was preferable not only for clients but also for the socias, who enjoyed a

great deal more control over their production schedule.

The other part of the financial package from the IDB grant enabled the

cooperative to work toward free trade zone certification through Nicaraguan customs.

This certification, usually offered to much larger companies such as Nike or Levi-Strauss,

gave the cooperative the same tax-free, tariff-free incentives and preferred rates on

utilities that were enjoyed by these companies. The legal and operational requirements

for gaining this status, however, were many and even included the requirement that CSD

invent a legally recognized shell corporation for the cooperative. When they were finally

met in October 2004, however, the cooperative became the first worker-owned free trade

zone in the world.

CSD actually arrived at the idea that the cooperative become a *zona franca*, wrote

the grant, and proceeded to implement it without much discussion with cooperative

members. Immediately, the benefits were clear to the socias. Lower tax overhead

allowed the cooperative to hire on even more waged workers for permanent or semi-

permanent positions. Additionally, because the cooperative now had a constant supply of

fabric, they were no longer forced to release those in whom they had invested time and

effort training with the completion of each order. There were also downsides, however.

First, there was a marked increase in bureaucracy—for example, the Zona Franca

Commission and Nicaraguan customs required extensive documentation of everything

and everybody that entered or exited the cooperative grounds. Second, socias have also felt free trade zone status to be an awkward assignment for their cooperative, one that often groups them with a class of rich businessmen. Ines comments, the downside is palpable because they oftentimes are not perceived by merchants or other groups to be poor women in need of a discount:

> Now we enter the market as a free trade zone, now they think that we are a zone that has money…They think 'free trade zone' and they think we are millionaires. And we are certainly not millionaires. We are always poor, and we just want to move forward.

Despite these things, however, free trade zone status has generally been considered a boon to the cooperative as well as for the Ciudad Sandino community, enabling the cooperative to enjoy lower overhead costs for exporting and to create more jobs for heads of household.

Apart from those practical considerations, becoming the first free trade zone in the world to be operated by its workers heralded a new era in prestige and notoriety, and thus public relations and advertising, for the cooperative. Within the first two years, in fact, members of the cooperative's executive board appeared on national television three times, articles about the cooperative appeared in two national newspapers, *La Prensa* and *El Nuevo Diario*, and in 2006 CNN International even produced a segment on the cooperative, framing the Fair Trade Zone as a new moment in worker's rights.

About the same point in time, The Fair Trade Zone began to be visited by delegations from the United States, Canada and Europe, typically hosted by one of Nicaragua's many North American-based NGOs, who were curious to hear the

cooperative's unique history. Sales for Fair Trade Zone-produced garments spiked as a

consequence, and Emilia encouraged the socias to continue telling their story and to

designate a member as head of public relations. By the next year, The Fair Trade Zone

was visited by delegations at least once or twice per week. As Jamileth, who was in

charge of these meetings for about a year, noted:

> I was telling that story about the cooperative so many times a week that I actually
> became sick of hearing myself talk about it. And always the same questions from
> people: What was the hurricane like? What was being poor like? How has your
> life changed because of the cooperative? At first I didn't know how to answer
> those questions. How do you describe to someone what it's like not having
> enough food, or hearing your children cry from hunger? How do you describe
> what it's like being sick, or losing your house? I mean, they're not going to ever
> understand anyways, so what's the point.

She later continued:

> You know, most of us don't want to talk about the hurricane any more. Those
> were tough, painful times, and sometimes it's painful to talk about. But, you
> know, we don't know a lot about how the market moves up there in the United
> States, but we have learned that some people want to see how a factory works—
> we see it every day, but they don't see it very much up there—and they also want
> to hear those stories because it makes them feel better about themselves and their
> support for the cooperative. We want them to support us, but sometimes we get
> fed up with the stories, because, maybe they don't know it, but we've moved on.

Though the cooperative's history has been one in which, as socias often say,

"everyone has their grain of sand"—meaning, that its building and its success very much

reflects the contributions of a great number of people—becoming the world's first

worker-owned free trade zone also marked the emergence of the cooperative as a

spectacle of sorts, as a site for "industrial tourism," to coin a phrase, in which tourists are

able to witness first hand the production end of familiar products. This, too, did not come

without significant cost to socias. In Jacinta's case, her own story about the Hurricane Mitch, finding the cooperative, and becoming the world's first worker-owned free trade zone, after so many retellings, became unfamiliar to her own ears.

With this disjuncture between representation and reality in mind, in 2007 I returned to Nicaragua, having translated sections of advertising from CSD's newsletters and Clean Clothes advertising—if their own words might sometimes seem alien to them, then what about those written by others? Little did I know that I would find myself in the middle of a heated debate, part of which was about the discrepancies between the rhetoric of partnership and fair trade, on the one hand, and the reality of it all on the other. Not wishing to fan any flames, I did not find out what socias thought of the particular content of their advertising. But, as I recount in Chapter IV, I did bear witness to a conflict between the socias, CSD, and Clean Clothes that cast into full view the structures of inequality and a basic imbalance of power.

THE LOGIC OF SWEAT

Beginning, perhaps with Edward Sapir's observations on linguistic relativity and culminating as a more or less comprehensive method with Geertzian "interpretive anthropology," language has occupied a privileged position in the understanding of social reality. Although its role in culture has been taken to pieces and reassembled, relabeled, and revamped in different ways at different times, the core, methodological principle has

remained more or less constant: the power of language lies not in the expanse of its abstractions but in the delicacy of its distinctions.

However indispensable a resource language has been for cultural analysis, it is also true that anthropologists have not been immune to an indelicate view, tending to privilege the fully formed word over the unvoiced, perhaps nearly invisible gesture (Sanjak 1990, Clifford 1986).[13] The consequences of this logocentrism have been many. Foremost among them, perhaps, is the failure to recognize the ontological gap that exists between words and and social processes, a gap, moreover, that cannot always be bridged within language itself. That is, people have experiences that they do not, or perhaps cannot, articulate perfectly in words. In the case of The Fair Trade Zone and the "meaning" of socias' labor in the cooperative as poor and working class mothers, it is clear that no single conversation, no single narrative, and, certainly, no single word or bit of language alone can establish the full context of their actions, thoughts, emotions, memories, and experiences. The reason for this is that, for the socias themselves, let alone for the recording practices of any ethnographer, so much remains beyond expressibility in words (c.f. Ardener 1989:180).[14]

For the socias of The Fair Trade Zone, sweat has come to be a powerful and polysemous metaphor, but in many ways the exegesis of the category brings us into the not-yet-coded space of the experience of struggle: sensory knowledge, memory, values, emotions, motives, as well as wordless experience (Okely 1994). In perhaps the most literal of senses, sweat references a struggle that has been experienced in and enacted

through socias' own bodies and minds in the task of constructing the cooperative from the ground up. Yet, as socias point out, sweat is not only about physical exertion. Sweat also conjures memories of hardship, conflict, and deprivation experienced in their lives at home on account of their choice to pursue activities in the cooperative. In this more metaphorical sense, sweat is also an emotional and psychological state of being, deeply imbricated with concepts such as *trabajo digno* (dignified work) and *la obra madre* (motherwork). And it is not merely a matter of "making ends meet," as is common parlance in academic discussions of work, but also the work to affect transformation in their own lives and in the lives of loved ones and future generations.

Marx glosses these various dimensions of labor with the term "concrete labor," to be contrasted with abstract labor, which is the product of the social process of commoditization in capitalism. Taking that distinction as a starting point, an ethnographic understanding of labor has the advantage of drawing out the finer distinctions within the category of concrete labor as well as in its complicated interplay with the world of commodities. Once we break free of the idea that there exist only one or two forms of value—i.e. exchange value (the money one can get for laboring) and use value (the utility of what ultimately comes out of the activity of laboring)—it becomes clear that there always exists a multiplicity of different kinds of values, nested within one another, oftentimes in relationships of constant tension and contradiction. From a feeling of ownership that derives from hard work, to the ability to make ends meet for oneself and one's family, to the personal satisfaction of dignified work, to the social prestige of

having a respectable job, to the ability to provide hope and security for the future, these values are not one half of a dichotomy along with the exchange value of labor. Rather, the many values of concrete labor and abstract or commodified labor exist simultaneously with one another, and their specific interplay is really an empirical question that cannot be determined *a priori*.

Though at first glance, the concept of sweat might appear to be a straightforward metaphor for shared experience—the empathic understanding and fellow-feeling of the socias—and thus the main criterion for membership in the cooperative, deriving from the collective nature of their struggle, really, sweat is a matter of transformation. On the one hand, this transformation is the result of physical labor on the land and later in the factory to make the cooperative a reality. Yet, socias frequently point out, it is also the result of another kind of struggle, psychological, emotional, and interpersonal both at home after a day's work and within the cooperative with one another. Dora describes the transformations that they have consequently experienced in themselves:

> At first we thought all that talk about the cooperative, the training sessions and things, were just words [*palabrería*]. It was very frustrating because we would come to listen and say 'Whatever everyone else thinks is fine.' This has changed. Through our sweat, the struggle we have gone through as poor women, at our meetings today the people who were the weakest are now the strongest. We all talk and participate, and we make ourselves heard, even if some people don't want to listen.

They came together as a group of strangers with different political ideologies, educational backgrounds, family situations, and work experiences. Though camaraderie, solidarity, and perhaps, to some extent, shared consciousness have been real sentiments that socias

have felt for one another, allowing them at times to identify as a group based on the similarity of their goals, socioeconomic positions, and feelings of responsibility to children and family, this image of socias should by no means be taken at face value. Beyond that image, in fact, have been power grabs, screaming matches, and hurt feelings —frictions that I further detail in Chapter IV. Competing interests, undemocratic decision-making practices, unequal power based on inequalities of education and status, divergent memories of the past, disparate perspectives on the present, and, ultimately different experiences in the struggle of building and sustaining the cooperative—filtered as they always are through the idiosyncrasies of social position, modes of participation, and even personality—have at the same time undermined those feelings of camaraderie, solidarity, and even the sense of a shared goal.

Social solidarity does not emerge organically from "shared experience," and not all forms of social solidarity give birth to lasting social communities. What may begin as the interpenetration of lives in shared struggle may of course have the potential to foster more extensive feelings, stronger bonds, and mutual responsibilities, but the interrelationship of individuals should not be conflated with the social process through which relations of moral or political obligation are forged. To assume that solidarity emerges from shared experience—being in the same place at the same time, to put it plainly—is to ignore that collective experience of struggle may also be an experience of struggle within the group, provoked by the persistence of inequality, questions about who "counts" as a member of the group, what is considered consistent action within the

relations of solidarity, and who is granted the epistemic privilege of speaking on behalf of the group. Put slightly differently, it is important to distinguish between shared experience and intersubjectivity. The term intersubjectivity, as Jackson writes, "embraces centripetal and centrifugal forces, and constructive and destructive extremes without prejudice" (Jackson 1998:4). Intersubjectivity is the precondition for shared experience, which requires that people actively interpret and construct their experiences as "shared" as well as to discursively construct a "we" in place of the "I" (Lutz 1998:86-98).

Sweat is about intersubjectivity, the mutual entanglement of socias of The Fair Trade Zone with one another. It is about collective struggle, understood in terms of the complications and contradictions of that entanglement, for better or worse, not the naïve perception that they have always been united by a common cause. And sweat is as much about feelings of solidarity and camaraderie and a common reservoir of memories—the taste of mangos picked form the trees after a day of work without food or water, the ache of repetitive, heavy lifting, and the sensation of dust and dirt sticking to sweaty skin—as feelings of enmity, the perception that memories and experiences are divergent, and the conviction that one must "sweat" to overcome that atomism.

COMMODIFYING SWEAT

At the same time, it would be naïve to suggest that individuals, whose labor is so concretely multifaceted in its social, cultural, emotional, personal, and interpersonal content, somehow define their own worlds, absent of the intrusive effects of other

people's projects. Indeed, the case of The Fair Trade Zone shows that any discussion of labor—in this case, "sweat"—would be woefully incomplete without also noting that the participation of socias in this project has been conditioned by a model of cooperativism taken from the Mondragón system in Spain, interpreted within the historical and legalcontext of cooperatives in Nicaragua, refracted through the sustainable development and micro-enterprise models of CSD and other NGOs, and articulated within the ethical and fair trade business models of Clean Clothes Organics. That is, socias have not done their labor in some empty space in which they are free to construct what they want, but have had that labor contextualized, limited, and defined for them by contingencies of land and capital, ideologies of membership and exchange that are not their own, and a market ideology that they did not invent. It is the "sweat equity" of socias' labor, the idea that labor can be quantified, made commensurable with other kinds of labor, and exchanged, in other words, that forms the basis of a right to membership, rather than the manifold and multi-dimensional experience of "sweat."

In capitalism, commodification is often linked with the concept of alienation, the separation of the product of labor from the laborer herself that occurs when the product of labor, once purchased, becomes the property of the capitalist. Yet, as Marx points out, that alienation is also experienced in the activity of labor itself:

> The estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production —within the producing activity itself....The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. [1988:73-4]

From the perspective of the laborer, that is, alienation is witnessed in "the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being" (Marx 1988:74). The individual comes to understand the activity of labor as producing *for* and *as* capital, laboring not for and not as his or her self, but rather in such a way that the activity itself is conceptualized as belonging to another.

Whether or not alienation is experienced in all productive spheres in capitalism is a matter of debate, but, to be sure, the socias of The Fair Trade Zone experience some degree of alienation as they occasionally come to understand their sweat not in its broadest social significance, but rather in terms of one dimension of that activity, congealed labor-time. For the original members of The Fair Trade Zone, formal membership was predicated not on the total social process of sweat that they had come to define for themselves, but rather than a labor theory of value. In a labor theory of value, the idea of labor-time (i.e. the amount of human productive ability, measured in terms of time) is understood as the common substance of commodities (which is in contrast to exchange theory, wherein the value of a commodity is whatever someone will pay for it).[15] From the view of the socias, thus, the "buy-in" system essentially collapsed the full content of labor onto a single dimension, pegging the total contribution of labor time for membership (called "sweat equity") at 640 hours.

Both the labor theory of value and the exchange theory of value are reductionist in the sense that they privilege one form of value over the others. Moreover, defining "economic value" apart from social values, these theories are also economistic,

"[claiming] precisely to reduce all the non-economic instances of the social structure purely and simply to reflections, transpositions, or phenomena of the economic base" (Balibar and Althusser 1970:306). Economism excises the actual activity of labor from its political, cultural, and social context, reducing it to a restricted, even impoverished, subset. This is not to say, however, that economism is a mere epistemic error. Whether it is kinship or politics or the economy, reductionism goes hand in hand with the idea of a social "system," functioning ideologically to emphasize certain relevant aspects of social life while de-emphasizing others.[16] Those systems in turn inform a variety of practices, making commodification a real social process that acts upon the entire experience of labor, having real social and material effects.

What the ethnographic case of The Fair Trade Zone demonstrates is that the labor value and, by extension, exchange value of socias' labor exists alongside, if in tension with, the many socially, culturally, and politically defined values encoded in the concepts of dignified work, motherwork, and sweat. Undergoing a process of commodification, that labor is certainly homogenized, abstracted into something that resembles little of the original activity and its many physical, psychological, emotional, and social facets—640 hours or 320 dollars. But that does not mean that the other values disappear. Rather, as the social convention of measuring labor in terms of hours or the money someone else is willing to part with imposes itself upon their very bodies and minds, so too do the socias resist that reduction and define in their own terms the values of sweat.

By bracketing the pervasive idea of exchange value and amplifying the significance of the heretofore suppressed values of labor, the ethnographic approach to labor has the potential to countermand the estranging effects that the language of labor has in converting labor in its social and cultural significance to an insipid, mechanical activity that people do because they are part of an "economic system."[17] By shifting the frame away from well-rehearsed discourses of labor in economic thought and emphasizing instead other forms of knowledge about labor, including the immediate embodied, emotional, psychological, and physical experience, the ethnography of labor may understand labor "in the flesh," as Ines puts it. In the case of the poor and working class women of The Fair Trade Zone, this expanded understanding of labor is crucial for coming to terms with the idea that laborers are not rationally self-interested automatons. They draw on and creatively manipulate ideas about how much inequality should be tolerated, who one should and should not do business with, what should not be commodified, who should work and who is entitled to be supported by others, and what people's obligations to future generations are. They also draw on broader social imaginaries that inform the relationship between the laborer and other people, the environment, or the cosmos. As June Nash demonstrates in the case of Bolivian tin miners, the relationship between workers and the earth, which is typically assumed to be a subject-object relation, may also be thought of as a subject-subject relation, a vital and reciprocal relationship felt to exist between human subjects and the earth. As Nash writes, "Miners talk of the mine as though it were a living organism" (1979:ix). Their

relationship, in turn is said to be cannibalistic: "We eat the mines and the mines eat us. For that reason, we have to give these rituals to the spirit of the hills so that he will continue to reveal the veins of metal to us and so that we can live" (ibid).

In The Fair Trade Zone, I have drawn out only three of these ideas—the idea of dignified work (What basic conditions do people deserve in their work?), the idea of motherwork (What responsibilities do mothers have to children and their futures?), and the idea of sweat (What are the criteria for ownership or membership?). It is eminently clear that these ideas influence actions. While the pursuit of self-interest is common enough in economic activities, there is no reason for accepting on faith the dogma that this is the only motivation involved. Instead, the ethnography of labor can make the nature of economic motivations into an empirical question.

DIGNIFIED WORK, NOT FAIR TRADE

Is Fair Trade Dignified Work? Another way of asking this question is, does fair trade really make a difference, not only in the economic terms of livelihood for small producers and their ability to get by in tough economic times, but also in terms of the total experience of their work and their ability to achieve the psychological, emotional, ethical, and social "ends" that labor is intended to achieve? In the case of The Fair Trade Zone, there is, of course, no single, straightforward way of answering this question, given the diversity of socias' perspectives on, and experiences of, what counts as "dignified" work and what does not. Nevertheless, what can be said is that socias' perceptions of fair

trade's ability to provide that dignified work have been characterized by a great deal of ambivalence—an ambivalence, it is important to note, that belies what is oftentimes a totalizing and romanticizing image of fair trade work, broadcast in CSD newsletters and public presentations, in Clean Clothes' advertisements for Fair Trade Zone-produced garments, and indeed in the public perception of fair trade as a radical alternative to conventional trade.

On the one hand, there should be no doubt that being the owners of the first worker-owned free trade zone in the world has had its benefits: the pay, however variable, is usually more than double that offered in other free trade zones; socias enjoy stable employment, knowing that they will not be fired at a whim; they work without chauvinistic, male bosses, who are at best condescending and at worst abusive to employees. Indeed, they work without bosses entirely, and thus go to work with the knowledge that they will reap at least a portion of the benefits of their own labor and that the success of the business is in fact their own success. In this sense, work in the cooperative is "dignified" work, but it is also not something that has been somehow gifted to them by virtue of their participation in fair trade. It is something that they have had to carve out for themselves by means of their sweat. As Maria remembers, the achievement of that aspect of trabajo digno is appreciable, as their work fulfills the ends they sought for it: "We wanted to be able to send our kids to school, and we wanted meaningful work for ourselves. And because of the cooperative, because we have struggled on our own behalf to create it, we have been able to do those things." For Ines,

likewise, the dignity of their work in the cooperative is measured by their ability to not just meet the needs of children and family, but also to "provide a future for them" and to act as an example of virtue in their lives. Connecting her work before the cooperative to her mother's before her, Ines remembers:

> Before I was a socia, I took in washing and ironing to make ends meet, but sometimes I didn't even have soap to wash the clothes and my children would cry from hunger. I am still a woman of scarce economic resources, but the difference is that, because of what we have accomplished, now my children eat, go to school, and my daughter who is only eleven will have her sixth grade graduation....When I told my mother about my work in the cooperative, she cried because she was so happy comparing her life with my life now. She told me that in life it's not important what we have, but rather who we are. I have faith in the future because I have experienced in the flesh all the deprivations that one can have in life, and I want my children and the children of women like me to become people who will not just work for their own food. I want them also to do good by themselves, by their children, by their children's future, and by the world.

Surely, by virtue of the conditions of their work, the resources that work has provided to them, and the ability of those socias to put those resources to use in creating a better life for themselves and others outside of the cooperative, Fair Trade Zone work qualifies as "dignified" work. To put it differently, the market access, capital, labor standards, and price premiums are not valued in and of themselves, but rather as enabling access to socias' own socially, culturally, and historically mediated social goods.

That being said, it is perhaps ironic that many of the conditions of their work that have frustrated socias, that have made them doubt their ownership of the cooperative, and that have in fact alienated many of them from their work can in many ways be traced back to a comercio justo (fair trade) organization of trade and labor. In a group interview in 2008, one socia made the point that, although there have been many problems,

conflicts, disagreements, and hurt feelings socias have experienced from within their own group, the most negative aspects have by in large derived from the shortfalls of a fair trade organization of trade and labor. Listed among them were an unbalanced distribution of profits (i.e. Clean Clothes, socias had recently found out, makes a profit on Fair Trade Zone garments ten times that which socias themselves make); the lack of transparency up the commodity chain (i.e. while the socias feel that they might be "the most famous poor people in the world," on the whole they have little knowledge about what goes on in the marketing and distribution of their goods, let alone consumption); and, perhaps more than anything else, the frequent intervention of CSD and Clean Clothes in the operations of the business (i.e. although the cooperative was conceptualized and designed by virtue of CSD's and Clean Clothes' efforts and capital, from the perspectives of socias, the two organizations marginalize or flat out fail to recognize the contributions of the socias themselves toward realizing the project, the socias' ownership of the cooperative, and thus grant them little autonomy). Although, as I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, there exists a conceptual difference for socias between comercio justo and trabajo digno, this is not to say that they reference autonomous separate spheres of activity. While they have created and sustained a space for themselves to have dignified work, that experience of work is often trespassed upon by these other members of the Fair Trade Zone network.

Socias, of course, responded in kind, eventually shaping the "buy-in" model for membership into the cooperative in their own terms, something they referred to as "sweat

equity." While sweat equity similarly referred to each socia's right to membership in the

cooperative, it also marks a key difference in the process of determining membership that

reflects, one could argue, their own experiences of struggle in becoming members. While

the consequences of socias' practices of granting membership based on the concept of

"sweat equity" are part of a larger series of events that I cover in Chapter IV, it is perhaps

true that their sweat to build the cooperative did not simply transform the socias

themselves and their economic circumstances. The changes that they affected in their

own lives also came to bear on their relationships with others. No small part of that

dimension of their sweat has resulted in socias coming to express more forcefully their

own positions, opinions, ideas, and senses of ownership and individuality in their

relationships with CSD and Clean Clothes Organics, for whom the idea of a "population"

could hardly be sustained.

NOTES

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[8] As William Sewell (1980) points out in his study of French labor history, the term "labor" is actually a term that is deeply rooted in the culture and its meaning has changed over time and in specific relation to political and social changes. Yet, in its wide application to economic activities the world over, it appears transhistorical, a monad possessed of conceptual unity and continuity through time and space.

[9] In popular use today, *capitalismo salvaje* is a term that most closely aligns with the English term "corporatisim," rather than "neoliberalism." It is not a statement about the proper relationship between the state, the economy, and society, but rather a kind of "crony capitalism" that generates massive wealth for corporations, typically multinationals, who extract that wealth from the country, rather than reinvesting in infrastructure or wages (Dávila 2007).

[10] Habermas' book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society,* has been the basis of many ideas about the public sphere. In Habermas' view the "public sphere" (*Öffentlichkeit*) implies a spatial concept, an arena within which meanings are articulated, distributed, and negotiated. Distinct from the state as well as the official economy, Nancy Fraser adds that it is a "site for the production and circulation of discourses...it is not an arena of market relations but rather one of discursive relations, a theater for debating and deliberating rather than for buying and selling" (Fraser 1990:57). Thus, the public sphere mediates between a multiplicity of "private spheres," and although this appears democratic in its construction of a universal space for debate (Taylor 2004), the public sphere is also a male bourgeois sphere, which can also be hegemonic in its discrimination against women, lower social strata of society, and their issues, precisely because they are not be rhetorically constructed as matters of "common concern" (Fraser 1990; Hauser 1998).

[11] One famous Managua mural illustrates, the ideas of "women" and "fertility" were given a new revolutionary meaning during this time: "Bendita la panza que parió un Sandinista" (Holy the womb that gave birth to a Sandinista).

[12] The concept of "the informal economy" is a singularly problematic concept that refers to certain kinds of economic activity that are "unregulated by the institutions of society, in a legal and social environment in which similar activities in which similar activities are regulated" (Portes & Haller 2005). Of course, informal economies are, in fact, regulated by institutions, just not the "formal" economic institutions that one would use, for example, to create GDP indexes. The distinction between formal/informal economies is problematic for many of the same reasons that public and private/domestic spheres are: it belies a ideological bias that undervalues the latter, suggests a normative model for what "proper" economic activity is, and excludes domestic work and informal economic work from the category of "real work."

[13] Likewise, the recognition that there is no *langue* for culture that is independent of practice came slowly, but when it did eventually come, it inspired a number of attempts to deconstruct the idea of a cultural system, to address the shortfalls of deploying such a limited view of language as a window on culture, and thus to unify subjectivity, action, and structure: Marshall Sahlins' (1981) historical anthropology, Erving Goffman's (1959, 1967) "interactionism," Anthony Giddens' (1979) "structuration," and Pierre Bourdieu's (1978) "practice" are but a few of those attempts.

[14] Of course, I do not mean to reiterate the British empiricist argument (after Locke, Hume, and William James) that suggests that all knowledge must ultimately be traced back to sense data. This position has implied the very lonely idea that other people are ultimately unknowable and has failed to recognize the way in which the senses are themselves mediated, interpreted, conceptualized, and translated via communication (Dewey 1958:11, Jackson 1996:24). While it is true that the nature of experience is that we can each experience only our own life, never the lived experience of someone else, as Victor Turner and Edward Bruner (1986) recommend in their project, the anthropology of experience, this should not prevent the anthropologist from acknowledging the fact that the lived experience of others may still exist (Hastrup 1994).

[15] According to the labor theory of value, if it takes a person an average of one day to make a coat and one day to make a glove, all other things are taken to be equal and the exchange of one for the other will be an equal exchange with the common reference being socially necessary labor time. The coat and the glove can be exchange values because they each have a value. As a theory of value, labor-time is thus a general and average way of accounting for the amount of human productive ability or labor went into the creation of a commodity.

[16] Marx provides an analog to the process of reduction that the socias experience in his rendition of the political economist's favorite example, Robinson Crusoe. Having salvaged ink and a ledger from the ship, that is, like a "true Briton" Crusoe proceeds to record the labor-time of his many activities on the island, thus abstracting them from their original contexts and putting them in arbitrary relation of equivalence with one another. Hunting, fishing, and tool-making are of course very different skill sets and activities from the perspective of the laborer, as they may also fill different needs. Nevertheless, when the time that each activity required is observed and put into relation with other activities of various duration, those activities may then be seen in terms of their various expenditures of labor-time. This, as Marx notes, is by no means a "natural" or even logical thing to do. In fact, it the very strange and reductive activity of creating a false distinction between things called "labor," on the one hand, and other social or personal activities, such as praying, on the other.

[17] It is important to note that scholars, too, often participate in reduction of labor by utilizing the language of "labor." The language of labor is so pervasive, in fact, that family labor, casual labor, seasonal labor, wage labor, bonded labor, manual labor, immaterial labor, sweatshop labor, and even child labor and forced labor, despite their manifold differences, may often appear in some way to be fundamentally the same. The psychological, emotional, or physical experiences of labor appear nowhere in the mix, and neither do the specific social, cultural and historical contexts.

CHAPTER IV

FAIR / COMPETITION

AND THE FRICTION OF FAIR TRADE

In recent years there has developed considerable excitement among intellectuals around the world that a growing transnational civil society will become a wellspring for democratic and emancipatory politics (e.g. Falk 1999, Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004). This rather optimistic perspective on globalization has been grounded in the supposition that, with the alleged weakening of state structures, some of the repressive forces of official political culture have subsided as well. New possibilities for forging transnational connections will serve as lightning rods for the rapid flow of new and empowering ideas and deeper collaborations around globally shared interests—an outlook that Raymond Williams (1989) has called "the resource of hope."

For social researchers, transnational civil society has sparked interest in the many ways in which grassroots groups from many different nation-states are, as June Nash puts it, "[finding] common cause in promoting principles of a global nature—such as human rights, the environment, and indigenous autonomy," in the process sowing the seeds for intensely diverse, even "hybrid" social forms (2004:438). Under the heading of "transnational networks," for example, scholars have reported on interdisciplinary partnerships between scientists and experts that Haas (1992) calls "knowledge-based" or

"epistemic communities"; cross-border partnerships between activists with shared principles, ideas, and values that Keck and Sikkink (1998) call "transnational advocacy networks"; cross-ideological partnerships between activists challenging corporate globalization (Juris 2008); and even "meshworks" of partnerships in the collective pursuit of indigenous autonomy and environmental justice (Escobar 2003, 2008). In much the same vein, the fair trade movement has since the 1960s attempted to support disadvantaged Third World producers by securing for them a "fair price" in the marketplace. Relying on existing market structures rather than opposing them, fair trade has claimed to develop transnational networks of allegedly equitable, democratic, and participatory "partnerships," as the particular fair trade business relationships between producers and distributors are called, spanning North America, Europe, and the global South.

Though ethnographic accounts of such networks are necessarily riven with the complexities of power, conflict, and competition over political ideas, access, supporters and resources—a realization that implies that, as Juris writes, "networks are fluid processes, not rigid structures" (2008:5)—the relatively neat and unalloyed terms involved in the theorization of these particular forms of social relations, by contrast, have tended to miss some of the darker, knottier roots. When it comes to discussions of the grassroots, in particular, ready-made concepts like partnership continue to function as the theoretical connective tissue for a range of possible relationships that actors may have. Though such networks may frequently appear from the outside as cohesive units, drawn

together by the centripetal forces of community, common identity, or common goals, it remains important, as Fox (2000) and others have cautioned, not to take these images at face value but rather to pay close attention to the inequalities that persist, including the extent to which actors may or may not actually engage in mutual support and joint action. Or as Homi Bhabha puts it, hybridity is not just a "third term that resolves the tension between two [others]" (1994:113). To put that concept into play without also "[turning] the gaze back upon the eye of power" (1994:112) is to orphan the form from the relations that gave it birth.

Arjun Appadurai (2000) provides an example of the general tendency to overlook the infra-politics of the grassroots in his argument for "grassroots globalization," a term that does not differentiate between the activities of activist organizations, indigenous groups, or even non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Based on the presupposition that grassroots actors naturally gravitate toward partnerships with one another because, as a whole, they "proceed independently from the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system" (2000:4), Appadurai makes the surprising assertion that, unlike corporations, grassroots actors "do not need to compete with each other" (2000:17). Indeed, in Appadurai's rendition it appears as if the only antagonism in the world were between the hegemony of the media, corporate capital and its international affiliates and guarantors, on the one hand, and the grassroots, on the other. Specific explications of power, conflict, and competition, apart from those that operate "from above" and "from below," seldom appear.

When a transnational network is oriented along the axis of the North-South, such as in the case of fair trade, the peculiar optic of the local-global does little to illuminate how such networks *work* and much less, still, how they often fall apart (Edelman 2005). In the case of fair trade, it is especially important to push through this received image of partnership between First World consumers, distributors, and disadvantaged Third World producers and to understand the specific power dynamics and inequalities attendant to fair trade's simultaneous operation as a strategy of development, a market-based charitable humanitarianism, and an advertising scheme. As I noted in Chapter III, a good starting point is to seek understanding of how producers conceptualize the fair trade movement and how they may or may not experience different kinds of fairness in their lives and work. Yet, it is also important to take a critical eye to the relationships between actors in a fair trade network, because despite its projected image, these might not be partnerships at all (Fridell 2006).

Drawing on the ethnographic case study of The Fair Trade Zone, a fair trade, industrial sewing cooperative in Nicaragua that claims the distinction of being the world's first worker-owned free trade zone (*zona franca*), my goal in this chapter is to provide a "de-centered" (Holland et al 2008) view of the particular transnational network that surrounds it. Instead of assuming coherence, partnership, or even a common cause, I show how the relationships among the three main groups—a North Carolina, faith-based development NGO called the Center for Sustainable Development (CSD), a Michigan-based fair trade retailer called Clean Clothes Organics, and the twelve cooperative

members (socias) who became the founding members of the fair trade zone sewing cooperative—are riven with miscommunication, asymmetrical power, and ideological contention and competition in addition to collaboration.

Many scholars have detailed how commonalities work as centripetal forces for enabling disparate groups to come together for some cause or concern. McCarthy and Zald (1997), for example, show that the coincidence of economic interest may provide the basis for collective action. Touraine (1988) and others (Melucci 1989, Laclau and Mouffe 1985) have demonstrated the unifying power of identity and shared domains of meaning in the recognition of common objectives. And Snow and Benford (1998) have shown how populations need to be "aligned" into collective action through the construction of common "frames." Few scholars, however, have chosen to focus on the differences and forms of power that operate within a single mobilization. Fewer have shed light on the "social process" (Harvey 1996:78) that create discontinuities and inequalities of meaning and power within those mobilizations. And still fewer have investigated in any non-teleological way how those processes may either enable or disable actors to work together with or without common cause. The general approach that I instead employ in this chapter is well summarized by Anna Tsing's concept of "friction," which points to the "zones of awkward engagement" (2005:x) between actors of different backgrounds, agendas, and ideologies and suggests that imperfect interactions often produce unpredictable outcomes, sometimes collaboration, sometimes devastation. Perfect complementarity and commonality alone never enable connection. Instead, as

Tsing writes, for better or worse, "Differences invigorate social mobilizations" (2005:245).

In sharp contrast to the image of the "three-legged stool," the actors of The Fair Trade Zone network have been drawn into a common project even while they maintained separate agendas, ideologies, strategies, and goals. This is not to say, however, that that collaboration has been sustainable. Within the broadly defined goal of bringing into focus the many centrifugal forces at work within this network, the goal of this chapter is to recount a story of conflict between CSD and Clean Clothes, on the one hand, and socias, on the other, that first emerged in 2007 and 2008 and has since, for all intents and purposes, resulted in the dissolution of the network. The story, like the relationships that it describes, is riven with the complexities of conflict, miscommunication, inequality, compromise, and asymmetrical power. As it turns out, against Appadurai's (2000) assertion, grassroots actors do compete with one another: they compete for resources, for supports and political access, and for sway in the ideological and discursive debates in which they are constantly embroiled. And much like the marketplace, this competition is not always productive. In many cases it is wholly unproductive, a fact that, in the case of The Fair Trade Zone, casts into full view Edelman's point that grassroots networks are in fact "quite fragile and ephemeral" (2005:29).

TWO ROADS

> *Quien da pan a perro ajeno, pierde el pan y pierde el perro.*
> He who gives bread to another's dog, loses the bread and loses the dog.
> — Zulema

Things began to fall apart in The Fair Trade Zone network in early 2007, a fact

that, although invisible to consumers in the U.S. who continued to purchase Fair Trade

Zone-produced garments, was palpable in the industrial complex known as Masilí in

Ciudad Sandino, Nicargaua, where the cooperative and CSD's offices were both located.

Socias and CSD staff actively avoided conversations with one another and sometimes

even passed one another without even making eye contact. Instead, despite the fact that

their buildings were no more than twenty meters away from one another, separated by a

concrete wall and a rusty gate with green-flaked paint that has never, in all its life, been

locked, the two organizations had instead begun to resort to communicating by delivering

memos to one another on their respective letterheads.

At the center of this conflict was the central role of contracted labor in the

cooperative's production practices. Since gaining free trade zone certification in 2004,

that is—a project that was funded by a grant through the Inter-American Foundation and

also established a fund so the cooperative could carry in stock a quantity of cloth and thus

continue production even in the absence of outstanding orders—The Fair Trade Zone had

been employing upwards of fifty individuals from the Ciudad Sandino community who

were not members of the cooperative, but rather considered "contracted workers" (*manos

de obra*). In contrast to the twelve original members of the cooperative, these workers

did not have the same rights to share in the cooperative's profit or to vote on any

measures that affected the future of the cooperative. Rather, for their daily work, they

received an average wage of 40 córdobas (about $2.00), compared to the average wage

of 54 córdobas (about $2.60) per day for cooperative members.

As Jacinta, the president of the cooperative in 2007, explained to me, the

reasoning for hiring these workers is a simply matter of meeting the production demands

of clients like Clean Clothes while also providing needed employment for the Ciudad

Sandino community. She points out, "We socias do not pay ourselves much more than

the other workers, who earn more here, and are treated much better, than they would in

the maquiladoras." The key difference between socias and workers, Jacinta continued, is

that "workers are not members of the cooperative, and thus do not get a vote in the

cooperative." All workers in The Fair Trade Zone, members as well as contracted

workers, she points out, are signed up for social security and health insurance. While the

worker pays 6.25% of their salary toward the cost of coverage, the cooperative pays 15%,

so that all workers are covered in the case of work injuries or other illnesses, and all

workers receive retirement benefits. Additionally, all workers receive paid maternity

leave (four weeks pre-natal and eight weeks post-partem), thirteen paid legal holidays per

year, one paid vacation day per month, and paid work days for any absence due to family

illness (verified, of course, by a note from a doctor).

It was, however, precisely the matter of the vote that bothered Roger, a CSD staff

member. This was especially the case in 2007 when it became apparent that, despite the

protocol for membership established in the cooperative's constitutions, socias had no

intentions of ever converting these workers into full members. As Roger points out, the

practice of hiring contracted workers is a violation of the terms of the cooperative's

constitution, which specifies that non-members may only work in the factory for a trial

period of three months. After that, a worker must decide either to become a full member

or leave the factory. Those who opt for membership become *presocias* (pre-members) for

a year, during which they must undergo training in production, quality control,

administration, as well as in the philosophy of cooperativism. At the end of this initial

year, they are evaluated by the current membership according to a check-list of criteria,

including their attitude towards the cooperative and other members, their participation,

their work ethic, and their willingness to contribute to the cooperative's collective goals.

The third and final step in this process uses the model of a "buy-in," which has

been successfully implemented in the Spanish cooperative system, particularly the

Mondragón Cooperative Corporation (MCC) in the Gipuzkoa province in the Basque

Country of Spain, which is the world's largest worker cooperative and a model for

modern day cooperative enterprises. In the Mondragón buy-in system, potential

cooperative members commit resources toward the cooperative in order to gain

membership.[18] The buy-in serves the dual purpose of providing the co-op with access to

capital while also providing the social function of formalizing the inductee's membership.

In the case of The Fair Trade Zone, for whom start-up capital was provided interest-free

from CSD, the buy-in was calculated to be valued at 320 dollars. Ideally, presocias are

given the option of paying this amount up front or contributing the same amount in labor-hours, deducted from their monthly paycheck. As Melissa, a CSD staff member, comments, "it is actually preferable that the incoming member not pay the buy-in up front, but rather have that amount deducted from their paycheck, because, as the case of Mondragón has proven, it much more effective for member retention than any upfront cash payment has been." In any case, the 320 dollar buy-in is no arbitrary amount; it is meant to represent the total number of labor-hours that the founding socias were calculated to have contributed—640 hours over two years—calculated at a standard wage for manual labor of 50 cents per hour. In that way, potential cooperative members who contribute their own "buy-in" later on can be said to have contributed an equal amount to the cooperative, thus meriting equal status of membership and profit share. As Roger put it, "The point of all that is to ensure that, as a matter of principle, in a cooperative there cannot be workers and owners, there can only be equals."

In reality, however, things have unfolded very differently, as the co-op has yet to allow anyone in the presocia stage to complete all three stages of this process. Initially, as Roger views it, the socias could have been said to have been taking advantage of a loophole in the rules. They were recruiting contracted workers for the purpose of meeting the conditions of an order, then dismissing them before the trial period was up, given that, in the absence of orders, it was not financially feasible to keep them on. When the co-op began working as a full service shop in 2004, however, socias began hiring groups of contracted workers for longer stretches. In 2005, 53 workers had

employment in the cooperative, and in the end of 2006 a slight drop in orders reduced

that workforce to 46. By 2007, however, these workers still had not been given the

opportunity to become full members. While several pushed to initiate the presocia

process, they did not end up contributing a buy-in because they were denied membership

based on their participation, attitude, or work ethic.

NOT ALL EQUITY IS THE SAME

Although many people involved in one way or another with The Fair Trade Zone

network have speculated about why socias have chosen not to expand the membership of

their cooperative, for me, insight into this did not come until I arrived in Nicaragua in

July of 2007 for a third field season. In the year that had passed since my previous visit,

it is important to note that the cooperative membership itself had gone through a great

deal of internal conflict, leading to the development of two very distinct factions. The

first group consisted of the cooperative's executive board, elected the previous December,

including the president, the vice-president, the secretary, the treasurer, and the director of

public relations. The second group, by contrast, worked floor jobs, which included the

management of day-to-day production activities, and were in large part removed from

decisions about the cooperative as a whole. Much of the divisiveness between the two

groups, as it turns out, was related to recent spats with CSD over the status of the

cooperative's land title, which CSD was not willing to sign over to the cooperative until

all loans that CSD had provided over the years had been repaid. While the latter group

sided with CSD's position on the matter, the first instead interpreted this as a sign of CSD's intention to continue to intervene in the cooperative.

In February of 2007, bad feelings within the cooperative were exacerbated when the executive board decided to suspend elections for their positions and seal financial statements. While the intent was of course to keep CSD from obtaining this information —which they used in newsletters and in monthly reports to the Inter-American Foundation—the measure quickly expanded to foreclose on sharing financial information with anyone who sided with CSD, including socias in non-leadership positions within the cooperative. This matter quickly escalated to such a point that, one afternoon in May of 2007 a group of socias appeared in CSD's main office to entreat Roger and the other staff to intervene once again in the cooperative, which they felt was slipping out of their hands. Sympathetic to these socias' disappointment, Roger only responded, "It's your cooperative, you have to take control yourself."

Though conflicts within the cooperative persisted over the next few months, with rumors and gossip circulating far and wide through lunchtime conversations and the long walk home from work, the fact remained that virtually all socias, regardless of what faction they aligned with in the cooperative, were resistant to the idea of converting contracted workers into full socias. In a series of interviews conducted in August and September of 2007, I sought to find out why this was the case, discussing with both groups the existing process of admitting new members. Both groups, in fact, agreed that the current "buy-in" model was flawed, mostly because it failed to represent what

membership in The Fair Trade Zone is about. An exchange with Andrea, a floor manager, illustrates these sentiments particularly well:

> ANDREA: Given all the pain and sacrifice that we socias endured in the two years that we worked without pay to build this cooperative, 320 dollars is simply not the same. When we were building this cooperative, we had no idea what was going to happen. Nothing like it had ever been done in Ciudad Sandino, and we went to work every day without knowing if we were working for nothing at all, whether all of our sweat was going to be in vain [de balde]...Would new socias who joined the cooperative today also go through that struggle? Of course not.

> JOSH: Is there any number that you can think of, as a buy-in, that would account for that sweat? If you could change the cooperative's rules? A thousand dollars?

> ANDREA: Actually, I don't really think that anything could be the equivalent of that. Our blood and sweat are in this building, you know. And we are who we are as members of this cooperative because we struggled, because of our sweat.

In Andrea's view, membership is something more than a number of hours or an equivalent amount of money. There are, in fact, real, justifiable inequalities between socias and workers that cannot be resolved in any simple way. I pressed further on the idea of 640 hours as a representation of their labor. Andrea responded, "I honestly don't remember where that figure came from. We might have worked 640 hours, but some of us also worked other jobs, and almost all of us went home and were not supported by our husbands. We struggled there, as well, to build this cooperative."

Marx's distinction between abstract and concrete labor is useful here in fleshing out Andrea's critiques of the buy-in model. Calculated first in terms of the labor-time (i.e. the number of hours worked) and second in terms of that labor-time's exchange value (i.e. the monetary equivalent of those hours in a marketplace in which manual labor is considered to be essentially the same), the buy-in model constructs an abstract view of

labor that, many other socias' also argued, does not reflect the experience of that labor "in the flesh." The model of the buy-in, in other words, allows for a scenario in which one person's labor, their buy-in, is equivalent to another's, regardless of the very different experiences they might have had. While the founding socias are willing to see their labor, or rather their "sweat," as equivalent to the others'—an idea communicated by socias' appeal to the term "sweat equity" (*equidad de sudor*)—the same cannot be said for workers who would join the cooperative once it is already an established success, or those whose labor would consist of a number of hours in an already fully operational cooperative. Not all forms of "equity" are the same, it would seem. And the problem with the buy-in model could be framed as a quantification, and thus reductive distortion, of socias' "concrete labor"—the total social experience of building the cooperative, forming real friendships and real relationships of mutual respect for one another, the sweat that they have put into the cooperative, and the many battles they have had to fight not only within the cooperative but also at home. The fact that labor-time is then converted into a money value at a standard rate of 50 cents per hour only makes the matter even more absurd. As Rosa joked, 320 dollars is like "a motorcycle, an expensive television, or six hundred pounds of rice." The real root of the matter, to put it slightly differently, is the fact that socias do not see their experience of labor as struggle as commensurable with the world of monetary transactions at all. "Membership," as Dora succinctly put it, is a matter of "all of us having experienced in the flesh all the deprivations and sacrifices that we alone have experienced."

Meanwhile, for CSD, the matter at hand was still really the socias' failure to follow the guidelines of cooperativism. In Roger's view, the practice of hiring contracted workers is essentially to deny them the opportunity to have an equal stake in the cooperative. Perhaps even more to the point, from his organization's sustainable development perspective, the cooperative is not about its individual members, but rather about the principles of democracy and sustainability, its present and future role in providing employment for the Ciudad Sandino community and allowing those individuals to define their own futures by virtue of their membership in the cooperative. Sitting in the main office one morning, coffee in hand, I pressed Roger on the topic of membership in The Fair Trade Zone, particularly how the process of becoming a socia came to be determined so many years ago. Pushing away from his keyboard and leaning back in a black office chair that squeaked in protest, he explained that The Fair Trade Zone was one of the first cooperatives that CSD had been involved in organizing from the start. "We made a lot of mistakes back then," he offered, "mistakes that we hopefully will not make again." He continued:

> There is no part of forming a cooperative that is more important than the initial organization, this part of the project will set the tone for the entire business in the future. If there are conflicts among those involved in the project that are left unresolved during the organizational period, those will continue to haunt the cooperative once it is formalized. If there are issues that are left undefined, those will also continue to crop up. You know, the first part of the organizational process is defining the legal framework of the cooperative, which vary country by country, but also define the basic principles by which all cooperatives must abide. The cooperative cannot discriminate on the basis of gender, age, religion, political views, or anything like that, meaning that, when economically and organizationally feasible, the cooperative cannot turn anyone down, they must have as much of a right to join as anyone else. The second part of this, probably

more important than the legal framework, [is that] it is critical to develop an organizational structure that reflects and promotes a culture best suited to the particular business. Once you have met the legal requirements, you build up these structures in order to define the parameters by which new members gain admission, how those members are ensured equal say and how the cooperative stays a democratic organization. Lastly, in cooperatives like The Fair Trade Zone, that depend on selling a product in a market, you then also have to make sure that your cooperative has a market for its product...You know, in becoming a cooperative member...it's ultimately the buy-in that counts. I mean, this isn't my invention, [laughs] it's a meeting of the minds of economists and lawyers. The only type of buy-in that they think matters is money.

I pressed on to ask if there were anything that Roger, personally would do differently if

he thought it would improve relations between the socias and CSD. After contemplating

for a moment, he responded:

You know, the fact of the matter is that I can't go back in time, but I tell you what. The next time we organize a cooperative, we're making damn sure that everybody, I mean everybody, is apprised of all the legal ins and outs. I mean, it's tough. We aren't lawyers, we learned all this by trial and error, but I suppose the biggest thing that we did wrong was not making sure that the socias knew all about this protocol. Thinking about it, the cooperative lawyer was here for like half a day, and just blew through it all. I guess they didn't get much out of that...Maybe also, if they were part of the process from the beginning, they'd be more sympathetic of all the, uh, hoops that we had to jump through in order to get this thing off the ground...You know, the fact of the matter is that some of this is the women's fault, too. Call it what you want, greed...the women are consolidating their own positions as employers over and above their disempowered employees...[They] are not seeing the big picture, they are selfishly concerned with getting a head up above everyone else. That happens a lot, everywhere, and that is not sustainable, it never has been. A community cannot build a future on twelve people having good jobs.

In November of 2007, CSD held a meeting with The Fair Trade Zone and several

other members of the extended network, including the executive board of the cotton

spinning plant, then a pre-cooperative, and several representatives from small grower

cooperatives to discuss the future of the field to factory, vertically integrated garment

production chain. What came out of the dialogue for CSD and The Fair Trade Zone, however, was not a renewed sense of understanding or clarity of purpose, but rather a tenuous relationship that was quickly approaching a breaking point. Grievances, many previously unvoiced, began to rise into public view.

THE MELTDOWN

> *El que paga la música, dicta el son.*
> He who pays for the music, decides the song.
> ---Rosa

Melissa and Roger had intended the meeting to look forward to the future, and not backward to the problems that had plagued the relationship between The Fair Trade Zone and CSD in the past year or so, but this quickly proved impossible. The Fair Trade Zone had taken out numerous loans from CSD in order to buy cloth and to meet payroll, and in two short years it had mounted over fifty thousand dollars in debt with the NGO. From CSD's point of view, the problem was systematic. Instead of making attempts at paying down even *un chelín* (a penny) of that debt, the cooperative relied on CSD's revolving fund for the continuous injection of capital. In this sense, if the cooperative was eventually going to become the economically autonomous and sustainable organization that both parties wanted it to be, they needed to find some resolution for the debt that the co-op had accrued and its problematic borrowing practices thus far.

Finishing up an organizational meeting for a forty-day employment generation workshop that was entering its final stretch the following week (see Chapter V), I arrived

late to the commodity chain meeting. I pulled up a plastic chair, with Melissa and Roger

on my right, and The Fair Trade Zone's executive board, the Génesis spinning

cooperative's executive board, and some as of yet unfamiliar faces (who turned out to be

representatives from some agricultural co-ops that CSD worked with) on my left. As I sat

down I realized that the meeting was already in full swing.

Roger was once again explaining CSD's position that it would not forgive The

Fair Trade Zone's still mounting debt. The reason, he said, pointing to the cluster of

chairs where Génesis socias were sitting, was that those funds were in fact earmarked for

the infrastructure of the new cooperative they were sponsoring. Neither would those

funds be gifted to Génesis, he continued. Once they were repaid, they would go toward

the next project, and so forth. "Finance, is not a gift economy. No funds are ever merely

given to you, because we have a responsibility to our donors and grantees to administer

them properly," added Melissa, to whom I turned my head sharply, wondering where the

term "gift economy" (*economía del don*) had come from and if it meant what I thought.

As it inevitably did, the conversation then turned to the perennial topic of the title

to the cooperative's land and started to become heated. "It is a *barbaridad* [shame] that

we are the owners of this cooperative, and yet we do not have legal title to it," protested

Ines. "What happens if you want to kick us off one day?" added another, to whom Roger

explained that CSD would never do that and that, once their debt was paid off, title would

be transferred. No longer was anyone waiting their turn speak, however, and by the

second half of Roger's sentence Jacinta had already begun to plea that the cooperative did

not even have the money to pay employees, let alone any debt to CSD. Roger, attempting to regain control by adopting an almost professional tone, reminded the socias of the history of the project, as he saw it, in which all of this was first established. "I wish I had a recording of it, we sat right here under this tree and established very clearly that these are not gifts, these are loans, and you will have to pay them back." He continued, "it's like everything in this cooperative, you can't seem to remember the constitution either. It's not okay that you're hiring contracted laborers, the cooperative is not for your profit, the project is for the community, for the benefit of the community."

Three things then happened at almost exactly the same time. An audible grumble came from the representatives of Génesis and the agricultural cooperatives, who had for some time now been listening quietly. Melissa got halfway through a sentence: "We recognize the contributions you have made, but…" And Ines stood up from her red, plastic chair, knocking it backwards, and yelled: "This is not your cooperative nor the community's...It's ours, you were not out here suffering with us. Our sweat is in this cooperative, not yours and not anybody else's." Taken aback, Roger stopped, Melissa stopped, and a very awkward silence ensued.

The discussion continued for two more hours, and apart from the occasional attempt to bring it back to the topic for which the meeting was originally called—the vertically integrated commodity chain—it was largely dominated by emotionally charged issues that affected only CSD and The Fair Trade Zone: who contributed what to the cooperative, what responsibilities the cooperative has to the community at large, and why

certain moves—like the decision to pursue free trade certification—were made without consultation of the cooperative's actual owners. To the surprise of Roger and Melissa, it became clear that, despite their years working together, socias did not fully trust them. A common perception seemed to be that CSD was profiting from the cooperative by continuing to refer to it as "their project" in Nicaragua, taking donations that were intended for the cooperative and making their own. Attempting to deflect those accusations, Roger tried to explain again that the NGO had the responsibility to administer donations effectively. "If we get 1,200 dollars from someone for the cooperative, we don't just go hand over 100 dollars to each of you. We have to make sure it goes to building up the cooperative as a business, or in some cases paying down the debt."

As the steam built, so did Roger's desire not only to refute these accusations but also to retaliate by claiming that socias were not really running a cooperative at all.

> Perhaps it is just a business with twelve bosses and sixty employees. I mean, look. The fact that the cooperative now has a lock on its gate during working hours and employs a security guard to check people at the gate in order to ensure that workers don't steal anything on the way out, means that this is not really a cooperative... Cooperative members don't steal from the cooperative, because that would mean that they are stealing from themselves. It's more like a maquiladora.

Appearing bewildered, Ines quickly rebutted. "*Gringo, sos loco, somos pobres* (Gringo, you're crazy, we are poor).[19] The statement almost did not need explanation: as poor women, they could not be owners of a maquiladora because, as everyone knows, poor people work in maquiladoras. But Melissa responded anyways: "We pay ourselves 200 dollars a month." Unbelieving, Rosa pointed out that, whatever CSD staff earned, they

did not ever go hungry, they lived a big house with a pool, and a television with satellite. "These are things we'll never have." It was, in other words, a matter of relative wealth: if not income, than the living conditions that CSD staff enjoy and that socias bear witness to everyday they come to work. This, as Rosa later explained to me, was an inevitable and grinding comparison between the two groups: "the things we lack and the things that they take for granted."

That conversation, which was "unfortunately public," said Roger, was riven not only with the friction of miscommunication, but also of divergent recollections of the past, of emotional charge, of ideological difference, and, as Rosa pointed out, of relative wealth. For Roger, one of the most disturbing disturbing turns of events was being called *gringo*, rather than *chele*. A derogatory term that draws on a historically significant discourse of U.S. intervention in Nicaragua and of a North-South organization of power, control and wealth in Nicaragua, gringo was about the last thing that Roger wanted to be called by someone with whom he worked closely for almost ten years in Nicaragua.

Having felt as if I were witnessing that I was not supposed to, I sat quietly, trying to make the action of writing something down as unobtrusively as possible. When the meeting finally dispersed with the promise of a future one in which they would actually talk about the vertically integrated commodity chain, I said my goodbyes to the socias (secretly attempting to reassure everyone involved that I was not on one side or the other) and walked with Roger and Melissa back toward their office where my things were. Clearly still processing the event, Melissa suggested that the biggest surprise of all was

that "the socias had such a wrong-headed idea about cooperativism" and were so "ignorant" about the roles, procedures, and laws of their own cooperative." For Roger, on the other hand, it was that "two human beings could be at the same meeting [years ago] and come away with such different recollections."

THE MEMO, THE CATCH-22, AND THE STRIKE

A week passed, and perhaps out of frustration and perhaps partly out of the perception that the end was in sight for the productivity of their discussions with the socias, Roger made the decision to "blunt" CSD's approach a little and to exercise the leverage that the NGO enjoyed as the funder of the project. A week later, he drafted up a memo on CSD letterhead and delivered it by hand to the cooperative. Contained within was the announcement that, henceforth, the availability loans to the co-op would be contingent upon the socias' following of the protocol regarding membership. In other words, CSD would release no more funds to the cooperative until they allowed all contracted workers the opportunity to become full socias. The moment they did that, Roger offered, CSD would not only forgive the cooperative's debt burden, they would also take steps toward signing over the title to the land.

Roger later explained to me that the threat was an empty one, a "mere performance." If it really came down to it, they would bail out the cooperative and the women who had spent so much of their time in building it. "But," Roger continued, "this kind of leverage is something that might force their hand a little bit, and if that ultimately

gets them back on the track to becoming a real cooperative, then it will obviously be worth it." He continued, making clear that his metaphor was not meant to be paternalistic that he had the greatest of respect for the women, but could not think of another way to say it: "Sometimes it is like dealing with children, you have to cut them off and make them realize how much they need you in order to teach them to be independent and grow on their own."

On the receiving end of the memo, however, the threat was anything but empty. As one socia explained it, it was essentially coercion:

> In Nicaragua, we have a saying. Someone comes up to you, holds a gun to your head and says, 'run, and I'll shoot you, stay, and I'll murder you.' That's what it was like, we were left with no good choice.

Not only did the socias openly express their feelings of disempowerment, now believing that they were on their own, they also interpreted it as an intensely personal challenge to their historical role in the construction of the cooperative and to the changes that they have affected in their lives because of the cooperative. María's daughter's tuition to attend the University of Central America, for example, depended on her own employment in the cooperative. Rosa, who often made her dissatisfaction with the executive board very public, argued with her fellow socias that there was perhaps enough fault to go around but also that, CSD was not respecting the authority of socias' ownership. Jacinta, the president of the executive board, was flat out infuriated by what was essentially a challenge to socias' "sweat" investment in the cooperative. She sardonically mocked the irony of the cooperative's slogan, suggesting that perhaps they should all vote to change

it to "Our Sweat, Our Sale, *Their* Success." While may other socias decided to keep their heads down and hope that the conflict would pass, the course of action Jacinta recommended was to attempt as clean of a break from CSD as possible, freeing The Fair Trade Zone to pursue its own independent course.

The clean break came in the form of a memo drafted on The Fair Trade Zone's letterhead that demanded that the NGO take down any mention of the cooperative from its website. As Jacinta explain to me, this was so that the NGO "would not be able to collect any more donations using the cooperative's name, and especially using our story." Though CSD eventually complied, the disconnection that they sought soon proved impossible because, despite the growing rift, the two organizations were still very much tied to one another in very basic ways. The entire plot of land called Masilí, the site of CSD's house and office, the spinning cooperative called Génesis, as well as The Fair Trade Zone, was all titled under CSD's name. Moreover, they shared a single electricity and water meter, which was paid every month by CSD, meaning that The Fair Trade Zone would be without utilities.

Things came to a head at the end of September of 2007. Once again running low on funds, Jacinta was forced to go to a bank in Managua to seek a short term bank loan to substitute for that which CSD often provided. She quickly discovered, however, that the fact that the cooperative did not possess the title to the land to put up as collateral precluded any possibility of getting such a loan—a title, in a sort of Catch-22, that would not be theirs until they ceded to the CSD's demands of them. The autonomy of the co-op,

in other words, was very much impossible in this situation, constrained as they inevitably were by the structural conditions of their relationship to the land and their access to capital. A bad situation was made worse when the the socias arrived Monday morning of the first week of October to find that the workers who had yet to be paid had gone on strike and were picketing just outside the cooperative's fence, one of whom was talking to a journalist from *La Prensa*, one of Nicaragua's national newspapers.

BEING COMPETITIVE IN A MARKET OF FAIRNESS

Meanwhile in Michigan, Emilia surveyed the first of several batches of a new line of products called "onesies," one-pieces organic cotton baby clothing that had just shipped in from The Fair Trade Zone in Nicaragua. Her frustration mounted, however, as she opened box after box and eventually estimated that over half of the garments were "irregulars," garments below quality control standards to be sold on the market that ultimately had to be scrapped. There are, of course, irregulars in every order, Emilia explains, but seldom does one end up with such a high number without something going wrong at the source. To Emilia, this development was especially surprising because of all of the producers she had worked with over the years The Fair Trade Zone typically had high production standards. With the goal of heading the issue off before it became too costly, Emilia called up CSD.

Melissa and I were enjoying the lazy and hot Saturday afternoon on the screened-in porch of CSD's main house, her teetering in a wicker and wood rocking chair, and me

horizontal in a worn, purple hammock, writing up some fieldnotes from the previous day, when the phone rang. Balancing the book she was reading on the arm of the chair, Melissa made her way back into the hallway toward the whitewashed dresser that was the temporary way station for the cordless phones and anything else, really, such as crumpled bits of paper. She answered, "Hello, oh wait a minute!" almost expecting it not to work immediately, and carried the cordless, international phone (a.k.a. in CSD-speak, the "magic phone" for its ability to communicate internationally using an internet connection) out past the porch into the yard where there was reception, finally recognizing the voice at the other end to be Emilia's.

The two made made a gesture at small talk before Emilia explained about the state of the "onesies" she had just received. "Will you be my eyes and ears in Nicaragua again and tell me what's going on?" asked Emilia. Melissa immediately realized that, although Emilia had typically been apprised of The Fair Trade Zone's recent debt and land issues with CSD, she had clearly been left out of the loop as of late, especially regarding the debacle that led to the two not being on speaking terms. By way of saying no, Melissa summarized these new developments, but when she arrived at the topic of the co-op's employment of contracted workers, Emilia stopped her short. "Wait, what you're saying is basically that the women didn't make these clothes? And they're employing workers to do it for them?" I overheard Emilia exclaim in a tinny phone-voice from the hammock in which I was stationed.

From Emilia's standpoint in Michigan, there was little sign of these events. In fact, everything appeared to be going swimmingly in Nicaragua. Socias were taking larger and more complicated orders and even filling them more or less on time. Yet, to hear that it was not, in fact, the socias that she thought whose work was going into these garments was very alarming. Not only was this a plausible explanation for why their quality was slipping—"Workers without a stake in their work almost always means bad quality," as Emilia put it—it was also problematic for her company, Clean Clothes, because selling garments produced in The Fair Trade Zone very much relied on the ability to (accurately) label and market them as produced in a cooperative that is "One-Hundred Percent Worker-Owned."

Two weeks later, Emilia, her husband, Greg, and two associates, young women in their twenties who Emilia had hired as her "eco-friendly product design and quality control" specialists, arrived at Augusto C. Sandino International Airport in Managua, where I picked them up in CSD's new Kia SUV and drove them to Ciudad Sandino. We shared a quick lunch of rice, beans, and an avocado and boiled egg salad, called *guacamole*, and the five of us then walked over to the cooperative, myself as a translator. Emilia introduced her husband and her two associates, whom the socias had not yet met. Emilia chatted with the socias for a while, and called for a meeting later that afternoon. As we walked away, she explained, "What I think we need here is for me to talk businesswoman to businesswomen with them—and what *they* need is some education in fair trade marketing."

In the mean time, Emilia's two associates checked into their hotel rooms—they insisted on staying in the Best Western near the airport, foregoing the offer of a *hospedaje* (inn) in Ciudad Sandino—and then returned to make their initial survey of the cooperative's production line. Because neither were Spanish speakers, however, and had as tools only the words that they had written down in their notebooks—*cortar* (cut), *tela* (cloth), *medir* (measure)—and mimed questions and recommendations to workers. When they eventually finished, we all settled down with a cup of overly-sweet, instant NesCafé coffee at a wooden picnic table under the mango tree within the cooperative's fenced in property. Inaugurating the meeting with an efficiency that the socias were by now quite accustomed to, Emilia yielded the floor to her assistants, who made their suggestions for improving the production. As they were quality control specialists, the biggest issue, logically, was the lack of a responsible party at each stage for quality control.

For the next hour—halting between each sentence to allow me to translate— Emilia lectured the socias on what needed to change in the production process, the importance of ensuring consistency, how to make those changes in order to avoid irregulars. As it turned out, the slip in quality control, she determined, was not the fault of the workers, but rather the piece of machinery that was responsible for spreading the cloth evenly before cutting.

Probably the most important step the cooperative needed to take, she continued, was to maintain communication with Clean Clothes: "Hopefully in the future, in order to avoid production issues like these, you will keep us apprised of the problems you are

having, you will discover them earlier in the process, and then you will tell us what measures you are going to take in order to solve those problems. Communication is key, and sometimes we wait for weeks before hearing back from you about something."

Without hesitation, she moved on:

> I am emotionally invested in this cooperative, I still remember the first order of camisoles that we got from you, and as Jacinta is fond of saying, I cried when I saw them, and I still think that you can do anything you wish. But, I know that there have been difficult times between us, but here we have a big opportunity to start over, to make a new beginning. The thing is, you may or may not know, but our marketplace is getting very competitive, and pricing has been much more difficult, and margins are down, down, down. And there are other fair trade cooperatives like yours across the world. Back when we were beginning, we could go sell our product with you as our partner, and it made a difference in the market. But now when I go to sell with other competitors, they have people like you that they're working with, who have a great story that we compete with. So it's more and more of a global economy of people like you that we compete against. You know, everyone claims to be fair trade, like I told you last year when I was here. Whether or not they're telling the truth is not ours to determine, but the point is that they market themselves like they are fair trade...At the end of the day, you know—the story is important—but so is quality.

As Emilia saw it, in the business partnership between Clean Clothes Organics and The Fair Trade Zone, Clean Clothes' job was to attend to the marketing side of the project. "This means generating product lines, designing packaging, and the ever important task of writing copy," says Emilia, "but it also means representing the cooperative, telling the story of the cooperative and its members and Nicaragua." One of the marketing edges that The Fair Trade Zone has enjoyed, moreover, has been Emilia's ability to emphasize the difference between "conventional business," on the one hand—which is often characterized by profit at the cost of human misery—and "ethical business" or "fair

trade," on the other. This aspect of marketing, that their status as a worker-owned

cooperative gave them their only edge in an already saturated apparel market, was what

she was seeking to give socias insight into in this meeting. She explained:

> Right now down the street there is that new Cone Denim factory, and you see the
> resources they have. And you compete with them. But the only weapon you have
> that they don't is that your business is ethical business. When it comes to t-shirts,
> the fact that you are what you are, a cooperative, is what sells. Nowadays, you're
> not alone in that any more. Every day that passes there's another cooperative with
> an even more tear-jerking story thank your own...and in order for you to remain
> competitive, in order for us both to continue to competitive in a market of
> fairness, you know, all of those stories of triumph that are being peddled. You
> need to be able to say that you're a cooperative and that you're worker-owned.

The socias sat quietly. Emilia pulled out a black, leather-bound notebook from

her backpack, and slid it across the table. "Okay, then, on a happier note, I have a small

token for you all," said Emilia, opening the bound book to reveal pages of colorful photos

of people posing with Fair Trade Zone t-shirts. "I'm very happy that you got to meet

these important people for the first time today, my husband, Greg, my associates," she

said, "These are photos of everyone in Clean Clothes that you have worked and some that

you don't know but who work with your garments up in Michigan. This is just to say

thank you, and that I hope that we make lots of money together in our continuing

partnership."

THE VACATION

Emilia's two associates left the next day, having decided to move up their

departure, and in exchange for the interview that I had been promised all week long, I

borrowed CSD's car again and drove Emilia and Greg to the beach town of San Juan del Sur to an all-inclusive hotel in which they had planned to pass the rest of their trip. On the way, I got my chance to ask some of the questions that had been mulling over in my head, and Emilia and Greg processed some of the events that had just transpired.

To my surprise, Emilia is not a big fan of fair trade, so many of those questions went straight out the window. "Nowadays," she explained, "everyone is using the fair trade label, and it's almost like it's become so diluted now that it has no meaning anymore." A colleague of hers, in fact, realizing the profit to be made in the market niche, had apparently marketed a whole line of clothing with the "fair trade" label attached to it. "People believed the label because, what can you do? There's no real way to check."

I asked if she thought that certification processes could solve that problem. "Well, yes and no. Currently, there's no certification process for garments, because, before the clothing, you have to certify the fabric, then the cotton. Garments are more complicated than coffee, you have to certify all the steps in the process. That's what we're working on with the FLO [Fair Trade Labeling Organizations] 'beta' project that Roger and I are involved in. Certification from beginning to end."

She continued, "From a marketing perspective the certification processes are great because it's a label and a logo that you can just slap on there. Of course, you want to have other marketing strategies too, with just the label, it's no longer unique and no longer appeals to customers in the same way as a nice, glossy photo...But, the big

problem with certification from the producer's standpoint is that it costs so damn much to

do it, literally thousands of dollars, and most of the time the FLO or TransFair won't even

send out a certifier to inspect the plant unless it has a thousand employees or something

like that."

"What is it, specifically, that sells fair trade goods?" I was curious to hear,

gathering that Emilia had given this some thought in the marketing of The Fair Trade

Zone and other businesses. Emilia explained:

> Well, of course, everybody in the marketing industry wants to know that, but the
> thing is that it's hard to say. From my experience, fair trade appeals to people as
> people, you know, as human beings. And so in that sense, fair trade humanizes
> the market in the sense that 'we are all human beings.' People identify with
> producers, and that goes a long way to making them want to also help them
> succeed. The second aspect, ironically, is that people also like to hear about and
> connect with different cultures and distant things, like Javanese coffee or
> whatever. When I hear customers talk about The Fair Trade Zone, part of it's like,
> 'Wow, their story is so great, I want to support them,' and part of it is 'Wow, their
> story is so great, this t-shirt is really authentically Nicaraguan.'

In her experience marketing Fair Trade Zone products, Emilia remarked that, if done

right, the fair trade marketing strategy can actually do good by helping shape the way that

customers make responsible choices:

> Although fair trade is only a marketing strategy, the fact that it makes people
> consider the implications of their choices, I think, is a good thing. People
> generally know very little about the things they buy and where they come from, or
> who made them. So I think that anything that contributes to changing that, and
> really does it faithfully, and doesn't lie to people like many products do, will
> undoubtedly help to change things.

The reason why it is important to be faithful to one's customers when you call

something fair trade, Emilia expanded, is the same reason that it is important for The Fair

Trade Zone to be able to call itself a cooperative and to call what it produces a fair trade product. It is not simply a matter of what will sell and what will not sell, it is a matter, Emilia says, of "ethical business." A business owner has an ethical obligation to not deceive its customers not because it is more profitable to do so, but because it is the right thing to do. Likewise, a business' obligation to workers follows very much the same reasoning. While it may be the case that workers are more productive and more efficient when they have a stake in their work, the real point of the matter is that, even if it is not more profitable, it is ethical to ensure that they go to work in safe working conditions, have fair pay, and have reason to put effort into their work.

As we approached our mid-way point of the trip, which was also our lunch destination, our conversation turned to the problem of contracted workers being employed as the primary labor source in The Fair Trade Zone. Emilia's dissatisfaction over that matter was even more palpable than her dissatisfaction with quality control issues they had also recently experienced. Two decisions ultimately came out of that lunch. First, she was going to have to remove mention of the "One-Hundred Percent Worker-Owned" from the blurb about The Fair Trade Zone on her company's website. And second, she was going to have to find a way to "get the cooperative back on track." "Would it be ethical to tie future Clean Clothes orders to structural changes within the cooperative?" Emilia floated to Greg, "Or would that be interfering?"

I dropped Emilia and Greg off at their resort and made my way back to Managua. Several weeks later, I discovered what ultimately came of the conversation to which I

was briefly privy. More forceful action was apparently needed and acceptable, and the socias were in an uproar over it. Emilia had informed them that additional conditions would be attached to all future contracts between the two businesses, Clean Clothes and The Fair Trade Zone. First, some additional percentage of the profits that the cooperative made from a Clean Clothes order would be reinvested in the cooperative's infrastructure, rather than taken home by socias in the form of higher pay. Second, with each order, the cooperative would agree to expand the membership base of the co-op beyond the original twelve, with the ultimate goal of having all labor in the co-op done by socias themselves within the year. And third, the cooperative would periodically release financial information concerning budgets, profits, and pay scales so that the co-op's progress could be effectively monitored. This, as she called it, was her miniature "structural adjustment plan" for the cooperative, as she later and not unselfconsciously referred to it.

Emilia, however, did not see this strategy as "interfering" in the cooperative, but merely extending the conditions that are always included in business contracts: production timeframes, quality standards, payment. In other words, it is an illusion to think of contracts as simple agreements or exchanges between parties. There are always conditions attached, and they vary from situation to situation, based on the needs of both. If there is something disagreeable about those conditions to one party or the other, then those conditions can be renegotiated or even rejected. In Emilia's view, this was an appropriate and effective way to leverage the position that Clean Clothes enjoyed, especially given that it is The Fair Trade Zone's largest client, in a way that would be

beneficial to both parties. In effect, this also meant guiding the cooperative toward being competitive, as she put it, "in a market of fairness." Emilia explained, "We aren't running a charity here, and the women know that...As a business partnership it simply wouldn't work if our arrangement weren't mutually beneficial. The marketability of the cooperative is as much our problem as it is theirs."

Socias did not see eye to eye with Emilia on this matter. In fact, when I sat down with Jacinta, Ines, and Zulema at the picnic table during lunch on the day that the news came in, the feeling among those three, at least, would most accurately be called confusion. Their relationship with Emilia—for which they sometimes used the language of a "business partnership" (*sociedad comercial*), sometimes an "alliance" (*alianza*), and sometimes a "pact" (*pacto*)—was one in which Emilia had always been someone whom they almost always could approach for support. Surely, Emilia benefited from their partnership as much as the socias did, but she nevertheless provided them with technical support and business advice; she wanted them to succeed. "Would you use the word *solidarity,* then?" I asked. Immediately, the tone of the conversation darkened, as Zulema volunteered and the others agreed, that no, in fact Emilia had not always been on the socias' side. One event several years ago came to mind.

One month in 2006, short on cash and at a routine low point with regard to orders, a group of socias decided to gather up the scrap fabric from a recent order from Clean Clothes. From this fabric, the socias produced a good number of hair scrunchies, which they then decided to go sell in the Ciudad Sandino city market and in Mercado Oriental,

the largest open-air market in Managua. This, they thought, was a creative way to use resources that were only going to clutter the factory floor and would eventually be thrown away. By word of CSD, Emilia eventually found out about this use of her fabric, and when she made her next visit to Nicaragua a few months later she claimed that the women were "stealing" her fabric and, worse, because they were dividing the profits among themselves as opposed to reinvesting it in the cooperative, they were essentially stealing from the cooperative as well. Emilia docked the pay from their next order from Clean Clothes, even after socias pled with her that they had only done it to get by that month. This was the kind of "callousness" (*insensibilidad*) that Emilia was capable of, Zulema submitted.

I honestly could not say that I was shocked by what Zulema had just told me, mostly because Emilia had actually told me the same story—albeit slightly differently. As Emilia recounted the events:

> When I explained what I was going to do, several of the women pulled me aside and said, 'we're poor Nicaraguans and our children need shoes to go to school.' And then I looked them each in the face and said, wait a minute, whose fabric did you use? And they got real quiet. I said, so not only did you do this, but you stole my fabric from me. They were totally shocked, because they said it was just little scraps. And I was like, I don't really give a shit. That fabric is ten dollars a pound, and its my fabric, and you stole it from me...I essentially gave them two options. On the one hand, I would either give you each around 300 dollars, more or less the amount of money I was going to lose, and we'd call it a day. I'd go home, and I'd never buy anything else from you ever again because I'm done. Is that what you want? Because we could do that, that's called charity. I mean, you guys said you want to by my business partner, stop stealing from me. They were really pissed off, but I think in the end they learned a really good lesson.

The lesson, it would seem, was about proper business practices. While the socias interpreted the scraps as belonging to no one, from Emilia's point of view the scraps were not scraps at all, but fabric that she had purchased.

Terming the conflict a matter of "theft," however, obscures the fact that the conflict emerged not over illicit intentions, but rather a legitimate miscommunication and a legitimate difference of perspective. On the one hand, seeing the scraps as waste, socias saw what they were doing as a very logical and resourceful strategy for getting by at the end of a tough month, economically speaking. They were not seeking charity, but simply making use of resources that were around them. Emilia, on the other hand, perceived their actions as, at the very least, a solicitation for charity because they were essentially asking the fabrics to be "gifted" to them. "If they wanted to do something with that fabric," remarked Emilia, "I would have supported it, but they would have first had to at least make the gesture of buying it at a nominal price." In this view, the socias can know the terms of the relationship between Clean Clothes and The Fair Trade Zone by looking to their work contract, which explains that Clean Clothes retains rights to all of the raw materials, and the client is paid for the "value-added" services that they render.

The current situation with Clean Clothes, the socias agreed as we each finished up our lunch, was very similar to what had gone on in the past. Emilia's actions showed her callousness to their needs and responsibilities as "poor women" and "mothers," and especially of their real investment, their sweat, in the cooperative. While Emilia might think of this line of action as an extension of a contract, it was nothing of the sort from

the cooperative's point of view. In fact, as I gathered from this conversation, socias

wondered if it was even legal for Emilia to violate in such a way the autonomy of the

cooperative, the socias' rights to determine their own future.

RE-VISIONING FAIR TRADE PARTNERSHIPS

> *El que parte y comparte, se lleva la mejor parte.*
> He who divides it and shares it carries away the better part.
> — Rosa

The search for some stable meaning of partnership in fair trade, I think, will end

in disappointment, not because the image that commands such a profound and hopeful

emotional charge loses some of its luster upon closer investigation, but rather because

there is actually a kind of emptiness behind it. Like Gertrude Stein (1938) said about

Oakland, 'there is no there there.' There is no 'is' to social relations: whatever form they

take, they are not tangible things, but can only, really, be grasped as ongoing social and

historical processes, forever in flux. The fact that partnership appears to be the governing

feature of fair trade relationships, so constant and so clearly delineated within perceptual

experience, is undoubtedly an important question that bears upon the image of fair trade

as a hopeful, economic alternative in the public imaginary. But it would be a grave error

to lose sight of the fact that, however scholars and practitioners use the term *partnership*

in fair trade, it is not a real, empirical entity itself, but rather a conceptual means for

coming to terms with the revisions to conventional business practices that fair trade

claims to make.[20] If the goal is to move beyond an uncomplicated, consumerist vision of fair trade, on the other hand, it is necessary to be mindful of the fact that an equally uncomplicated notion of partnership encourages that ignorance. Perhaps only in the abstract space of theory do social relationships function as a kind of "connective tissue" between social actors. In everyday life, though, "social relations" are instead experienced and are thus better thought of in terms of a wide range of modes by which human beings actually relate to one another, for which the term itself is very much a lousy bargain with ethnographic reality. Although patterns certainly emerge in the observation of these processes, they never really concretize into the definite sets of statuses, rules, and roles.

In many cases, in fact, it is not the predictability of those social relations but rather their unpredictability that is socially significant. With the goal of re-visioning fair trade relationships—a project that consists in large part in challenging the assumptions that fair trade itself urges us to make—I seek to tie the observations of this chapter together by showing that it is actually a "de-centered" approach to the understanding of partnership, focusing on divergent meanings, asymmetrical power, and "friction," that may reveal a wider spectrum of social interactions among fair trade actors. In so doing, it also becomes possible to register a challenge to the imagination of fair trade as an alternative economy, which is often sustained by a false distinction between gift and commodity economies.

PARTNERSHIPS AS A CONTACT ZONE

The ethnographic account of The Fair Trade Zone network, if nothing else, confounds a straightforward discussion of partnership. A large part of this difficulty is undoubtedly due to the fact that, among the various groups linked through this particular network, there actually exists no single, shared understanding of "partnership" in the sense of a common set of ideas about proper roles, responsibilities, and conditions for exchange. This is perhaps even an understatement, given that their very interactions are themselves shot through with myriad social, cultural, ideological, and linguistic differences. Nowhere do these differences manifest more clearly than in the observation that, beyond what might be accurately termed a facade of harmonious collaboration, fair trade actors frequently fail to communicate effectively with one another, to act appropriately in the eyes of others, to act in concert with one another and with share goals, or even to hold onto, for themselves, a single, consistent understanding of their actual or ideal relationships to others.

Emilia, for example, variously uses the terms "business partnership," "solidarity," and "support" in reference to her connection to the cooperative. These words not only carry very distinct meanings, depending on the contexts in which she uses them, they also index qualitatively different relationships. Sometimes she is compelled to emphasize the importance of professionalism and dispassionate, business-mindedness in that relationship, dwelling on contracts as a basic framework. Sometimes she articulates her role as pedagogical and acts as a mentor of sorts in the socias' development as business

owners, seeking to teach them various "lessons" about business ownership, organization, profitability, and so forth. Yet, sometimes she also personalizes her relationship with socias, visiting their homes, sharing lunch with them, and allowing herself to have an emotional attachment to The Fair Trade Zone, very much apart from whatever profit-driven motives she also might have. To say, then, that her idea of partnership is any one thing is to ignore the fact that her own ideas about business and her own moral ambitions are themselves multi-faceted and even contradictory. It is also to disregard the important point that Emilia, too, has her own uncertainties and internal conflicts about those relationships and about what is an appropriate course of action when others fail to meet her expectations.

Something similar can also be said about CSD staff members, who in many ways have had an even more fraught relationship with the socias. Far from single-minded or strictly ideological about their relationship to the cooperative, CSD staff, too, have an inveterate, personal interest in the project's success as well as in the success of the women with whom they have forged friendships and have worked closely for so long. Because of this, in fact, they often express a profound ambivalence about their own roles as "sustainable developers" and recognize what is often a paradoxical relationship between their own ideals, on the one hand, and what is practical, possible, or effective, on the other. While CSD may often play the role of the NGO patron—i.e. as lenders, financiers, and administrators of funds—this alone is an artless depiction of the full range of their actions and intentions. They have also cultivated personal relationships with

socias and seek to stand with them in solidarity in their struggle, *compañeros a*

compañeras (comrades to comrades). Despite that, even, CSD staff at the same time find

themselves weighing their democratic and collaborative approaches to these

relationships, which they value greatly, against their desire for the cooperative to succeed.

As Roger phrases the conundrum:

> It is sometimes difficult to discern what level of involvement the NGO should
> have in the cooperative and its decision-making process. Liberal purists believe
> that grassroots organizations should be left alone to sink or swim…that all
> decisions should be made at the grassroots. The reality is that in an economic
> movement to empower the poor, like any social movement, the poor don't
> necessarily start off with the skills or resources necessarily to make it a success.

For CSD, this is a very awkward situation that can sometimes result in them very

begrudgingly playing a paternalistic role or, worse, exercising leverage in order for them

to accomplish what they see as right or, if not that, effective.

Although often underreported in the study of development projects, it is no secret

in the case of The Fair Trade Zone that socias quite often maintain very different

impressions of their relationships with other members of the network, very different ideas

about the rights, expectations, obligations, and prohibitions that condition their exchange

with these organizations, and even very different ideas about the purpose of the

cooperative and of fair trade—in no small part abetted by undeniably divergent

experiences regarding the historical and present roles of NGOs, charitable aid

organizations, foreign-owned businesses, and foreign trade in Nicaragua. Socias, in other

words, do not simply absorb and enact the ideologies of the Northerners, passively

playing out the roles ascribed to them through other people's projects, but rather bring to

the table their own identities, subjectivities, strategies, and goals, asserting their own influence within a constantly shifting frame. And while some of the frictions that inevitably emerge manifest as minor, sometimes even comical, misunderstandings, others flare up into major disagreements, heated arguments, and moral outrage.

How, then, should we conceptualize the relationship between these actors, if they connect with one another only imperfectly and across so many scales and disjunctures? Because there exists in this fair trade network no single, durable and identifiable set of relations that connect actors, I argue that it is more productive to engage the notion of partnership in terms of a "contact zone" (Pratt 1991, Lomnitz 2001). Defining contact zones as "the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractably conflict" (1992:6), Pratt highlights the inequality, imbalance, and asymmetrical power between actors (as opposed to their presumed equality and commensurability) and invokes "the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect" (1991:6-7). In sharp contrast to the language of subjugation or partnership, in which people appear connected to one another in well-traveled patterns, the use of the word 'zone' indicates the importance of seeing the encounter as productive of novelty—new spaces, new languages, new tribes.[21] It also allows, in that space, for consideration of miscomprehension and incomprehension as much as productive dialogue, asymmetrical power relations as much as solidarity, and

resistance as much as collaboration. In this sense, the concept of a "contact zone" is similar to Anna Tsing's concept of "friction," which points to those "zones of awkward engagement" (2005:x) in which collaboration, newfound power and agency, and intercultural hybridity are forged not only across social and cultural difference but across local, regional, national, and global scales as well. In the interstices of these interactions, moreover, Tsing points out that we should not naively foreclose on the possibility that engagement may also be oppositional or (intentionally or unintentionally) have detrimental effects: "hybridity is not all promise, and neither is agency. Destruction too requires agency" (2005:26).

Friction is a powerful concept for demonstrating that conflicts and struggles do not happen in the abstract space of "up there" or "out there," but rather in messy and complex interaction. Rather than seeking to reveal universals as imperial fictions, Tsing's concept of friction encourages us to study universals earnestly, detailing how and where they move, their hybrid forms, and their specific knowledge. In so doing, we may locate the global in friction, in the everyday disruptions, malfunctions, resistances, and conjured illusions that are forged through global connections, all while grounding those universals in their worldly encounters as they 'reattach' and gain traction in the local. Yet, one of the limitations of Tsing's discussion of friction is that 'the local' is sometimes very ill-defined. Surely, Tsing overturns the classic mantra of the local and global in which, as Arturo Escobar frames it, "the global is associated with space, capital, history and agency while the local, conversely, is linked to place, labor, and tradition—as well as with

women, minorities, the poor, and, one might add, local cultures" (2001:155-6, see also Dirlik 1998, Gibson-Graham 2002, Harcourt 2002). But, as Doreen Massey writes, "it is no response to globalization to press the case of the local...the political meaning of the local cannot be determined outside of specific contextual reference" (2005:181).

In the case of The Fair Trade Zone, I argue that Tsing's notion that friction ultimately manifests in 'the local' may be further honed by rooting those 'zones of awkward engagement' in the ethnography of communication (Hymes 1962, 1972). Like friction, the utility of the ethnography of communication is its flexibility for understanding translocal social phenomena—e.g. roaming ideologies, images, ideas, languages, capital—within very well-defined contextual frames. Within a frame, that is, widely recognized communicative acts, genres of speech, norms, or situations, like Tsing's universals, "engage" specific speech events.[22]

Although the ethnography of communication is typically described as the study of the way in which communication within a speech community is patterned and organized as systems of communicative events—that is, what one needs to know in order to be a culturally competent member of that speech community—I argue that, for the purposes of understanding the specific social consequences of friction, the approach may also be used to frame "incompetencies" and, thus, misunderstandings and conflicts. It is also significant when people violate cultural norms of behavior or communication because of a lack of understanding of cultural meanings, norms, and rules. An ethnography of miscommunication, to coin a phrase, can provide concrete insight into the legitimately

different ways in which people "see," how they register, among other things, the

significance of communicative action, of genre, of situation, and other paralinguistic

aspects of communication through which interactions are tacitly or explicitly constructed

into relationships. Of course, as some have pointed out, the simple dualism between

competence and incompetence is far too stifling: communication may also be thought

about in terms of various degrees of "effectiveness" (Lustig and Spitzberg 1993).[23]

(Hymes also points this out, suggesting that the real matter at hand is not the intention of

the sender, but the effect it has, namely, its ability to 'move' the audience.)

Miscommunication, likewise, may also 'move' the audience, albeit by its unintended

effects, and it is there that we may identify the concretely localized manifestations of

friction.

CONTRACTUAL EXCHANGE AS A (MIS)COMMUNICATIVE EVENT

Take, for example, the contract. The contract has long inhabited center stage, a

kind of uncontested universal, in modern models for commodity exchange if not also in

models of modern, social relations and voluntaristic action—Hobbes's idea of the

transition between nature and society, Locke's treatise on the origin of governance,

Rousseau's idea of the social contract, and Henry Sumner Maine's (1963 [1861]) vision

of modern society and the "deontic modality" (the move from status to contract)

immediately come to mind. Yet, as many philosophers of language and, more recently,

linguistic anthropologists have pointed out, the contract—indeed, one might say all forms

of exchange as well as ideas of social and economic value—is fundamentally social and thus rooted in language (e.g. Kockelman 2006, Vološinov 1986). Though it may appear to be universal, structuring land ownership in South Africa, stock markets in Japan, and tourism in Bolivia, it is important to see it as what it really is: a functional variant of natural language with distinct linguistic norms (phraseology, vocabulary) and specific morphosyntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features and used in particular social roles (pleading, claiming, etc.). Contractual language is, in other words, no more a building block for social relations than legal language can be said to be a building block for all language. Reversing Fredric Jameson's observation that genre is a kind of "social contract" (1981:106), it is useful to understand the contract as a specific (decidedly not universal) "genre" of communication that is by definition socioculturally constructed and has the communicative purpose of ritualizing exchange (Kockelman 2007).[24] In the ethnographic case of The Fair Trade Zone, it can therefore be understood to be vulnerable to the kind of inter-group miscommunication, misunderstanding, and friction that is possible in all genres, all communicative events, and, arguably, all language.[25]

First, the concept of genre, which has had a long tradition in rhetorical and literary analysis (Bakhtin 1986), generally refers to socially recognized types of communicative action with socially recognized characteristics of form (Bazerman 1988, Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995, Brown and Duguid 1991, Miller 1984).[26] In the ethnography of communication, genres serve particular speech communities as institutionalized templates for social interaction, providing a basic organizing structure that in turn

influences the ongoing communicative action of members. Genres can therefore be thought to shape, but not determine, how community members engage in everyday social interaction. Individuals may draw on existing genre norms out of habit to facilitate a particular communicative act, or they may deliberately draw on them to accomplish a specific kind of communicative action (Yates et al 1999). The contract—both the literal contract used (implicitly and explicitly) in many kinds of exchange and the metaphorical contract of inter-subjective voluntaristic action—like the content of law, is, if nothing else, a matter of language. Thus, as a genre, the contract can be understood not as a thing but as a set of (socially defined) norms for the patterning of social relations. In Emilia's statement that contracts are the "basic unit of business partnerships," for example, she is not making an objective statement about what exchange relationships actually consist of in the world (however true that might appear from her point of view) but rather, drawing on the genre of contract, mobilizing a normative statement about how they should be "professionalized" and "formalized," especially with reference to legal discourse and power (Orliowski and Yates 1994).[27]

Second, by understanding the contract as a genre, encoding these specific social norms, it then becomes possible to say that contractual exchanges are ritual events in the sense that, semiotically speaking, (1) they perform social action, and (2) they are therefore not fundamentally different from any form of exchange (e.g. gift exchange) that undergirds circulation. Although the "ritual" may be lacking in the stereotypical sense—

no incense, no drums, no incantations—the essence of its symbolic action is present. As

Kockelman writes:

> [A]ny time I give someone $2 for a coke, I am engaging in a ritual event: such an
> event is only appropriate if I had rights to the $2 and they had rights to the coke;
> and it is only effective so far as I come to have rights to the coke, and they come
> to have rights to the $2—where these rights, qua statuses, are evinced in our
> subsequent roles: I drink the coke (thereby demonstrating my right to it); and they
> invest the $2 (likewise demonstrating their right to it). [2007:161]

Of course, like variants to legal language and all ritual activities exist, variants to the

contract and contractual exchange exist as well. A person may just tilt their head toward

what they want and slide over their credit card. Or they may bring what they want to the

counter, cash in hand. Or, to use the example of the business partnership between Clean

Clothes and The Fair Trade Zone, one party may construct a multiple-page document,

petitioning the other to sign it, that details in very dense, legalistic language the

conditions of that exchange: what is being exchanged (say, T-shirts for money), how

many T-shirts, how much money, what standard of quality for those T-shirts, what

definition of quality, and what timeframe within which they need to be completed and

delivered.

To equate this kind of exchange with other, more obviously ritualized forms of

exchange may seem to understate the distinction between commodity exchange and other

forms of exchange, but, really, contractual exchange transforms individual "status" much

in the same way that rituals everywhere do. Building on the work of Maine (1963

[1861]), Ralph Linton (1936) offers a definition of *status* that is useful here in

conceptualizing the rights and responsibilities attendant upon inhabiting a certain position

in the social fabric. Parents, he says, have certain rights and responsibilities, as do

citizens, and as do prisoners.[28] The differences between them are essentially of the same

kind: what those rights and responsibilities are. Though it may not immediately appear to

be the case, economic actors—buyers and sellers, creditors and debtors—have statuses,

too, insofar as their social location invokes specific rights and responsibilities attendant to

"owning" property.[29] These property rights, as they are so termed, essentially define, by

enforceable authority, actions that individuals can and cannot take in relation to other

individuals regarding some 'thing' (i.e. if one person has a right, someone else has a

commensurate duty to observe that right). These property rights are so well known—and

the exchange of those property rights through contract is so hegemonic—that they

oftentimes appear to be natural, categorically different from other socially defined rights/

responsibilities derived from other positions in the social fabric. Within the field of

economics, even variations on the notion of individual property rights are highlight

contested. For example, as Nobel Prize-winner Ostrom (2007) notes, many economists

have tended to frame private property as superior to common property, which is seen

either as a remnant of the past (Maine 1963 [1861]), or likely to diappear during the

twenty-first century (Atran 1993), or legally problematic (Ellickson et al 1995).[30] Ostrom

demonstrates that, like the many variations on contractual exchange that exist, there exist

a wide and flexible diversity of property regimes, even within so-called "modern"

societies. Against the tragedy of the commons hypothesis, Ostrom's (1990) argument is

that it is indeed possible for communal property and communally contractual exchange

(what she calls the "right to alienation") to exist absent of government intervention.[31]

This is precisely because common property rights, like private property rights, are specific social constructions that refer back to social norms and formal and informal institutions that manage common property resources, prevent tragedies of the commons, and govern their exchange.

In any case, if we understand the transfer of rights and responsibilities regarding property (and the accompanying transfer of statuses of "possession" more generally) to occur via a ritualized process, then it is also true that norms, rules, and laws of social action must also be observed. In order for the ritual to be a ritual, for the communicative event to be a communicative event, and for the exchange to be an actual exchange, as J.L. Austin (2003:14) argues, the proper words must be said, the proper actions must be done, participants must already hold the proper statuses ("appropriateness"), and must subsequently hold the intended statuses ("effectiveness"). Even in exchange, that is to say, the essence of any ritual process or the 'meaning' of any sign event more generally is that sign events pull contexts behind them and push context before them, making otherwise ambiguous activities understandable and making the social and cultural activities effective. In many ways, this view of exchange overturns the common assumption that exchange is a sort of universal substrate to society.[32]

How is this approach useful for understanding the conflicts that have arisen in The Fair Trade Zone network? Contrary to the reified notion of exchange that assumes that it is everywhere interpreted the same, or at least in capitalist societies, the language-

oriented understanding suggests that exchange may be thought of as a contact zone

wherein sometimes disparate communicative forms engage one another, potentially

resulting in effective social action and potentially resulting in conflict. In this case, while

it is easy, as Emilia suggests, to chalk up socias' misidentification of the exchange as

something akin to "charity" (and, thus, for Emilia, socias' lack of "professionalism"), it is

actually more subtle a conflict than this leads one to believe. In fact, the ethnographic

evidence points to the fact that socias do not think of fair trade as charity at all and that

they do, in fact, conduct themselves with the self-identification as professionals, albeit in

their own style. The conflict is a legitimate disjuncture of ideas, but not one that can be

so quickly reduced to a conflict between a gift economy and a commodity economy. It is

more complicated than that. Instead, if the exchange between The Fair Trade Zone and

Clean Clothes is also social or symbolic action—as Dell Hymes puts it in his discussion

of the "speech event," the "activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed

by rules and norms for the use of speech" (1971:56)—then it is necessary to understand

the specific, socially defined norms, and rules attendant to not just commodity exchange

or gift exchange, but "fair trade," "ethical business," and "comercio justo." Moreover, it

is also necessary to understand the conflicts and social dramas that emerge in the process

of miscommunication, of differing norms and rules. In a miscommunicative event, to

reverse Austin's appropriateness/effectiveness duo, if unexpected words are said,

unexpected actions are done, and participants hold unexpected statuses, it is not the event

that is "ineffective" in the sense that nothing happens Quite the contrary, the unexpected

happens, or "friction" as Tsing defines it: "everyday malfunctions" and "unexpected cataclysms" (2005:6), as well as "unexpected opportunities" and "alliances" (2005:12).

The contract is of course a widely recognized genre of communication in exchange, but it is also surprising flexible. There is plenty of room in everyday life—not to mention cross-socially, cross-culturally, or cross-linguistically—for variations on the generic theme, and, thus, there is plenty of room as well for miscommunication (Frade 2002, Bhatia 1993, van Dijk 1984). Anthropologically speaking, this is already very evident because, as Sharma (2006) points out, for example, inequalities in schooling and literacy that fall along the lines of gender and class in many countries have often put poor women in very disadvantaged positions when it comes to understanding and manipulating legal structures. The highly abstract and technical language of legal discourse, that is, can often be alienating and even repressive to those who lack access to formal education. Socias' experiences with Clean Clothes confirm this insight in many ways, primarily because "contract," as Emilia means it—narrowly conceived as a set of conditions for de-personalized exchange (cf. Weber 1978:666)—is from socias' perspectives very unfamiliar, to say the least.

In a sense, the friction between Clean Clothes and The Fair Trade Zone emerges from the fact that, while the two groups share a very basic framework of contractual exchange, at the same time they also have different normative expectations for that exchange. Emilia, on the one hand, believes it appropriate to shift between mutually exclusive roles in her relationship with the socias: she is a friend and she is a mentor, but

when she takes on the role of a business partner, she stops being the others. As Emilia herself puts it, "In a very basic way, it's a bad idea to mix business with personal life...[if you do] you set yourself up for being manipulated because someone says, 'oh, but you're my friend, you can give me a break on this'." She later continued, "A businessperson doesn't play to your sympathies or tell you a sob story about their life," says Emilia, "a businessperson voluntarily enters into an agreement understanding the conditions and consequences." This is, of course, not to say that business has to be survival of the fittest. Emilia also believes it possible to factor ethical concerns into business relationships, something she calls "ethical business." However, when it comes down to brass tacks, Emilia also believes that ethics or fairness should not be considered in this case to be personal at all. Rather, they should be factored into the conditions of a contract, in the case of The Fair Trade Zone by contractually securing for them an above-market, 'fair' price for their labor. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Emilia instead chooses to engage socias stories on the de-personalized level of marketing, situating them in relation to other stories of more or less the same kind in a "market of fairness." The market logic extends to the definition of a 'fair' price, too. It is not socias' pay as a total profit on the item, relative to Clean Clothes, that socias receive that makes the situation fair trade, it is the pay that they receive relative to all other 'fair' trade in the market.

For socias, on the other hand, 'fair trade' (comercio justo) is not de-personalized in the sense that all of their social and ethical expectations can be expressed in contractual terms. Quite the opposite, in fact, the exchange is in many ways intensely

personalized for these socias. While, at the end of the day, how much money they receive in that exchange in the form of profits is indeed important—especially in terms of the various "social goods" toward which that profit may be put, as I discussed in Chapter 3—there are also social aspects of that relationship that matter greatly as well. First, as socias point out, comercio justo is in part about *trato* ("manners"): the decency and caring that partners in exchange show toward socias. Aside from profits, it matters to socias if they are treated with respect as human beings, as women and mothers, and as individuals who have put so much of their sweat into the cooperative. Second, comercio justo is also about "balance" (*equilibrio*). As the word implies, the equitability of the exchange cannot be judged by only examining the results of it from one or the other perspective. Rather, the "balance" of that exchange is decidedly relative insofar as it connects the two parties. When the social relationship is equitable, profits, power, and wealth involved in that exchange are also balanced. When the relationship is not equitable, on the other hand, neither is the exchange balanced. In this case, it is actually in recognition of the "imbalance" of that social relationship—not, in fact, merely the profits that socias ultimately receive—that compels many socias on occasion to reject or criticize the label fair trade, or even to characterize the movement as "unfair."

One dimension of the balance of exchange is the distribution of profits. As I said, profits are of course important in their own right, but it is the distribution of profits, more specifically, that reflects upon the relationship itself. Outraged by what she perceived to be Clean Clothes' intervention in the cooperative, Jacinta, for example, points to the

distribution of profits between the two as evidence of the relationship's systematic

unfairness:

> We have put our sweat and blood into our cooperative, it has been our lives for the last seven years...And Emilia and la fundación [CSD] have been profiting off of our sweat and our story with every T-shirt they sell. For every T-shirt that goes out this door we get less than three dollars. And you know what she sells them for in the U.S.? Almost 20 dollars! Is that fair trade [comercio justo]? She has all the power and we have none.

As Moberg (2005) points out, the relative distribution of profits—the prices paid to

producers, on the one hand, and the prices paid to consumers, on the other—is actually a

common criticism of fair trade. Emilia, on the one hand, disagrees. Not only does this

analysis fail to take into account of the transaction costs for distributors—marketing,

packaging, and payment to employees—nowhere does it say that fair trade profits must

be equitably distributed, only that producers get an above market price: "It's typically the

case that, whether it's coffee, chocolate, or whatever, the 'fairness' is not about how those

profits are split up, but rather how much more producers are getting for their products in

the marketplace than they otherwise would otherwise, if they were not fair trade."

Socias, on the other hand, say that this relative distribution is very much relevant. The

common point of reference is not 'the market,' but rather the relationship of exchange

itself. A 'fair' trading relationship, in other words, is essentially balanced.

A second dimension to balance is the relative distribution of wealth. While wealth

is often discussed as something that people have, irrespective of the wealth of others,

socias find their business partnership with Emilia colored by not only the distribution of

profits but also, to put it rather bluntly, the fact that Emilia lives luxuriously, while they

do not. This is perhaps one of the most socially significant differences between the socias, on the one hand, and CSD and The Fair Trade Zone, on the other.. As Appadurai (1996) notes in his discussion of mediascapes, perceptions of wealth are often engendered by, for example, the availability of television shows or cinema from other parts of the world, which present people in distant place with images of impossibly wealth lifestyles (and which are often applied categorically to people from Europe, the U.S., and Canada, the common point of reference). In the case of The Fair Trade Zone network, this perception is also generated by impressions gained through direct contact with Northerners. The spatial proximity of the cooperative to CSD's offices and living space, for example, has over time given socias an inside view into staff members' lifestyles and different levels of consumption, generating envy or resentment at the relative ease by which the Northerners meet the basic needs of provision and entertainment. The same, in many ways, goes for Emilia. Although Emilia does not spend nearly as much time in Nicaragua as CSD staff and socias have little idea of what her lifestyle is like in the U.S., her ability to buy plane tickets, her mobility to travel freely between the U.S. and Nicaragua, her treatment of Nicaragua as a vacation destination (e.g. in expensive resorts to which socias have never been able to travel), and her desire, in light of all of that, to "make lots of money" with the socias are things that all contrast sharply with socias' own, more modest experiences, standards of living, and ambitions. As Rosa observes, "These are things we'll never have." Other socias agree, the relative distribution of wealth is actually quite relevant to the transaction, though the

contract oftentimes obscures that fact by glossing the relationship as a "partnership."
Importantly, I think, following this line of reasoning in regard to fair trade leads to a
profound conclusion: 'fair' trade (or, rather, 'just' trade, comercio justo) can only be so if
it results in a broad-based redistribution of wealth, not just the remittance of a slightly
larger profit than that which would otherwise be earned in the world market (cf. Sen
1983). Or as Rosa more eloquently put it, "There is no such thing as individual justice,
justice is about all of us."

Profits—even distribution of profits—are of course not everything in fair trade.
Equally important for socias in the balance of trade is the matter of power.[33] While socias
often feel empowered in their communities and their families because of the income they
are able to bring home, they often feel disempowered in their relationship with Clean
Clothes. The fact that they receive a smaller portion of the profits, in this sense, is a
reflection of the larger structures of power. Indeed, having few other clients as large as
Clean Clothes, socias are typically cornered into a position in which they have little
negotiating power to increase their share of profits. Instead, they accept whatever
contract Emilia offers them and can do little to modify that contract. There are, moreover
social consequences to this economic disempowerment, the most obvious being Emilia's
choice to make those contracts with The Fair Trade Zone contingent on social
transformation within the cooperative, particularly with respect to their choice to hire
waged workers instead of admit new socias. Like the macroeconomic structural
adjustment plans that have been implemented widely since the 1990s, Emilia's "micro-

structural adjustment plan," as she calls it, uses the threat of deprivation (in this case, not from loans per se, but from Clean Clothes contracts and thus capital) as a pivot. By means of this pivot, she may in turn exercise disciplinary power upon the cooperative, shape and normalize the terms of their relationship according to her vision of "partnership," and practice a kind of "social engineering" according to her view of how things should be. Neoliberal adjustments use technologies of power to discipline government spending, to assert economic visions in which price controls and state subsidies are inimical to the optimal functioning of the market, and to reconfigure on a national scale the "proper" relationship between the state, the economy, and society. Emilia's micro-structural adjustment plan, similarly, is based on the assumption that fair trade is optimally efficient not only in the impersonal play of supply and demand but also when businesses are themselves organized in "ethical" ways. In this case, for Emilia, this means that they are organized according to the cooperative model. Confident in the righteousness of her position, moreover, Emilia does not adapt the actions of Clean Clothes to meet with socias' views but instead attempts to persuade socias of the fact that her view is "correct" and "reasonable," thus placing the onus on them for "not understanding." When that fails, coercion through deprivation typically succeeds. From socias' perspectives, this "imbalance" of power is one of the most compelling arguments against the 'fairness' of fair trade. As Rosa explained to me, Emilia's plan for the cooperative—especially the fact that she used the threat of no more contracts for the

cooperative—may not be the most obvious injustices in the world, but they are injustices

the same:

> In life, you know, there is luck and then there is justice.….Good or bad, lots of things happen in life that nobody has control over except for God. You may be born to a wealth family or you may be born to a poor family, and it is luck which one it is. You know, Emilia and us socias, we are human beings, there is nothing different about us because we are all made essentially the same as human beings. That is really the definition of luck, because whatever you have control over in life, you do not have control over where you were born into this world, there's nothing you can do about it. Then, there's justice. Justice is not a matter of who we are, it is about what we do as human beings and how we choose to live our lives out. When a person who was born into a rich family walks down the street and sees people suffering and ignores them, that is an active choice, that is not luck. That's justice, that's injustice. Watching a person suffer and choosing not to do anything about it, even though you have the power to, that is as bad as any sin. That is the definition of injustice.

Power, then, dwells in the contact zone of fair trade partnerships, wherein an actor may,

in pushing through agendas, strategies, and putatively "collective" goals, call to their aid

both economic and political leverage. Some leverage, on the one hand, takes the form of

persuading another that one's own point of view is reasonable and consists in creating

consensus by appealing to expertise. Other leverage, on the other hand, is coercion: by

gun or contract, securing "compliance by threat of deprivation" (Lukes 2004:21).

Unlike Emilia's ideal of de-personalized contractual exchanges and "professional"

comportment within the frame of exchange, the "who" of exchange matters for socias.

Who gets the profits matters. Who has the wealth matters. And who has the power

matters. Balanced or not, socias do not strip exchange of those constituting social

dimensions, revealing some sort of essential basis for exchange beneath, but rather

incorporate the totality of those norms, rules, rights, and responsibilities—from their

status, in other words, as poor women and mothers to Emilia's status as a wealthy female

from the U.S.—into an idea of what the relationship, indeed the 'partnership,' should be.

In this sense, much like labor as I discussed in Chapter 3, economic exchange cannot be

separated, analytically or otherwise, from the social processes in which they are ultimate

embedded. As Jacinta said of "balanced" exchange in our field trip to the Ciudad

Sandino market:

> If I am in the [Ciudad Sandino] market and I have 10 córdobas and I want to buy
> a coke, I will buy from Marta, for example, because I know that her child is sick
> and that she needs the extra money. Maybe Marta will help me out the next time I
> need it, or maybe not. But the point is that it is the right thing to do. As mothers
> we know that we have to stick together and support each other, like we have done
> in the cooperative...that's what makes us different from big companies,
> corporations, you know, we want profit, but not at any cost. Above all, we want
> dignified work, and we don't want to force people to be undignified, either.

As poor and working-class women and mothers whose sweat has gone into the

cooperative, they are not abstract people, and as a wealthy Northerner, but also a

businesswoman, neither is Emilia. Appropriate, or "fair," exchange, likewise, does not

forget or distort that fact, but rather is mindful of relative wealth, power, and solidarity in

their struggle—not just after work hours—and thus factors them into the exchange itself.

　　　To say that the difference between socias' about exchange and Emilia's ideas

about exchange essentially breaks down into a distinction between personalized and de-

personalized, however, is not what I mean to argue. The distinction between the gift and

commodity economies, that is, is a false distinction that relies on arbitrary assessments of,

among other things, tradition and modernity, leading to broad generalizations like the

idea that gift economies are *for* social relations (i.e. people's motivations are purely

social, Mauss 1990 [1925]) and commodity or market economies, by sharp contrast, are

for commodities. While this dualism has been especially compelling for moral

economists who have sought to understand encroaching market logic upon traditional

economies that submerge production and exchange in social, political or religious

institutions—and thus to explain the insurgency, rebellion, and "moral outrage" ensues

(Gosner 1992, Scott 1976, Thompson 1981)—fair trade provides a useful location for

observing how the embedded-disembedded conceptual framework obscures the social

composition of even so-called "modern" economies by insisting on too radical a

detachment from the sustaining social, institutional, and historical nexus. Moreover, as

the revised concept of friction that I have developed here shows, things like moral

outrage need not be reserved for that narrow space between the traditional and the

modern when the potential for friction—collaboration, misunderstanding, asymmetrical

power, coercion or even outrage—exists in the "contact zones" of everyday interaction.

GIFT AND COMMODITY ECONOMIES: A FALSE DISTINCTION

The anthropological hypothesis that reciprocity is the basis of sociality was first

developed by Marcel Mauss (1990 [1925]). Against the Hobbesian portrait of humans as

struggling for survival, Mauss argued that the drive for sociality precedes selfhood and

that only in modern, capitalist (class-based) societies does the impersonal logic of

individual interest triumph (Honneth 1996, Ricoeur 2005).[34][35] Generally speaking,

Mauss sees the exchange of material goods as fundamental in the process of shaping of

human personhood (i.e. social life). A gift (i.e. recognition) is given to another, is received by the other, and the other returns the gesture, thus recognizing the giver. In a gift economy, that is, exchanges do not have the impersonal qualities of the capitalist marketplace. What really matters, he says, is instead the relations between people. Exchange is therefore about creating relationships, working out rivalries, or fulfilling obligations, and only incidentally about distributing goods. As a result, everything becomes personally charged, even property, which is to be contrasted with the market economy in which transactions are simply a way of getting one's hands on useful things and in which the personal qualities of the buyer and seller should ideally be irrelevant.[36]

The distinction between gifts and commodities, to put it succinctly, is essentially a matter of personal relationships (Gregory 1982:10-28). In gift economies, people come together to exchange inalienable goods in order to make or reaffirm relations (exchange *for* social relations). In commodity economies, however, people come together without needing to form personal relationships, without attachment to the products of their labor, and, strictly speaking, with the goal of exchanging and acquiring things (Bell 1991).[37] Gift exchange creates relations between subjects who are exchanging aspects of themselves, while the commodity economy only creates relationships between the objects exchanged. In the 1950s and 1960s, the gift-commodity dichotomy provided anthropologists with a useful analytical tool, particularly in the theorization of economic differences between modes of exchange in 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, an approach that Polanyi (1957) and Sahlins (1972) called substantivism. Polanyi (1957)

contributed to the discussion of the gift the concept of "embedded" economies, which contrasts with commodity-oriented economies that may instead be considered "autonomous." Embedded (typically "ancient" or "primitive") economies submerge production and exchange value in social, political, or religious institutions, and at the most basic level Polanyi's claim that pre-market economies are embedded means that the human interchange with the material world is, likewise, submerged in social relations (Polanyi 1957:46). Unfolded further, this also means that the provisioning of humans is located in, or integrated through, these essentially non-economic institutions.[38] Though specific forms of economic integration vary by quality and degree from society to society, what they have in common is the fact that each of their modalities and ends are thoroughly molded by non-economic forces. In fact, the securing of livelihood has no separateness, no boundary line separating it from the enveloping society's institutions and values (Polanyi 1977:55).[39]

The disembedded, or autonomous, economy, by contrast, is visible. Thus, with modernity was born the concepts of "the economy" and "the economic sciences" (Polanyi 1977:80). The autonomous economy is not enveloped by the non-economic context, but rather is located "outside" of the cultural context and governed by natural laws of its own. Having broken free from that context, Polanyi writes, it becomes 'purely economic.' The embedded economy, in other words, is turned inside out so that it is instead the autonomous economy that envelops society, pushing inward on it and threatening to become the dominant logic. This is a society in which the economy is self-regulating and

the contract, the primary behavioral form of rationalizing economic individuals, becomes the cement of an otherwise atomized world. Sahlins, likewise, argued that reciprocity is a continuum and that it ranged from "pure gifts" (where social proximity is intense) to negative reciprocity (where social actors are not close to one another) (Sahlins 1972). Reciprocity, in Sahlins' view, and thus so-called primitive societies, could also be considered "economically rational," a premise that flew in the face of neo-classical concepts of the utility of exchange.[40]

This is more or less where Marilyn Strathern picked up the distinction between the gift and the commodity in *The Gender of the Gift* (1972). Strathern argues that the pair of terms *gift* and *commodity* provide "an axis for considering a range of contrasts between Melanesian societies and the societies of the Western world…[If] in any commodity economy things and persons assume the social form of things, then in a gift economy they assume the social form of persons" (1990:178). Insofar as Melanesia is positioned as a metonym for all non-Western societies, it would seem that whole cultures and whole societies may be characterized by this heuristic dichotomy. The West is a commodity society, and the rest is a gift society. One pursues exchange for the enhancement of the self and its enterprises without regard for relationships. In the other, the creation and affirmation of relationships is the key to interaction, and exchange is carried out in order to foster mutual recognition.

Of course, once reality crowds in, several things become apparent. First, there are, in fact, profit-seeking commodity exchanges in gift societies, and there are

relationship-seeking gift exchanges in commodity societies. Second, the characterization of non-Western societies as one type lapses into a reading that is colored by stereotype and romantic nostalgia (Godelier 1986:181). Moral economies and embedded economies, that is, have provided a mirror in which scholars have inadvertently reflected on their own societies, consequently putting the goal of understanding historical and institutional context to the side. Third, as Booth (1994) notes, such a sharp distinction between submerged, premodern economies and modern, autonomous ones blinds us to a crucial aspect of the market economy: namely, that it, too, is a kind of moral economy. Contrary to Polanyi-type claims, Booth argues that market economies are never so autonomous from society that the behavior of actors can be understood as narrowly rational, and behavior in pre-market societies, likewise is never so embedded that it is "theoretically indistinct" or "invisible."

More recently, using the terms recognition and redistribution, Nancy Fraser (1997, Fraser and Honneth 2003) has taken up this basic question once again in her study of Western social movements. Fraser argues that in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, political struggle in Western democracies ceased to center on economic issues of distribution organized along class lines and came instead to focus on issues of recognition in terms of shared cultural identity.[41] For her, "the relative decline in claims for egalitarian redistribution" (Fraser 2000:107) is problematic because it tends to forget the central importance of redistribution of wealth in economic domain. As a solution, Fraser suggests the "perspectival dualist" approach," in which all situations can instead

be understood in terms of economic injuries as well as cultural insults (Fraser and Honneth 2003:217-18). These injustices, Fraser suggests, must be understood in their own terms, without losing sight of the specificity of the economic domain. To put it otherwise, in Fraser's opinion, the economy is about distribution, recognition happens elsewhere.

Responding to Fraser's argument, Honneth (1996) gives an alternative perspective. Recognition, he says, is not separable from distribution in the same way that gift exchange has been imagined to be separable from commodity exchange. Recognition, in fact, affects people in all spheres of action and underlies all issues of economic distribution in ways that Fraser's dualist model elides. Perhaps the most obvious evidence is the belief that one's wages, to the person doing the work especially, often reflect social recognition of one's work. To be under-compensated or unemployed because your skills are not valued is to fail gain recognition in the economic sphere. In fact, in struggling for recognition, people oftentimes struggle for better wages. And in struggling for better wages, people oftentimes rally for better recognition.

While Fraser's argument that the economy is not a sphere of recognition is in many ways a fine rendering of the Western ideology of de-personalized exchange, the strength of Honneth's (1996) view is that, in rethinking the separateness of recognition and redistribution one can also rethink the relationship between the gift and commodity economies. Joel Robbins (2006) points out that one of the long-standing effects of the debate over gift and commodity societies is that anthropologists have tended to focus

primarily on the structures of reciprocity and the way in which they form interlinked systems of exchange in society. What continues to be missing, he said, is an understanding of exchange "phenomenologically...as a form of mutuality" (2006:22). What does reciprocity mean for actors, rather than in terms of the system in which they allegedly live? The answer, Ricoeur (2005) suggests, is in many ways the missing link in understanding why mutual recognition might actually be something worthwhile to human beings in the first place.

Of course, the same question needs to be posed for market/commodity economies as well. Why is it that self-interest is valorized and exchanges are de-personalized? Fair trade provides a convenient, interstitial zone for thinking about not only how exchanges at least appear to be de-personalized but also how, contrary to that rather ideological portrait of economic activity, moral, ethical, and other subjective concerns are at the same time projected onto, or factored into, the very same relationships of exchange. The false distinctions between gift and commodity, embedded and autonomous, that is, lead one to believe that exchange is either about creating social relationships or not. But, really, social relationships should be implied in exchange. Exchange cannot and does not happen without social relations, and the illusion that it can somehow be understood as something other than a kind of human relationship is an ideological effect that is a extremely detrimental to social analysis (not to mention social justice). Refocusing that question, we can instead ask: Why are certain kinds of exchange relationships selected at certain times and in certain contexts? What meanings, norms, rules, and laws sustain

those relations? And how do those relationships produce, sustain, or counteract social equality or inequality?

As I hope to have shown in my analysis of exchange in The Fair Trade Zone using the idea of the "communicative event," there exists no "pure" form of exchange that one may arrive at once one strips away the seemingly superfluous, subjective relations between people. Even de-personalized, contractual exchange, so often extolled as the essence of capitalism for its universally objective and rational approach, cannot, really, be anything but a form of subjectivity that is learned, enacted through specific generic norms, rules, and laws in communicative events, and enforced by the similar subjectivities of others. The truly universal subject is, by definition, contentless. And self-interest, too, is an empty term, until you have defined what a self is and the kinds of things that it is interested in.[42]

At the same time, as Honneth (1996) suggests, the ethnographic study of fair trade, for example, allows us to fill up those empty terms with a complex and intertwined relationship between profits, wealth, and "recognition." What is at stake in all economic activity, gift or commodity, in other words, is the ability of people to simultaneously provision and construct one another as specific kinds of human subjects through mutual recognition.[43] If we take recognition to refer to the validation of selfhood that Hegel meant, the "recognition of difference" (Fraser 2000:107), and the whole range of possible "statuses" (Linton 1936) that derive from all of the possible social locations in the social fabric—not just identities (gender, race, citizenship) but also achieved statuses (doctor,

student, taxadermist), and intentional statuses (mental states), not to mention those having specifically to do with capitalist economic exchange (buyer, seller, lender, borrower)—then the idea of exchange is very clearly enriched by the dynamic interplay between material practices, social relations, institutions, beliefs/values/desires, language, and of course all of the various kinds of power and conflict that may emerge therein.

If macroeconomics is understood as the aggregated microeconomics of exchange, by taking into account this expanded view we are left with a picture of "the capitalist economy," as Gibson-Graham (1996) point out, that is far more diverse that it might at first appear. Formal markets, wage labor, and capitalist enterprise form but one set of cells in a complex field of economic relations which are, taken as a whole, inseparable from an even larger field of, among other things, non-market transactions, unpaid labor, and non-capitalist enterprise. In fair trade, too, such a de-centered view allows us to not only bypass the alleged confrontation between non-capitalist exchange and capitalist exchange, it can allow us to shift the terms by which we discuss the many different critiques of the capitalist order. It may also allow us to shift the terms in which we understand conflict arising in the interplay between economy and sociality—i.e. conflict, rebellion, and moral outrage—which often appear to be the predictable, even mechanical, consequence of resisting the market. By contrast, Tsing's metaphor of friction communicates the idea that most conflict is not calamitous collision, but rather the result of texture, microscopic imperfections coming into contact with microscopic imperfections, and simply not lining up. The friction of fair trade, likewise, should not be

thought of in terms of a conflict between "fair" and "trade" but rather in the discord that

results from its various utterances.

NOTES

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[18] In the Mondragón system, when a new co-op is set up, the cooperative savings bank, the Caja Laboral Popular, provides 75% of the required capital, repayable over ten years at below-market rates. The state, in turn, provides 12.5% of the start-up funding as a low-interest loan, and the remaining 12.5% is provided by worker-owners upon joining the co-op as their buy-in. In this way, financial resources of banks are not intimately connected with the regional system (Davidmann 1996; Kaswan and Kaswan 1989).

[19] It is interesting that Ines uses the verb of *sos* in this case. She does not say *estamos pobres,* which also translates as "we are poor" but which also communicates a temporary or conditional state of affairs. In so doing, she seems to suggest that no matter how much the socias earned, how much power they wielded as owners of a business, or how many people worked for them, they would always be, by virtue of an immutable alignment of class, poor.

[20] This tendency is expressed in Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness," which consists in "neglecting the degree of the abstraction involved when an actual entity is considered merely so far as it exemplifies certain categories of thought" (Whitehead et al 1978:7-8).

[21] Pratt takes the term "contact" from linguistics, in which contact languages refer to languages that develop among speakers of different native languages who need to communicate with each other, usually in the context of trade. "Pidgins," as they are also called, become "creoles" when they have native speakers of their own (1992:6).

[22] Hymes's (1962, 1972) elements of SPEAKING are: *Scene,* the physical setting where talk occurs and the cultural definition of the scene; *Participants,* the actors in the scene and their role relationships; *Ends,* the purpose, outcomes or goals of the talk; *Act Sequence,* the relationship between what is said and how it is said; *Key,* the tone, manner or spirit in which the talk occurs; *Instrumentalities,* the particular channel, language, dialect, or speech variety in which the talk occurs; *Norms,* the normative aspect of the interaction among the participants and the interpretation of the talk; and *Genre,* the cultural category for talk.

[23] As Lustig and Spitzberg explain, "Appropriate interaction avoids the violation of extant valued rules or expectancies for a given context. Effective interaction functions to produce relatively valued outcomes or objectives" (1993:154).

[24] Jameson's argument is that genre is basically a social contract between the writer and the public who must specify the proper use of a literary work (1981:106)

[25] "Miscommunication" in linguistic anthropology has largely be understood under the rubric of inter-cultural and male-female misunderstanding (Maltz and Borker 1982). Chick, for example, likens the inter-cultural encounters to ballroom dances between strangers who "misinterpret one another's signals, struggle to develop a sequence or theme, or establish a rhythm, quarrel over rights to lead, and, metaphorically speaking, trample one another's toes" (1990:227)

[26] In various genres (e.g. memos, meetings, reports, training seminars, resumes, and announcements), form refers to observable aspects of the communication, such as medium (e.g. pen and paper, telephone, or face to face), structural features (e.g. text formatting devices such as lists), and linguistic features (e.g. such as level of formality or specialized vocabulary)

[27] Legally speaking, a contract can be "a promise or set of promises constituting an agreement between the parties that gives a legal duty to the other and also the right to seek a remedy for the breach of those duties" (Black 1990:332)

[28] Status is a very flexible category, and can be broken down into many sub-groups: ascribed statuses are those that one is born into (gender, race, citizenship); achieved statuses are those that are intentionally habited (doctor, student, taxadermist); intentional statuses (mental states, being angry, believing it will snow, wanting sushi, fearing cats, etc). But the cannot be inferred directly. It must be signaled and observed through the enactment of roles, which involve normative ways of speaking and acting according to the status. If these roles in turn seem particularly important to someone, they are instead called "identities" (Kockelman 2005).

[29] Indeed, as Marx implies, economic value itself may be understood as a reflection of this status as the quantification and abstraction of "right" (Marx 1967:136-7; see also Kockelman 2006)

[30] Maine concluded that "it is more than likely that joint ownership, and not separate ownership, is the really archaic institution, and that the forms of property that will afford us instruction will be those that are associated with the rights of families and of groups of kindred" (1963 [1861]:252).

[31] According to Schlager and Ostrom (1992:11), the five collective property rights, not to be confused with private property rights, may be defined as follows: access ("The right to enter a defined physical area and enjoy nonsubtractive benefits [e.g. hike, canoe, sit in the sun]"); withdrawl ("The right to obtain resource units or products of a resource system [e.g. catch fish, divert water]"); management ("The right to regulate internal use patterns and transform the resource by making improvements"); exclusion ("The right to determine who will have access rights and withdrawal rights, and how those rights may be transferred"); alienation ("The right to sell or lease management and exclusion rights").

[32] The new institutionalism, for example, suggests a "choice-within-constraints" view of economic activity that similarly overturns the assumption that exchange processes are somehow separate from social activity. Pioneered by Max Weber and later by Talcott Parsons, the new institutionalism framework understands an institution to be "a *web of interrelated norms*—formal and informal—governing social relationships" (Ingram and Nee 2001:19) and suggests that economic action is embedded in interpersonal relations and subject to informal norms.

[33] I mean power in the very conventional (and some would say, limited) sense that Bertrande Russell meant it: "For individual human beings, power is the ability to get what one wants. The term *power* is also used, however, to describe the ability to achieve common ends for families, groups, organizations of all kinds."

[34] Ricoeur (2005:227) argues that it is most fruitful to read Mauss's ideas not in terms of the provisioning of societies, but rather as a part of a more general theory on the role of mutual recognition in human life

[35] In support of this view, Mauss drew on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1979), which theorized that a person's coming into being as a self-conscious subject requires that he or she recognize another person and be recognized in return, as well as his *Philosophy of Right* (1991), which extends that argument by saying that exchange of property is one of the most basic ways in which mutual recognition is accomplished (Honneth 1996, 2001, Robbins 2003).

[36] With Malinowski (1923), Mauss analogizes the logic of gift exchange in traditional societies with the Maori idea of *hau*, a term that expresses obligation to reciprocate. Things were personified by the hau, enforcing a return of some kind. Lévi-Strauss [1987], notably, provided a famous critique of Mauss's appropriation of the *hau* as an explanation for why there is an obligation to return, rather than grounding that obligation in what he sees as the universal, unconscious structures that construct society itself as a system of exchange. Yet, as Josephides (1985) explained, "For Mauss the obligation to return gifts arose out of the powerful relation between gift and donor, such that the recipient could not enjoy the fruit of the gift without making a return to the donor" (1985:107). Reciprocity, however, also created inequality, though of a different order of inequality than alienation, dominance and control in capitalist societies. Gifts, in this sense are a form of self-deception and can be a source of pleasure and 'poison' (Mauss 1924:28-31). Thus, as Mauss argued, the root of the problem with gifts is that "society always pays itself in the counterfeit coin of its dream" (1924:231).

[37] Gregory (1982), an economist turn political economic anthropologist, takes the Maussian model to its limits, stressing the basic antagonism between the gift and the commodity. He writes, "what distinguishes commodity from gift exchange is the conceptualization of kinship as a method of consumption (ibid:212). A gift implies the intention to develop or maintain a social relationship between parties to the exchange. In contrast, commodities are exchanged strictly in relation to other commodities without any implied residual obligations or relationships between the people involved.

[38] Similarly, Evans-Pritchard argues that Nuer economic relations "always form part of direct social relations of a general kind" (1940:90).

[39] Sahlins writes, "to speak of '*the* economy' of a primitive society is an exercise in unreality. Structurally, 'the economy' does not exist. Rather than a distinct and specialized oragnization, the 'economy' is something that generalized social groups and relations, notably kinship groups and relations, *do"* (1972:76).

[40] Typically, it has been this distinction between gift and commodity economies, embedded and market economies, that scholar have understood to foment conflict, unrest, and rebellion, the study of which has usually been taken up under the heading of moral economies. E.P. Thompson's study of English food riots, James Scott's (1976) analysis of peasant rebellions in early twentieth century Burma and Vietnam, and Kevin Gosner's (1992) account of the Tzeltal Revolt in Central America, for example, each understand conflict as flaring up in the contact zone between modern, de-personalized market logic and 'traditional' moralities. Rejecting the application of the de-contextualized economic rationality favored by the formalists, moral economies have taken "economies," qua societies, to be the proper unit of analysis.

[41] This focus on "identity politics" can be linked to the emergence of new social movements as well. Fraser offers an incisive critique of the decouple of struggles for cultural recognition from the old social movement project of redistribution.

[42] Rawls (1971) provides a portrait of the stripped down, rational subject.

[43] Robbins (2003), for example, demonstrates that exchange is communication and sociality. In this case, people do not believe they can communicate to another person what they are really thinking or feeling, and so oftentimes the task of communication falls onto the reciprocal gifting of things.

CHAPTER V

BUILDING CONSCIOUSNESS:

THE ORGANIZATION WORKSHOP COMES TO NICARAGUA

> A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame
> many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst
> architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in the
> imagination before he erects it in reality.
> — Karl Marx, *Capital Vol. 1* (1930:178)

Roger Durham grabbed his coffee mug, pushed away from his computer, and, for the second time on this particular October morning, began to navigate the mossy stepping stones leading away from the three room concrete building that is the Center for Sustainable Development's (CSD) main office in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua. A blue sedan pulled through the gate and parked next to an old rust-hulk structure, at one point a 1987 Chevy pickup truck, and a stout, mustachioed man with a large, round face emerged, clutching a tattered leather briefcase. "Shit," exhaled Roger, coming to a full stop, "He's early." Starting toward the man and flashing through his white beard a friendly and suddenly relaxed smile, he bellowed in natural Nicaraguan Spanish, without a hint of the North Carolina accent of his native tongue, "Tobías, *¿cómo te va, amigo? We're just arranging things in the office for you. Can I organize a cup of coffee for you in the mean time?"

The Organizational Workshop (OW)—or, in Spanish, *Laboratorio Organizacional del Terreno* (LOT), the forty day employment generation workshop that was borne in 1960s Brazil, that was heavily influenced by Paulo Freire's radical democratic pedagogy, and that has been implemented on four continents since—was not Roger's idea, nor his highest priority, nor even something that he knew very much about. Rather, for him and his fellow CSD staff, it was one of those distracting side projects that they typically attempted to avoid and certainly would have in this case, too, if it were not for a favor collected upon by a colleague. Months before, CSD had reluctantly agreed to turn one of their main sustainable development initiatives, Génesis, a burgeoning cotton-spinning pre-cooperative (*hilandería*) employing forty-five men and women, into a test case for the first OW in Nicaragua. Tobías's arrival marked the workshop's imminent inauguration.

Although the details of what, exactly, the workshop was going to entail had long been lost amid a sea of emails and a carpet of sticky notes spread across the NGO's collective desk space, the basic objective was clear enough: to provide training in cooperativism by dismantling the "artisan consciousness" (*conciencia artesanal*) of the cooperative members (*socios/as*) and equipping them instead with the more sophisticated worker's "organizational consciousness" (*conciencia organizacional*), defined as the communicative, technical, social, and organizational "mentality" necessary to run a collectively-owned enterprise. On the ground, this basic schematic translates into short-term, relatively large-scale workshops that emphasize an interactive, "learn by doing"

pedagogy in the building of autonomous and self-sustaining enterprises. The OW's

method of organizational conscientization (i.e. *capacitación* or capacitation), proponents

claim, is an allegedly "proven" (Carmen 2000:47) solution for overcoming many of the

obstacles to a cooperative organization of work, including workers' deeply-ingrained

skepticism toward it.[44]

  To say that CSD staff were unenthusiastic about the project is perhaps an

understatement. While the small NGO of only eight permanent members usually

welcomed experimentation with new methods, their collective experiences in organizing

and supporting more than a dozen cooperatives in Nicaragua over the previous 15 years

stirred in them a measure of skepticism toward any approach that promised a magic bullet

as straightforward as "instilling consciousness." Organizing a cooperative is a very

messy task that involves dealing in practical terms with all of the issues that can arise

within a heterogeneous group of people, as well as those that sneak up unexpectedly from

the outside, as they coordinate their efforts to create a competitive, unified, and

democratic enterprise. Perhaps it was for this reason that Roger was particularly hesitant

to put very much stock in this *palabrería* (hot air), in his words, of *consciousness*,

conscientization, and *capacitation*, the terms for the OW's idea of organizational

consciousness-raising. As a sustainable development specialist, it was not that he denied

the importance of an equitable and democratic workplace, only that it was within any one

person's power to engineer such a thing. His limited time, in his assessment, would be

much better spent on the task of helping to furnish the cooperative with its own

productive machinery (i.e. factory walls, a cotton gin), without which the enterprise would only exist as a shared idea. Thus, it hardly came as a surprise to me when, pointing to my higher tolerance for "academic" pursuits, Roger soon tracked me down to do some delegating.

This chapter is based on my experiences working as the *gerente técnico* (technical director) of the Génesis OW in Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua during the forty day workshop in October and November, 2007. In this capacity, I was also solicited to conduct a formal assessment of the workshop, a task which I chose to approach with the ethnographic tools of participant-observation and focused individual and group interviews. One of the consequences of my impromptu involvement was that I could not go about the project with the kind of research design that many cultural anthropologists are accustomed to having in place well in advance. My research questions, in fact, emerged gradually out of the themes of numerous debates and conversations that I witnessed and participated in, as opposed to the other way around: Is it necessary or even possible to "instill" social consciousness, as the OW presupposes? What is consciousness, really, that it could feasibly be imparted, gained through participation in a social movement, or experienced as part of a class?

My goal in this chapter is not simply to evaluate the workshop, which is a task that, however needed, lies very much outside of the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I seek to shift the focus toward the area of interaction and tension between the OW's approach to organization and conscientization, on the one hand, and the existing

meanings and practices among Génesis socias, on the other. The Génesis OW can in this
respect be seen not as a top-down transmission of "organizational consciousness," but
rather, in the conversations and conflicts that it provokes, as a productive tension that has
incited socias to articulate and reassert their own practices of organization of
consciousness. Thus, I challenge the historical understanding of consciousness-raising as
a project of a few, select elites (i.e. "organic intellectuals") and instead locate it in already
existing "social processes" (Harvey 1996:78-9). In the case of the Génesis cooperative,
ongoing and sometimes heated discussions about organization give insight into this
process by touching on the idea of equitable working relationships, how they can be
achieved, as well as the political, social, and material conditions for doing so.

First and foremost, in the case of the Génesis cooperative, it is important to note
that discussions of "social consciousness" (i.e. the objective social phenomenon of a
shared mentality or politicized awareness) are implicitly bound up with normative
discussions of "social conscience," the proper, right, just, fair, or equitable organization
of the social. Lexically speaking, this is because while English speakers may consider
consciousness and *conscience* to separate concepts, in Spanish they are oftentimes the
same (i.e. *conciencia*). Thus, the idea of conciencia—at least in the case of Génesis
cooperative, because the concept has had a great deal of currency in Latin America (e.g.
Anzaldúa 2003, Zea 1952, Burdick 1998)—may be understood not only in terms of a
social process involving the manifestation of a shared mentality or politicized awareness
but also in terms of a shared mentality or awareness of what things (relationships, society,

political, economic, and social life) *should* be like. In the context of this dissertation, conciencia is therefore a historically mediated term that reflects squarely back on an image of how social justice is achieved in the workplace.

Of course, to do so it is first necessary to move beyond the powerful, theoretical constructions of consciousness that have had an enduring effect in political thought and in the language and praxis of social transformation. Taking as a case study the discussions of organization and consciousness that arose during the Génesis OW, this means bracketing the OW's concepts of organizational and artisanal consciousness as well as the idea that certain "mentalities" of work, the world over, for characteristic sets. Instead, it is necessary to understand that consciousness is not itself a thing, but rather is inextricable from particular political and social milieus wherein the word and concept ultimately gain their purchase. In the case of the Génesis cooperative, socias' discussions of conciencia do not refer to some universal, abstract category that may be "gained," ratcheted up in others, or "born" (e.g. *así me nació la conciencia*, Menchú 1984). Rather it is a daily practice of a mentality of organization and a civic ethic of mutual responsibility, irrespective of class or personal difference, to which one "aligns oneself" (*alinearse*). This view of conciencia becomes visible in the wake of the OW and the imposition of its own concepts and language of consciousness, which a select group within the cooperative chose to adopt. In the following months, amid accusations of graft and dishonesty, a large faction of socias mobilized successfully to oust the leadership of the cooperative. They pointed to the terminology of the OW, particularly "organizational

consciousness" in the OW's sense of the phrase, as the wedge by which those holding official leadership positions rhetorically secured their status over and above the collectivity.

My goal in this chapter is therefore not to make a case for or against the OW (and the active role the project gives to consciousness) as "hot air." Rather, it is to contribute to a better understanding of the social process of organizing among Génesis socias as well as the meanings of conciencia and consciousness, words that have suffered from an unfortunate lack of ethnographic documentation and critical inquiry. In so doing, I also hope to contribute to an understanding of social justice or 'fairness' in the cooperative workplace. For many scholars, consciousness has enjoyed great explanatory power, yet has suffered from disproportionately little concrete, critical definition, making it more of a brickbat than a precision, conceptual tool (Hobsbawm 1971). Opposed to the common, strictly theoretical understanding of the concept that oftentimes bears little resemblance to the diversity of social forms to which it lays claim, I argue that an ethnography of consciousness may instead open up a field of inquiry in which consciousness can be multivocal and refer to the many ways in which people develop alternative perspectives on the world, galvanize or become part of particular struggles, narrate personal or social transformations, use the vocabulary of social transformation for political effect, or articulate visions about what "should be" in social life.

BACKGROUND: CONSCIOUSNESS AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS

For development and the broad, interdisciplinary field called "peasant studies," one of the most enduring questions over the past forty or fifty years has been whether the economic development of the world's poor should run its course through individualized, entrepreneurial activity or the more complex and demanding route of collective enterprises. It is not a coincidence that the main positions on the matter recapitulate major cleavages in the academic debate between methodological individualism and formalism, on the one hand, and holistic institutionalism, substantivism, and Marxism, on the other (Weber 2007). In micro-finance, it is the individual who, but for lack of credit could be a successful entrepreneur, much like it is also the individual whose rationality is the starting point for certain schools of social analysis (Udehn 2002). Likewise, in sustainable and community development, it is the larger social and political institutions and industries that form the target of development, much like, for others, it is some of the very same structures that most directly represent the proper object of social analysis.

One of many ways in which this fundamental methodological, epistemological, and ontological disagreement has been expressed is in terms of consciousness. In the individualist perspective, human beings are surely social creatures, as the holist is wont to point out. But, generally speaking, individualist consciousness carries much the same meaning as in microeconomics: it is a statement about the human mind and an awareness of one's needs and desires. Peasants are no different in that basic capacity and should therefore be understood as a very rational, commonly entrepreneurial, population whose

oppression is due to the fact that they are entrapped in political and economic structures that punish them every time they pose a challenge (e.g. Popkin 1979:17-8). As Richard Adams (1964:73) frames it, a person needs only to be shown that change is possible, that a particular course of action is plausible, rewarding, and will not be met with sanctions, in order to embrace it with alacrity.

The critique usually lodged against this position is that it oversimplifies power (Dugger and Sherman 1994; Lukes 1968; 1973). While institutional holism, substantivism, and Marxism possess distinct explanatory paradigms for politics, one area of common ground, following from Durkheim's conscience collective and Marx's and Hegel's critiques of the Cartesian *cogito*, has been the concept of social consciousness. Surely, as Marx ([1867] 1930:169-70) observes, self-consciousness distinguishes humans from animals. Humans have the imaginative capacity to envision what they produce before they produce it and, more to the point, to organize and produce their own means of subsistence (Marx and Engels 1965:31). Yet, the real utility of the concept of consciousness comes from the observation that human productive activities are almost always, in one way or another, social (Marx 1904[1859]:11; [1847] 1910:120; [1894] 1966:957). Social consciousness is therefore not an amassing of individual self-consciousness but rather an objective social phenomenon of its own, rooted in the "definite relations" (Marx 1904[1859]:11) that exist independent of the wills of individuals.

In contrast to the individualist view, many different modalities of power are possible within the full range of social relations. Coercion is course indispensable to domination, but, as Gramsci (1971) points out, there are also those that fall short of the pure force of domination, that win consent to ruling ideas and the existing social order through persuasion. In what amounts to a struggle over the social representation of reality, that is, the bourgeoisie may ultimately call to its aid "hegemony" over ideology and, indeed, the instruments of consciousness.

It has not been merely submission and something called "false consciousness" that has drawn all the analytic attention, but also the residue of agency that exists in things like class consciousness. Popularized as a term by Georg Lukács ([1920] 1972) as way to resolve some of the ambiguity in Marx's notion of social class, class consciousness, Lukács argues, is not the origin of class but rather something to be achieved: a vision of the "concrete totality" ([1920] 1972:8) of the historical process, "the ideas, sentiments, etc., which men in a given situation of life *would* have, *if they were able to grasp in its entirety* this situation" (Hobsbawm 1971:11). Along the same lines, arguments have been made in recent years for race consciousness (e.g. Appiah and Gutmann 1998), gender consciousness (e.g. Gurin 1985), environmental consciousness (e.g. Hussey and Thompson 2004), *mestiza* consciousness (Anzaldúa 2003, Zea 1952) and even disability consciousness (e.g. Barnartt 1996). Each designates a pattern of relations in the world; each, by in large, is meant to be grasped as a kind of historical project of "total understanding," coupled with action; and each is treated not as a capacity

but rather as something to be "gained," "attained," "awoken" to, or, in the case of politicians, labor leaders, and activists, ratcheted up in others.

The task of identifying and representing the actual, observable social phenomenon to which consciousness refers is substantially more difficult. The reason for this is that truth and understanding do not work like objects do. To start, knowledge is always partial, incomplete, and fragmentary. Only in the active, social process of "articulation," in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985:105) sense of the word, may those fragments of knowledge and experience of struggle be composed into something more coherent, systematic, or global. Yet, in so doing, even as they may lead to the construction of an alternative discourse or worldview, articulation also changes the identities of the knowledge fragments. For this reason, actual, observable forms of shared consciousness do not come about as if objects caught in tides of history, but through specific social practices, making them as layered and multiplex in character as individual behavior.

With the goal of capturing this level of complexity, I argue that an ethnography of consciousness could feasibly be built upon David Harvey's concept of the "social process" (1996:78-9). The metaphor of a social phenomenon as an active *process*, as opposed to *form*, Harvey explains, is anti-reductionistic insofar as it compels one to consider not merely the maze of discursive practices or hard facts of material practices but rather a range of interconnected "moments" that make up the entirety: social imaginaries, discourses, social relations, institutions, power, as well as material practices. Though broadly applicable, the social process works in the case of consciousness to resist

the facile reification by means of which consciousness becomes an unquestioned category for explanation, rather than interpretation.

Take, for example, the well-known story of Mondragón Cooperative Corporation (MCC), the 30,000 member cooperative in the Basque region of Spain, for which the term "participatory consciousness" has been a fixture for explaining both success and failure (Dickstein 1991; Toth 1995:182). As the mythology goes, in 1940s Spain, Father Arizmendiarrieta generated a philosophy of cooperation and self-determination that was able to bridge both the ideological differences and depleted physical infrastructure bought about by civil war, allowing the community of Mondragón to build perhaps the most successful complex of employee-owned industrial, retail, service, and support cooperatives in the world (Oakeshott 1975). Closer inspection, however, shows the history of Mondragón to be far from a straightforward triumph of this participatory consciousness. Instead, Mondragón can be seen as forged in the context of political, economic, and social uncertainty and struggle, not the least of which has been competition with other firms in the capitalist sector (e.g. Bradley and Gelb 1983, Hacker 1989); Basque nationalism and politics (e.g. Kasmir 1996:171-2); gender stratification (e.g. Hacker and Elcorobairutia 1987); technological change (e.g. Kasmir 1999); the tension between the business success and social values of the cooperative (e.g. Cheney 1999, Dow 2003:64, Whyte and Whyte 1991); and feelings of solidarity as well as competition between workers (Kasmir 1999:163-5). Surely, mention of participatory consciousness cannot appear apart from this constellation of exogenous forces, frictions

and alignments between multiple stakeholders and debt-holders, and internal structures, strategies, and struggles of membership and management.

One could also add to that list, as J.K. Gibson-Graham do, the fact that Mondragón is what it is today "not only in the light of political and economic circumstances, but in the face of obstacles posed by economic and political *thought* about the viability and sustainability of cooperatives" (2006:106). Cooperatives, that is to say, have played a powerful role in the economic imaginary of left politics, serving a symbolic alternative to the oppressive and exploitative norm of capitalism and even, in their purest forms, "prefigurative forms of socialist society" (Clarke 1984:117; Gibson-Graham 2003; Montoya 2007). The problem, as the argument goes, is that cooperatives have really yet to be successfully implemented as truly participatory organizations, on any significant scale, or without the economic or political support of the state. Vulnerable to internal conflicts and inefficiencies, most cooperatives have proven unable to compete on their own in the external capitalist society (Booth 1987; Cook 1995; Fulton 2001).

THEORY AND METHOD IN THE ORGANIZATION WORKSHOP

It has been as a direct response to this line of thought about cooperatives and as a reassertion of the viability of large-scale, collectively owned enterprises that the OW's method of capacitation came about. The roots of the project actually harken back to Paulo Freire, former prison cellmate during the 1964 Brazilian coup and close friend of

the OW's originator, Clodomir Santos de Morais.[45] Similar to Freire, whose method recognized a connection between the socio-historical conditioning of knowledge and social class, identifying a problematic pedagogy as an oppressive instrument of consciousness, de Morais argues that one of the central issues in development has been the practice of depriving the target population of control over the instruments of organization. Development projects, that is to say, are inscribed in concrete relations of power, such that these instruments are instead given over to technicians and other specialists, and, without sustained intervention, these projects commonly fail for the population's lack of real investment or organizational know-how. The OW suggests that, when people instead maintain control over their own instruments of organization, they may critically engage and transform the organizational conditions and limitations of their lives, undergo a fundamental change in thinking, and experience a renewed sense of ownership and control over their own futures. This requires, however, a radical re-conceptualization of the role of the development technician vis-à-vis the target population.

While the ideas of capacity building and poverty alleviation, for example, have given us a clear picture of the "what" of development, for de Morais and the OW, the question is really "how?" What are the appropriate and effective methodologies by means of which economic development can and should be accomplished (Carmen 2000:48)? Along the lines of Freire's critique of the "banking concept of education"—the problematic dynamic in which knowledge is imagined to be transported from one

individual to another through a process of extension (Freire 1970:53)—the term *capacitation* suggests that real development cannot merely be transfer of skills (i.e. 'learning'), capital (i.e. redistribution), or power (i.e. empowerment) from one party to another, whether by dint of social assistance or poverty alleviation. These strategies form a conceptual whole of interventionalist, extensionalist, development-inducing models that Raff Carmen (1996) refers to as "projectile projects." By contrast, capacitation is the means by which people may realize their own already, heretofore untapped, organizational potential and take initiatives toward the solution of their own problems. Real power, like real development, is about genuine ownership, autonomy, and control, not only over the means of production but also the instruments of consciousness. How, one might then ask, does the OW claim to "instill" organizational consciousness via capacitation? According to OW practitioners, the workshop is only meant to create the "ideal conditions" (Sobrado 2000:22), which is another way of saying that participants must gain their own consciousness.

This all makes more sense when one first considers de Morais' view of consciousness. Far from a historical reading—such as E. P. Thompson's (1966), which demonstrates the very great degree of contingency attached to the historical construction of both class and class consciousness—de Morais posits a nearly direct line of causation between one's class position and one's consciousness. For him, however, both class and consciousness are less a matter of one's position within a system of property relations than the specific "mental organizational structures" that are gained during, and brought to

bear upon, one's daily work activities. Consciousness, in other words, is socio-historically conditioned, but only to the extent that people develop certain "habits" according to their characteristic sets of work activities: Artisans are accustomed to being self-sufficient and involved in production from beginning to end; workers are accustomed to living by some form of work that involves a more or less complicated division of labor; and the lumpen neither work nor have the desire to work. Theoretically speaking, this typology is informed by the idea of "objective activity" (*Deyatel'nost*) first developed by the Russian social psychology school of Vygotsky, Luria, and Leont'ev, wherein consciousness is conceptually enclosed within a dynamic envelope of subject-object interactions with "material reality," i.e. the 'Object' (de Morais 1987; see also Lave and Wenger 1991; Wertsch 1981).[46]

Of course, political economic structures such as capitalist industry and technology, combined with the ideologically motivated drive for "total marketization" (i.e. neoliberalism, Carmen and Sobrado 2000:5), have created an adverse environment for artisanal work habits.[47] Echoing Josué de Castro's (1952) image of "the geography of hunger," de Morais sees the world as divided into the Included, "those who don't eat" because they cannot afford to, and the Excluded, "those who don't sleep" because they live in permanent fear of the teeming masses at their gates (Carmen and Sobrado 2000:2). Practically speaking, however, de Morais says that the way forward is not to attempt transformation of the system from the top down but rather to capacitate "the Excluded," to enable them to maneuver and even manipulate that system to their

own benefit. That is, the the peasant's problem is the very nature of their artisan (i.e. small producer) activities, the fact that the organization of their work is habitually "simple" (i.e. non-complex), isolated (i.e. non-social), and self-sufficient (i.e. according to their own schedules). Their "artisan consciousness," in other words, would preclude them from running a factory even if they had at their disposal the necessary machinery of production—a scenario that is lent credence, for de Morais, by the perception that the history of cooperatives and other collective enterprises is littered by failures due precisely to the inability of their owners to organize. Programs like the OW are therefore necessary for intentionally modifying the consciousness of the peasant by enabling the "cross-cultural transition from the artisanal (small producer) to the industrial (complex 'worker') mode" (Sobrado 2000:23).[48] On the ground, capacitation translates into a process of eliminating all tendencies toward the "vices" of individualism, spontaneity, self-sufficiency, and other artisanal behavioral forms, inimical as they are to efficiency. Yet, in place of a teacher, it is "'the Object' which teaches" and makes participants organizationally "literate." In the words of Jacinta Branco Correia, "only in the total surrender of the bicycle to the learner can the capacitation in bicycle-riding be fully achieved" (2000:46).

On the one hand, the conscientization argument states that peasants have at their disposal the tools of their own liberation insofar as they can be enabled to navigate the multiple dimensions of power always at play around them. In this respect, Freire's work (and by extension, de Morais') has been in direct conversation with Frantz Fanon's

(1967), and conscientization can be thought of as a transition between "being for others" to "being for oneself" in the process of overcoming the limits of one's thinking, including the the entrenched idea (and carefully constructed illusion in development discourse) that stigmatizes beneficiary populations as "underdeveloped" and forces them to internalize the idea that they are incapable of addressing the problem without outside aid. On the other, de Morais' argument is also similar to Oscar Lewis' (1966) culture of poverty thesis: left to their own devices, peasants are also somewhat anti-change, trapped within their own stubborn "bad habits" of thought and work, thus overdetermining the constrains upon their behavior, thought, and choice (see Goode and Eames [1966] 2002; Leacock 1971).

How these two claims ultimately play out is not really knowable in theoretical terms alone. After all, it is not simply a bundle of free-floating ideas, but rather a project that has for forty years been dedicated to praxis. With what can at best be termed uneven success, it has been implemented in settings as diverse as Central and South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe and with the active participation of international development organizations such as the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Labor Organization (ILO), and the U.N. Development Program (UNDP) (e.g. Carmen and Sobrado 2000). And like a pendulum, the OW's modus operandi has swung far from the well-rehearsed approach of the institutionalized development industry, advocating a radical democratic pedagogy and a total restructuring of power, only to be pulled back in again, beholden to political maneuvering of funders, experts,

and state officials as well as the particular ideas and histories of those whose

"consciousness" is meant to be transformed. As an approach to employment generation

and poverty alleviation, this is not to say that the OW, its typology of consciousness, the

logic of its Marxist cum Soviet-era social psychology methodology have been possessed

of their own internal contradictions, but rather that they been transformed by the frictions

of particular social and cultural contexts, material infrastructures, and political regimes.

Before moving onto an ethnographic account of these tensions in the Génesis OW,

however, it is worth briefly summarizing some of the workshops and the various ways in

which conscientization and capacitation have played out elsewhere, the information for

which I have assembled from organizational reports provided to me by Tobías as well as

the published works of Carmen and Sobrado (2000).

THE OW IN ACTION

Clodomir Santos de Morais pitched the original OW in Bataán, Costa Rica in

1973 when he was in political exile from Brazil and working in the country with the

International Labor Organization (ILO). The immediate goal of the OW, as de Morais

and the ILO envisioned it, was to use the radical democratic pedagogy that de Morais had

learned from Freire, refashioned for his own ends, in order to form several pre-

cooperative groups out of population of unemployed banana plantation workers whose

jobs had recently been made redundant by technological innovation. All told, 80 pre-

cooperative groups and 15 enterprises came out of the experiment. Although the project

trained dozens who would eventually move on to stage OWs of their own, including

Tobías, the director of the Génesis OW, the Bataán experiment was afflicted by

something that would continue to plague the OW project for years to come. That is, then

and now, it has been difficult to determine to what extents the successes and failures of

the methodology could be attributed to the OW at all. By its very nature, there existed no

handbook for the OW's pedagogy, no clear metric, or, really, any kind of reporting

mechanism at all, by means of which the sustainability of those projects could be

evaluated. This was not only the biggest problem for the ILO, who had funded the

project, but also for future funders of the project, however enticed they were by the

philosophy of methodology itself. While the Bataán workshops surely fostered a

movement toward self-management among these banana workers, that is to say, twenty

years on, when the first systematic evaluation took place, only one cooperative,

Coopasilencio was still on operation, the others had dissolved (e.g. Barrantes 1998;

Sobrado 1999).

Two years later in 1975, the OW were staged again in Honduras. Throughout the

twentieth century the heavily agrarian economy of Honduras has suffered from an

alarmingly unequal land tenure system. In 1975, as much as a third of the population had

no access at all to land, 67.5 percent of all small-holders controlled only 12.3 percent of

the total cultivatable land, while a miniscule 0.2 percent of the population, all large

landowners and many foreign, controlled 19.6 percent of the land (Erazo 2000:60).

Readjustments to the agricultural export sector, driven by the emergence of labor-saving

technologies, complicated matters for both the landless, who found their wage labor opportunities dramatically diminished, as well as small-holders, who found themselves having an increasingly precarious hold on what land they had. It was in this context that many landless peasants and former agricultural laborers came together to form the Honduran campesino movement, the favored tactic of which was "land invasions." Thanks to inroads that campesino activists had made with state officials in the 1950s and 60s, in the 1970s campesinos suddenly became able to legitimately reclaim land that had been left idle by large, foreign-owned agro-industrial export companies. According to these reforms, if a parcel was left fallow for a certain period of time, it became eligible for land seizure by those landless and unemployed laborers who sought to occupy and cultivate it. The catch, of course, was that these groups needed to do so and form legally recognized collectives within a certain period of time in order for the title to the land to ultimately be awarded to them, retroactively legitimizing the seizure. Recognizing the difficulty of campesinos in forming the social and legal structures necessary to meet those demands, the Campesino Capacitation Program for Land Reform (PROCCARA), a public turn private sector initiative with whom de Morais was working closely, eventually decided that OW was an appropriate workshop for generating just those kind of legal and social structures.[49]

According to Benjamin Erazo, who was in charge of the Honduran Social Capacitation Program (the Honduran label for the OW) from 1973 to 1977 and who was originally trained in the OW method in Bataán, the OW "dealt with precisely the type of

real-life questions posed by the majority of the new land settlers and...provided an institutional framework capable of rapidly converting an idea into action and a force" (Erazo 2000:61). Two-hundred and ten workshops were held in that time period, involving over seventeen thousand campesinos from three compact zones, which PROCCARA had identified to have "high agricultural potential" with regard to the national economy: Guanchias, Guaymas, and Bajo Aguan. The OWs that were staged in these sectors of the economy generated national and regional political interest and were thus joined by experts and functionaries of the national public sector, members of international development organizations, and political representatives from other Latin American counties. This relatively large scale project—which, as Erazo notes, "was only possible because participation in the OW learning events does not require preparatory schooling or a minimum level of literacy" (2000:62)—was organized into fifteen to twenty day workshops, each structured as a series of courses ranging topics from technical agricultural training to the organization of an agricultural enterprise, the model for which was taken from cooperative theory as well as agricultural trade journals.

In Erazo's estimation, the workshop was a success. Participants who came from enterprises that did not have the luxury of additional support (institutional or otherwise) were able to improve their organization and management skills. Participants who came from enterprises that did already benefit from some form of assistance, on the other hand, functioned as support bases for other cooperative enterprises in nearby regions. While of course some cooperatives did not stand the test of time—such as the complex of Bajo

Aguan, which folded years later due to disappearing state support and corruption—others, such as the 15 thousand hectare complex of Guaymas, became iconic successes. Thanks to the OW, Erazo says, Guaymas today consists of 66 settlements (about 10 thousand people) that have been collective organized into campesino enterprises of African oil palm. By 1995, in fact, the Guaymas collective was the largest cooperative in the country, exported over two million dollars worth of product and winning grants from the Dutch government to do so. As a whole, the Guaymas enterprise has also managed to maintain a democratic cooperative organization, having organized itself as a general assembly and an administrative board (with representatives from each community). Additionally, while cooperative members receive almost three thousand dollars per year, almost four times the average Honduran income, the enterprise has also chosen to develop its own social infrastructure by investing 70 thousand dollars in secondary and higher education scholarships. All of this, Erazo admits, is of course hard to attribute to the methodology of the OW itself, rather than state support or the particular ingenuity of its members.

The next stop for the OW was Mexico, where in 1977 and 1978 the OW was implemented as part of the creation of the New Ejido Population Center (NCPE) of Velasco Suárez (in Selva Lacandona, Chiapas) and Nueva Tampaón, in the Tamuin municipality. In Velasco Suárez, de Morais was invited by Mexico's Center for Ecology and Sustainable Development (CECODES) in order to assist in the creation of a settlement meant to be a environmental solution to the stress exerted on the land by

recent displacement of a large population, mostly Tzeltal, from other parts of Chiapas. In cooperation with the Economic and Social Development Institute for Indigenous Mexicans (DEMCI), which provided a small grant, the regional government had set aside 400 hectares for a population of about five thousand, and the workshop, which involved about 800 ejido settlers, was intended to mobilize an ethnically diverse population to find common solutions to health, production, communication and education on a settlement-wide basis. Perhaps one of the most important outcomes of the workshop was to give each settlement a symbolic center by providing the resources for each community to construct a "people's house." In these buildings, OW participants not only developed courses in auto mechanics, typing, first aid, woodwork, forestry, accountancy, journalism, baking and cooking, and even lime production, they also held community wide meetings to discuss social and political problems. These projects, in turn, established permanent community fixtures, such as a five-ton lime oven, a local newspaper, and a community bakery. With the passage of time, however, it was again unclear to what extent the OW was able to create a lasting, community-based organizational apparatus, to form a sustainable agricultural sector, or to reduce the stress of human impact on the environment, all of which were articulated as the OW's original goals.

In Tampaón, the OW was by contrast initiated against the politically charged backdrop as a kind of "no contest" solution to independent peasant organizations' demands for agrarian reform. Tampaón was, in fact, a New Ejido Population Center (NCPE) that was created as part of an overall effort to push public land ownership. As

part of the deal, hydrological infrastructure, rural credit, and the provision of modern

agricultural machinery were also made available to the ejido inhabitants as part of a

broader plan to create the material conditions with which a new type of "ejido farmer"

could emerge, and it was the OW, in turn, that was meant to create the social, political,

and organizational infrastructure to manage public services, to administer to those means

of production held in common, and, eventually, to provide the foundation for an

integrated community.. In reality, however, the task was more difficult than first

imagined, as settlements were geographically scattered anarchically throughout the area

and were very much segregated from one another according to ethnic difference. Five

hundred individuals from seven different common land ejido settlements inside Tampaón

eventually agreed to participate in the workshop, which was coordinated by Frederico

Porras, a Nicaraguan agronomist. De Morais separated himself from the day to day

proceedings, which were delegated to Porras and 23 lecturers, and instead chose to

function as an evaluator while reporting to the U.N. and F.A.O., who signed on as

granters for the project. The participants initially voted to set up a commission of seven

directors, one from each ejido, which was called Educational Enterprise New Tampaón

and formed for the first time a political structure that would connect the diverse

populations for the next forty years. These directors, in turn, selected a number of

courses that they perceived to be most important in the building of a community

infrastructure and created an separate, democratically elected entity that would be

responsible for managing the "common pool resources" (which started as a collection of

typewriters, cooking implements, medicinal stores, and tools but grew sharply in the following years).[50]

The Tampaón workshop was the first to be systematically evaluated after its initial evaluation, and twenty years later what researchers found surprised them. Tampaón had relatively well-developed urban services and infrastructure such as roads, water, and electricity, but many of its community-based commissions that managed community finances, education, forestry, transport, and agriculture, noted as a achievement of the original OW, were allowed to disintegrate. And though the population was significantly more integrated than in the past, a civic ethic and overall sense of community had never really developed. As Herrera (2000) noted, it was ultimately difficult to determine what could be chalked up to a deficiency of the OW itself and what was instead a matter of the social process of community organizing that occurs (or fails to occur) organically within a group of culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse people who are put in the awkward situation of having to coordinate action and share community resources.

During the 1980s and 1990s, with dozens of new directors having been trained in OW theory and methodology, OWs proliferated through Central and South America and beyond. Funded by a range of organizations, these directors largely secured funding and support by pointing to the success of the "Honduran model" (de Morais 1975b) of rural development. Based on the common presupposition that "target" populations should be part of large-scale land settlements and should have the goal of collective ownership of production, that is, in replicating the Honduran model directors tended to disregard the

particular political and economic climates, which eventually proved to be a source of uncertainty. In Panama, for example, agrarian reform was pushed through by General Omar Torrijos after the national coup of 1969.[51] Large estates were appropriated and landless, agricultural laborers settled there, generating, with the guidance of the OW and the financial support of a government organization, the National Confederation of Campesino Land Settlements (CONAC), 280 enterprises out of two thousand participants. Of course, little is known what happened to these enterprises after the installment of General Manual Noriega in 1983, after the U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 (and the resulting embargo), or after the Balladares administration's neoliberal structural reforms, which included the re-privatization of state enterprises nationalized during the Torrijos era.

In Colombia in the 1980s, four hundred cooperatives emerged out of a partnership between the Colombian Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje, which sponsored the OW, and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation and Agriculture (IICA). Yet, similar to Panama's case, few follow up analyses of the OW have been conducted over the following twenty years, especially regarding these cooperatives' abilities to abide President Belisario Cuartas' conservative position that associated collective organization with Marxism, *la apertura económica* (President Trujillo's and the IMF's experiments with economic liberalism in the early 1990s), or the formalized IMF agreement in 1999. However progressive the OW methodology has been, the biggest limitation of its practical effect, especially with regard to the generation of cooperative enterprises, is its

tendency to ignore the effect of massive social and technological change and political and

economic disruption that has so often determined the fate of cooperative initiatives,

regardless of any transformed "consciousness." The OW is at its best when it is coupled

with sustained social movements that are, in fact, attentive to political economic

structures and are capable of, for example, providing rural credit to cooperatives in the

sudden absence of state support or changing markets.

A good example of this is the Brazilian OWs (called PROGEIs and SIPGEIs). In

the mid-1980s, the OW finally returned to Brazil as the power of the military junta had

began to crumble and the country had began to undergo a process of re-democratization.

Many of those who were in forced, political exile over the previous twenty years were

consequently able to return, including de Morais, who was working as a lecturer at the

University of Rostock in East Germany at the time. Returning to Brazil, he set up the

Institute for Technical Support to Third World Countries (IATTERMUND) with the goal

of confronting unemployment, which he saw as the most pressing problem facing the

country due in no small part to inflation and IMF austerity programs. Then mayor of São

Paulo and former president of the Republic, the charismatic Jânio da Silva Quadros,

joined up with de Morais' cause and broadcast the message of IATTERMUND by

explicitly linking IMF policies to dictatorial practices, claiming that Brazil was "subject

to a sort of 'hidden civil war of unemployment' with thousands of people killed

(murdered) each day, hundreds of street children summarily executed each year" (????

2000:175). All of this was the result of a kind of "'epidemic' sweeping all the big cities

and imposing a kind of curfew on everyone...Every day, from early evening, families and citizens were forced to load themselves up in their homes and watch soap operas to keep themselves from dying of boredom" (ibid).

With da Silva Quadros' support, the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) soon approached IATTERMUND to stage 30 self-managing cooperatives and to train MST activists in the methodology. Working with MST, IATTERMUND officials found themselves in the odd position of pressuring the movement's leaders to rethink their movement's signature practice of "invading" unproductive land and then distributing it to the participating militants. This would all be in vain, they argued, if the MST could not also sustain the achievements of the victorious ex-landless by establishing systems of common ownership or even collectivist enterprises. While the MST of course continued the practice of land invasions, to some degree they also heeded IATTERMUND's advice, trained technical cadres, and eventually even became the driving force behind a number of cooperative enterprises in Brazil.

Of course, not all of the OW implementations were as grassroots as that which took place with the MST. Immediately following the MST workshops, in fact, IATTERMUND initiated a joint project called the Polonoroeste Project with the Ministry of the Interior, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, the Institute for Environmental Protection (IBAMA), the Institute for Land Settlement and Agrarian Reform (INCRA), and various other international development and aid

agencies.[52] Thanks to the availability of funding for this project, IATTERMUND was able to inaugurate projects in Matto Grosso, Rondônia, Ceará, Paraíba, as well as São Paulo. The significant involvement of the Brazilian government in these programs, in collaboration with international NGOs, was something that de Morais did not want to see disappear, and so he quickly complied with pressure from these organizations to abandon the collective enterprise model, modifying the approach for job- and income-generation training programs, collectively called the PROGEIs.[53]

At about the same time as the Brazilian PROGEIs, the OW was being adopted by NGOs in Portuguese-speaking African countries, such as Mozambique and Angola. Labra and Labra (2000) give a detailed account of the dynamics of the Mozambique OWs, rooted, for the first time, in an analysis of the sporadic war and violence after Mozambican Civil War (1977-1992) as well as the public sector cutbacks that followed from the country's structural adjustment package in 1986. The authors recount the story of a soup-making enterprise called Sopão during an OW in Polana Canizo in 1991, in which twenty women with loaner pots and pans sold bowls of soup made from left over greeneries, vegetables, and meat from the local bazaar. A scant few weeks later the women were in the position to buy their own cauldrocns and had a queue of people waiting to buy their lunch. As the directors of the OW, Labra and Labra claim that all of this is "thanks to the organizational consciousness that they had acquired during the OW" (2000:95) but make no distinction between the ingenuity, creativity, and already existing organizational knowledge of the women, on the one hand, and the specific

contributions of the OW toward mobilizing that knowledge. Elsewhere, Labra and Labra are more critical of the OW, detailing some of the real obstacles to its effective implementation. During another OW, called the Caritas Mozambique 'Course' OW, for example, leaders were caught embezzling money and food from the common resource pool and the workshop quickly fell into disarray as participants felt cheated by those who were supposed to be their equals. When the dust eventually settled, this OW did manage to organize a group of women with experience in a large textile mill to create small-scale garment production enterprise. The cooperative enjoyed some success when cooperative members were eventually able to iron out some of the frictions in the groups, but, ironically, it eventually collapsed when the same organization that had sponsored the OW in the first place, Caritas, undercut the market by donating to the local community a large quantity of second hand clothes.

Empirically speaking, political projects do not inscribe themselves on homogeneous, abstract space any more than they emerge organically from homogeneous, abstract space. Rather, lodged in dialogic relation within a shifting web of political, social, and economic circumstance, these projects are beholden to the questions and concerns of funders, to access to capital and political opportunity, and to the demands of practicality and sustainability. Of course, this does not mean that said projects do not also attempt to create such a space in which one method or one approach is universally applicable. As Henri Lefebvre writes, "abstract space *is not* homogeneous; it simply *has* homogeneity as its goal, its orientation, its 'lens'" (1991:287), and it is in just such a

space—the space of "the Excluded," as it were—in which the OW has attempted to project its own vision of the problems presented to the poor and unemployed across the world. In practice, however, de Morais' theory of organizational consciousness, the method of a radical democratic pedagogy, and, ultimately, the idea that the world can be divided into two parts (i.e. the Included and the Excluded), however successfully they are framed as "solutions," do not always help the OW to maneuver the concrete particulars of contexts. In fact, by bringing into sharp focus the issue of consciousness, they oftentimes obscure recognition of the immediate political and economic structures that impact a project's success or failure, completely apart from the "mentality" of its participants. While the odd mention of failure in reporting this far on the OW should not be dismissed, the purpose of this chapter is not to evaluate the efficacy of the workshop as a whole but rather to understand the particular social impact of its discourse of organizational consciousness on the already ongoing social process of organizing in Génesis. Maintaining the perspective that the OW is but one aspect of organizing in the Génesis cooperative, it is possible to understand with greater clarity the relationship between consciousness and the ideal of autonomy as distinct yet interrelated moments in the historically driven social process of generating new concepts of social justice and fair trade.

THE ORIGINS OF GÉNESIS

Génesis is the second cooperative enterprise project initiated by CSD and based on the philosophy that the means of production should be democratically held in common by its workers. From CSD's perspective, the principal and immediate objective of this project was to generate a sustainable, if relatively small, source of employment for the municipality of Ciudad Sandino.

When Génesis was formally inaugurated in December 2006, it consisted of a group of eighteen women from Ciudad Sandino whom CSD had recruited to be the founding members. Though the *socias*, as they are termed, would eventually gain full administrative control and ownership, the role of the NGO in the early stages of the enterprise was to provide the necessary training, legal and organizational support, and start-up capital in the form of low-interest loans. Based on a constantly evolving template that was first generated in the NGO's original cooperative project, an industrial sewing cooperative, CSD envisioned that socias as doing the bulk of the legwork in building the cooperative from the ground up, in the process of which the socias would learn by trial and error, rather than simulation, to develop effective administrative, managerial, and decision-making structures for their future cooperative. This meant that, while the NGO established the broad guidelines and conditions for membership in the cooperative—for example, that each hour of work would contribute a pre-determined amount of social capital toward the "buy-in" of 500 dollars—the task of constructing the spinning plant facility fell to the socias themselves.

The original members of the cooperative comprised a diverse group of women ranging in age from 18 to 80 who claimed a diverse range of political and social identities. They possessed various professional, pre-professional, and other specialized skills and experiences. And, coming from many different socio-economic and class situations, they ultimately had many different reasons for wanting to be part of the project. Even before they were part of Génesis, let alone the Génesis OW, it is certainly safe to say that they possessed organizational consciousnesses that could only very awkwardly be described as "artisanal" or "individualistic." For one, "as mothers [and heads of household]," remarked Jasmine, a Génesis socia,

> We know how to organize. We cook, we clean, we manage the kids, and we try to make ends meet when we need to. You have to be organized in order manage all of the tasks of the day. Sometimes it's impossible to do it all by yourself, so you also have find support in other people.

Others gained important organizational and leadership knowledge while in the Sandinista military during the 1979 revolution or the subsequent Contra War, participating in workers' unions during the 1990s, or, in the case of one, employment as a lawyer for the national police.

Adelina, a mother of three and a grandmother of one, considered herself to be more fortunate than most in Ciudad Sandino when she decided to join the cooperative because, in contrast many, both her husband and eldest son worked as carpenters and thus brought money into the house, however episodically. It was only when work was slow for them, that is to say, that she needed to find temporary work outside of the house, and even then she could usually rely on her sister for some pay (or at the very least, credit)

who operated a pulpería (small shop) only a block away. Since moving to Ciudad Sandino in the early 1990s, Adelina had attempted to work several different jobs in the capital city of Managua, but, as inter-city bus routes did not develop until the late 1990s, travel was exceedingly difficult, time intensive, and costly (amounting to as much as half a day's pay), and so she ultimately had to quit.

Joaquina was also an original member of the Génesis cooperative. Born in the city of León as one of thirteen siblings. Joaquina dedicated 24 years to military life starting, including with the Sandinista army during the revolution. Although it provided her with the opportunity to obtain her law degree, military service was also extremely difficult hostile and abusive toward women, and so in 2000, prompted by mistreatment and blatant corruption in the ranks, she decided to relinquish her position. Unfortunately, finding independent work as a lawyer was difficult, and so until 2005 she remained unemployed, depending on the support of her four children.

The initial months of Génesis' pre-cooperative phase solidified that organizational knowledge while also creating ample opportunity for new organizational experiences. While some of these may appear at first glance to involve the navigation of mundane, bureaucratic activities, all, as Weber (1978:956) point out, are central to the operation of large-scale enterprises in the political, administrative, and economic realm. The first steps in long, arduous process occurred during the initial organizational meetings in January of 2007, which covered the business of electing the provisional executive board

(*junta directiva*), the purpose of which was to organize and direct the the general membership's efforts.[54]

Recognizing that the cooperative's membership would eventually need to grow significantly to meet the demands of a full scale cotton spinning plant, the junta's first act was to canvass for new members in Ciudad Sandino. Lacking a central public forum, however, doing so required the organization of the group's efforts to go door to door or to arrange group informational meetings. Although the tools for accomplishing this were only a white board and a marker, around which they gathered one member's home, the act of drawing up a work plan while working around the responsibilities of each socia to the cooperative and home life was an immensely complicated undertaking. Moreover, while the tasks setting up and running meetings and evaluating and screening prospective members were easy for some, others were forced to deal directly with personal limitations such as a fear of public speaking. The coordination of the sum of these endeavors, and the recognition that each was responsible for communicating with the group instead of making her own way, proved a valuable skill set as the project moved along.

By the end of the month Génesis had expanded their membership to just under fifty socias, including a number of men.[55] Although the labor thus far contributed toward each one's social capital (i.e. "buy-in"), they were nevertheless in the tenuous situation of working without direct remuneration. Socias therefore voted to form two shifts, each working half a day, to give individuals the flexibility to be able to tend to other business.

With this organization of time and with the junta coordinating between the two shifts, they began the physically intense labor of preparing the grounds for the facility. They cut down or uprooted trees and bushes using only small hatchets and machetes, hauled off mounds of trash and rusty scrap metal, and set up a small office and meeting place in the shade of a Guanacaste tree. An ongoing project during this time was also to produce the concrete blocks and *losetas* (long, concrete slabs) for the primary structure of the facility. This task was significantly aided by the infrastructure left behind by a now-defunct concrete block-making enterprise (*bloquera*) that CSD had sponsored. Each of the two shifts divided up into three teams and established a rudimentary *bloquera* production line. With a tractor and trailer loaned by CSD, one team made trips to a dry river bed known as La Trinidad, dug up sand, and hauled it back to the industrial complex. Another group mixed the appropriate proportions of sand, concrete, and water to make the block mixture. And yet another group operated the *bloquera*, a startlingly loud machine that compressed the mixture into cinder blocks.

Meanwhile, the junta performed the organizational role of prioritizing tasks, constructing long and short term work plans, and directing the group's efforts toward specific goals, making sure that the labor involved was divided up equitably. Yet, power operated in the other direction as well. In constant dialogue with the general membership, and upon constant (and publicly broadcast) threat of replacement, the junta was not allowed to sequester themselves to the "office" and send out directives. Rather, they were required to worked side by side with everyone else. "It is important to show

that no one thinks of herself as more important than the others," explained Laya, the treasurer, "We all do the same work and contribute the same amount."

Of course, Génesis socias were often joined in their labor by monthly delegations hosted by CSD, mostly church or university groups from the U.S. From CSD's perspective, having these delegations work alongside socias in the construction of the cooperative served multiple purposes, including the education of delegates on issues of concern in Nicaragua, fostering relationships of solidarity between delegates and Nicaraguans, and galvanizing a fundraising base. By giving delegates the experience of working closely with specific projects like the Génesis co-op, in other words, the Northerners often became personally invested in its success and tended to redouble their funding-raising efforts upon return to the U.S., which would prove useful as the project moved along.

Building the social structure of the cooperative was a somewhat less straightforward task. Those who had never before taken on leadership roles—some of whom, in fact, had never held a "formal" job before—found themselves directing the activities of forty people. In so doing, they learned how to be assertive without appearing officious. Others, including the men, found themselves in the unfamiliar position of taking directions from women in their community, forcing them, to some extent, to cease treating their coworkers as women and to understand them to possess a common membership and equal status. A conversation with Victor, a young many of 21 who

joined the cooperative several months in, illustrates his experience of overcoming gender

as a barrier to cooperativism:

> FRANCISCO: At first, I thought it was strange that here we were doing all of this construction work, you know, man's work, and the six of us men were in the minority. We didn't hardly have a say over anything that was going on.
>
> JOSH: Did you already know how to make blocks or do this kind of construction?
>
> FRANCISCO: Well, no. We were just learning then. But this kind of labor is something that we are used to doing. Now, I think, the difference is that we know one another as individuals, we trust one another more, and don't really take instructions from anybody because we work together and organize ourselves as a group. Nobody gets upset when someone tells him that something needs to be done.

Of course, the ability to working together as a group did not pan out for everyone

involved. Five members dropped out during the first six months and three more were

ejected for being disruptive and divisive.

While much of the physical labor was done by socias themselves, contributions

also came from outside of the cooperative, specifically from CSD. One of CSD's

strategies was to stage training sessions to build skills in infra-group politics, including

courses on leadership, administration, and philosophies of cooperativism, as well as

extra-group politics, such as business management, fair trade, and Nicaraguan

cooperative law. Business management, for example, was intended to teaching the basic

skills necessary to think about profits margins and accounting and was offered to all

socias regardless of educational background. Depending on who excelled, socias voted

their next treasurer accordingly. Embroiled in a conflict with The Fair Trade Zone during

that period of time, it was, of course, the legal dimensions of the cooperative and the details of their lending practices, rather than, for example, fair trade, that received perhaps the most attention in their seminars. In fact, during this time, CSD began the practice of having co-op representatives sign promissory notes when any funds were dispersed and also had the junta directiva work closely alongside the lawyer that they had hired to write the *Acta Constitutiva* (constitution), to receive certification from the Ministry of Labor (*Ministerio del Trabajo*) and the National Registry of Cooperatives (*Registro Nacional de Cooperativas*) so that they were apprised of all of the legal requirements of membership. The legal establishment of the cooperative did not of course stop there. In August and September of 2007, CSD organized a three week-long training session that all socias were required to attend. The goal, as Melissa put it, was "to enumerate the rights and obligations of members of the cooperative and to make sure that they understood them and abided by them." By building a "legal consciousness" among socias, she continued, socias would see their position in the cooperative as bound by certain regulations that they needed to understand. From socias perspectives, these three weeks were filled with a great deal of legal language about cooperativism of which many, save those who had been working on the writing of the constitution, were familiar. As Merry (1990) and Mertz (1994) point out, however, while legal consciousness may on the surface appear to be about attaining basic linguistic competence in legalistic language, the discourse of law also shapes the ways in which people think about themselves, their rights, and their obligations.

Coming to understand these rights and obligations, in fact, came to have a powerful effect on the way that socias conceptualized their membership. Though there existed no single idiom in everyday parlance for that social transformation, when pressed, socias often characterized the feelings of mutual respect for one another, regardless of individual political preferences, religious identities, or interpersonal differences, in terms of "civic solidarity" (*solidaridad cívica*). A group interview with eleven socias during August of 2007 sheds some light on the idea. Cecilia explained,

> The way we treat one another is based on mutual respect and professionalism. We do not pour our hearts out to one another or bring our problems from home to work, even though we've all invested our lives in this project.

Dalia responded:

> Civic solidarity is how one aligns oneself (*alinearse)* and one's attitudes toward the group, recognizing that, regardless of disagreements we might have, a common thread binds our fates together. Sometimes that thread may be strained by disagreements or outside factors, but we've learned that in order to make it strong we need to communicate and respect one another.

Often coupled with mention of consciousness/conscience (*conciencia*), civil solidarity is, by contrast with the word's connotations in English, not some individuated substance to be "gained" or "acquired." Rather, it is a goal, a matter of "aligning oneself" (*alinearse*) in the reflexive sense of the word so that one's relationships are built on mutual respect and one's attitudes and outlooks are harmonious with those of others. As Cecilia pointed out, "gaining" a collective sense of civic ethic is not enough for solidarity in its own right. Individuals also have to adopt as part of their conception of themselves, and thus in terms of their orientation toward the group, a relational identification as a civic person:

"We each have our individual jobs in the cooperative, but we also have to understand that part of the job is a responsibility to other people in the cooperative."

For many, the transformation of the landscape served as a symbol for the social transformation of the group. Out of a tangled, rubble-filled mess appeared a flat, dusty area bearing the promise of future construction. Alicia summarized some of the views of her coworkers during a second group interview:

> We could visualize where the factory was going to be built…[pointing into the distance] the main entrance over there, and the factory floor over here. We are poor women, only a handful of us have a high school diploma. Up until now, we never thought it would possible to achieve such a thing…a factory that we own…in our lives.

Echoes of Marx's architect abound in Alicia's imagination of the factory as well as their collective capacity to own and run it. But while an architect, by virtue of self-consciousness, may erect a building in her imagination, realizing the building, giving it materiality, is a different matter altogether. The work of construction, in other words, is an intensely social process that requires a shared idea of what is going on, an effective and fair division of labor, an equitable scheme for remunerating labor, and a common understanding of the conditions of possibility, given resources like land and capital. Apart from the facility itself, the social experience of organizing a cooperative is further complicated by the drive to construct a democratic and participatory administrative structure based on an idea of common membership. Although the reality of the matter is of course infinitely messier than can be easily summarized here, shot through with the many complexities and inequalities of everyday interaction, the model of cooperativism

embraced by socias is one that seeks to avoid the systematic alienation from decision-making and other creative activities that is so common for workers in conventional enterprises. In effect, part of becoming a cooperative members—in this case, by contributing the labor required for the membership "buy-in"—is the primary social process by which each *socia* comes to understand that she is (sometimes quite literally) an architect of the project. As Ariela told me in an interview in August of 2007:

> As a group, we are building our economic future. Everyone has the right to speak and be heard and make their opinions known. And as cooperative members it is important for all of us to listen. We must reach consensus, our visions must be in harmony with one another.

Given this ethnographic context, the notion that consciousness can be "gained" is no more germane to the social practice of organizing than the idea that human beings exercise the capacity for rational choice.

ORGANIZING THE ORGANIZERS: CONSTRUCTING A "MODEL" WORKSHOP

Roger and I greeted Tobías in the largest of the three room in CSD's main office, where he was carefully arranging his notepad and binder on a wicker table. After some pleasantries, he jumped right into the prepared lecture intended to prime us on the workshop's philosophy, its basic set-up, and the highlights of its implementation over the years, pausing only occasionally for questions. When we resurfaced forty-five minutes later, it occurred to me that Roger and the other CSD staff member who was in attendance at the beginning of the meeting had both left the room to accept phone calls and had failed to return. Tobías and I chatted briefly about my role as the technical

director, about the differences between the OW and the Grameen Bank micro-credit

model, and about the institutional biases against small producers and individualized

entrepreneurial activity that make them untenable in the open market. He repeated his

position that the more appropriate and effective solution to the structural problem of

unemployment lay in the promise of large-scale enterprises. "The Génesis cooperative,"

he continued, "will provide a model case study for how consciousness-building,

capacitation, is necessary for such an enterprise to succeed."

Our next stop was the introductory meeting with the Génesis socias, which Tobías

titled the "Organizing the Organizers" (*Organizar los Organizadores*). For reasons still

unknown to me, this meeting invited the participation of only the twelve members of the

junta directiva, rather than the full membership of the cooperative. Under the tin roof of

the *bloquera*, this group assembled their multi-colored plastic chairs in a semi-circle

opening up toward Tobías, who signaled the beginning of the meeting by opening up his

blue notebook and laying out the basic principles of the workshop in much the same

manner as he had done for me: that the organizational reigns would be handed over to the

workshop's participants; that the "objective" of the capacitation was open-ended and was

open to participants' definition; and that the role of the facilitator was only to function as

an intermediary, encouraging the active and critical reflection of the participants.

Though the messages were clear in and of themselves, how they were

communicated seemed quite contradictory to me. During the meeting or afterward,

Tobías asked no questions about the Génesis cooperative or its history, nor about the

specific organizational experiences or skills that socias may have gained thus far. In other words, the concepts of organizational consciousness and conscientization were imparted to the socias, who were in turn positioned as possessing an artisanal consciousness, a mentality, he explained, that is fundamentally resistant to adapt on its own to more complicated contexts. In contrast to the message that he was there only to encourage the participants, moreover, his presumed role as an authority on artisan consciousness was further solidified when he proceeded to discuss his expertise in development, providing examples of the 25 years worth of OWs that he had staged as a facilitator. Taken as a whole, the rhetorical effect of this communicative event was to subsume all of the various contingencies, particularities, and processes that had thus far given form to Génesis under a "model OW."

Tobías then continued to explain that, as a matter of precedent, the structures of model OWs have typically broken down into one of two types. The "course OW," on the one hand, works best for mass capacitations, including large-scale employment generation projects in urban communities. The "enterprise OW," on the other hand, is run in the case of existing communities who seek organizational training. Normal circumstances for the Génesis OW, given the cooperative's long-term goals, would of course dictate the enterprise model. The problem, Tobías told the junta—recognizing that at least one condition of the OW, the timing, was not within the power of the socias to decide—was that the project was in such an early stage that it did not yet even have the "bicycle" of production on which they were to be capacitated. In a move that left very

little room for participants' creative problem solving, he proceeded to indicate that the course-style OW was the only choice available. The socias complied, and within the next half hour, hands shooting up in the air one after another like a classroom, the group decided upon twelve courses to offer as part of the OW and identified family members, friends, or acquaintances whom they could hire with OW funds to teach brick-making, electricity, carpentry, cooking, management, accounting, welding, design, beauty, and English language. These courses, they voted, would not only be open to the general membership of the cooperative but also to the broader Ciudad Sandino community.

Last but not least, embracing Tobías's entreaty for them to become the "organizers" of the workshop, the executive board made themselves the *de facto* leaders of the OW. It was only when the results of that meeting were reported to the General Assembly the following day that most socias discovered, first, that the allegedly open-ended workshop had already been organized, and, second, that they knew almost nothing about it. The majority of this meeting was then dedicated to answering a handful of questions on the OW: why certain classes had been chosen and not others, the relevance of the class to the cooperative, why the junta directiva did not consult the general membership, and whom was going to be paid to teach these classes.

Over the next forty days, socias and community members, side by side, took classes of their own choosing. The junta, meanwhile, continued to operate under the now self-applied title of "organizers," overseeing the implementation of these classes. One of many consequences of this sudden differentiation roles was that the *de facto* non-

organizer socias were now grouped with the Ciudad Sandino community members. They found themselves in the position of being the recipients of lectures on the "vices" (*vicios*) of organization, the artisan mentality (*conciencia artesanal*), and of course the idea of gaining organizational consciousness (*conciencia organizacional*), a now common term amongst the *junta* that it was part of their role as organizers to "instill" (*inculcar*), "stimulate" (*estimular*), or "raise up" (*levantar*)—all in the transitive senses of these words.

The OW also had disruptive effects in the administrative structure of the cooperative. Having regarded transparency as an important component of leadership, the junta had up to this point taken to spending the day working along the other socias, then retiring to the meeting area at the end of the work day where they would detail a work plan for the following day or week and discuss finances or any membership issues that may have arisen since the previous meeting. Sometimes going on for hours, these meetings were open to the anyone who desired to bring an issue to their attention, check in on the junta, or simply sit and listen. As one socia put it, "We watch them carefully because everywhere power breeds *generalillos* [literally, "little generals"]...in our cooperative, the junta is where they should be, with *la asamblea* [the general assembly], not above them." This changed once the junta doubled as organizers of the OW. Per Tobías's suggestion, organizational meetings were closed to the public in order to avoid, as he put it, the encumbrance of "every dissenting voice of the whole group." What was to Tobías a matter of efficiency, however, was to others a sudden lack of transparency.

Indeed, as María put it, comparing the position of the socias to the community members also taking the OW classes, "We have no more right to know what is going on in our cooperative than anyone else in Ciudad Sandino."

In an ethnographic view, the discontentment of the socias with the junta directiva was nowhere more visible than in the whispers of small groups who congregated for lunch or those who walked home together, talking about their day's encounters with junta members. For many of these socias term "organizational consciousness" (*conciencia organizacional*)—as *conciencia* in Spanish means both "consciousness" and "conscience"—was the topic of a great many discussions and jokes. For example, the end of the OW was celebrated by a work fair (*fería del trabajo*), in which class-goers were encouraged to show off their new skills, such as being able to repair an electrical device, to built a wooden table or chair, or to use a computer. Afterwards, I accompanied a group to celebrate at the local cantina, and in what turned out to be a late and drunken night, one socia was inspired to parody the popular radio song, "Conciencia," by the Bronx-based Bachata band Aventura. The new version, which was widely and surreptitiously repeated thereafter, reveals a measure disdain for the language of consciousness and the perceived condescension of its use by the junta during the OW. The chorus line, *Mi conciencia me domina, una voz a mí me dice que tu eres infiel* ("My conscience dominates me, a voice tells me that you are unfaithful") became *Mi conciencia me domina, una voz a mí me dice que somos lentos* ("Mi consciousness dominates me, a voice tells me that we are slow-witted"). Likewise, *esa voz también me*

dice que mi vida es aburrida que cambie mi forma de ser ("that voice also tells me that my life is boring, that I should change my way of being") became *esa voz también me dice que mi vida es inefectiva, tengo que cambiar mi forma de trabajar* ("that voice also tells me that my life is ineffective, I have to change my way of working").

In the coming weeks, rumors of fraud and theft came to a head. General assembly meetings resumed with the OW's conclusion, but, instead of being dedicated to planning construction, most of the discussion revolved around nepotism in selecting and paying teachers and the lack of transparency in accounting for the OW's funds, which had amounted to nearly thirty thousand dollars. That discussion, however, was cut short in early December of 2007 on a note of tension and uncertainty when socias left for their scheduled holiday vacation (which in Nicaragua is four weeks, covering La Purísima and Christmas). When they returned to work in January, the junta discovered that the *comite de vigilancia* (vigilance committee), a sub-committee within the general assembly, had mobilized a majority of the socias to vote no confidence in the junta and demand a financial audit. The accusations of fraud and theft, even though they were never really substantiated, compelled three members of the original junta to drop out of the cooperative altogether.

In the months following the OW, trying to come to terms with the difference between the "model OW' and what had happened at Génesis, I decided to ask many of the remaining socias what they perceived the goal of the OW to have been and to what extent they though that it had succeeded or failed. The results, I think, demonstrate the

great degree to which the socias had actually been dispossessed of the knowledge, language, and concepts of the workshop, thus empowering others to be its "organizers." About half understood it to be about generating employment in the Ciudad Sandino community, the success of which was measured by the ability to take in some extra money on account of the new skills. The rest understood the OW to be a basic organizational training for the cooperative, but took issue with the distraction that it represented from the primary goal of getting the cooperative on its feet. Perhaps most noteworthy was the change in these individuals' attitudes toward the cooperative, given the recent conflicts. Whereas the general attitude the previous summer had been quite optimistic, three-quarters of the socias now believed it to be a distinct possibility either that the cooperatives in general were a doomed model or, if not that, that this cooperative would fail before even opening its doors—a fear that was only exacerbated by the delay in the construction schedule for which the OW was responsible.

With food prices on the rise in Nicaragua—a larger event that was later termed the "world food crisis"—Génesis socias were also feeling the pinch of the temporarily non-remunerative aspects of their cooperative work. In fact, in Ciudad Sandino markets, the prices of staples like rice and beans had doubled in only a year, forcing many socias with only one other stable household income to eliminate from their budgets non-essentials such as vegetables and fruit, laundry soap, or bus fare. In this context, working without pay in the cooperative was a heavy burden. By May, several more socias dropped out to search for work, while others decided to pursue outside work simultaneously. For

example, some decided to outsource their "buy-in" labor to family members, friends, or neighbors at a fraction of the normal social capital rate while they pursued work elsewhere, thus allowing them to maintain their membership in the event of its success. Another group decided to pool resources and draw on some of their newly minted OW skills to start a small, informal bakery.

For the newly elected junta directiva, this was of course a troubling development. Arguing that the process of being a cooperative member was as much a social as an economic, they decided to require all social capital labor to be performed by the person him or herself. Consequently, socias were torn between wanting to maintain their membership in the cooperative but, economically speaking, not being able to. In June of 2008, as a solution to that struggle, the junta and the general membership together voted to petition CSD, the funder of the project, to provide a temporary loan to match, in direct payment to the socias, any social capital value generated. As Hernán, the new treasurer of the cooperative, remarked, "Now that people can eat, we can get on with aligning ourselves (*alinearnos*) as a cooperative."

UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES

At first glance, it might seem that the topic of sub-prime mortgages that dominated economic news in the U.S. in late 2007 and 2008 would be unconnected to sharply rising prices of food in Nicaragua, let alone daily economic difficulties that nearly forced almost twenty members of the Génesis cooperative to drop out in search of

extra income. Yet, what started out as a largely isolated financial crisis in developed industrial countries quickly transformed itself into a generalized crisis, taking center stage in global financial markets and roiling debt and equity markets in emerging economies as well. The economic crisis in the U.S. eventually came to be termed a recession, and one effect of that recession, especially in the wake of the collapse of the financial derivatives markets, was to compel financial speculators to seek quick returns by reinvesting trillions of dollars from equities and mortgage bonds in food and raw materials, which tend to retain a more or less constant demand (Macwhirter 2008). The worldwide impact that U.S. commodities speculation had on world food prices, in turn, came to be prime contributing factor to what would later be called the "world food crisis" (Lappé 2008).[56]

To make matters worse, food commodities speculation in 2007 and 2008 happened to coincide with drop in food reserves due to poor harvests and crop shortfalls from natural disasters (i.e. extended drought in Australia, heat waves in Californa's San Joaquin Valley, rains in Kerala), rising oil prices (leading to heightened costs of fertlizers, in some cases doubling the price within the six months before 2008), as well as the subsidization of biofuel usage (resulting in lower food stocks for human consumption, especially in the global South, Mitchell 2008). As Martin Khor (2008a, 2008b) of the Third World Network points out, however, all of these things would have remained relatively isolated phenomena if it were not for the trade liberalization measures going on since the 1970s that encouraged food independent countries to become food importing countries, that opened them up to food imports that are subsidized by Western

governments and undercut smallholder agriculture, and that made food as a commodity subject to speculation. The result, of course, was a dramatic increase in price of some of the most basic international food commodities on international markets. According to the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, between March 2007 and March 2008 global food prices increased an average of 43 percent: wheat prices increased by 146 percent, soybeans by 71 percent, corn by 41 percent, and rice by 29 percent. Of course, globally speaking, of the approximately one billion people who subsist on less than one dollar a day and the 200 million more who survive on less than 50 cents per day, increasing food prices have had the greatest effect on these food-insecure populations, who spend on average 50 to 60 percent or more of their income on food (IFPRI, International Food Policy Research Institute).

In Nicaragua, the systemic effects of this economic storm were felt broadly and acutely, especially after September of 2007 when Hurricane Felix caused severe crop damage in the North Atlantic region of Nicaragua (called RAAN). Almost immediately, the average price of white maize and red beans, two cereals that represent more than half of the diet of Nicaraguans, rose by 20.5% and 80.7% respectively (WFP 2008), and the cost of the basic food basket (*canasta básica*), a figure that is determined by the National Bank of Nicaragua and that is meant to represent the very basic elements of a family's diet, increased 33.5% (Envío 2008).[57] This increase in basic food costs is significant in Nicaragua given that the per capita National Gross Income (NGI) is only 980 dollars per year, 46 percent live in poverty and 15.1 percent live in extreme poverty, which means

that the median income of the poor before the food crisis in 2001 only covered about 60

percent of the basic food basket per month.[58] In 2008, it was calculated to only cover

about 26 percent per month (Observecon 2009).

In Ciudad Sandino, Nicaragua, what this meant in everyday terms was that the

price of beans in the marketplace rose from 18 córdobas ($0.90) per pound to over 30

($1.50) córdobas per pound ($1.50). Rice increased from 4 córdobas ($0.20) per pound

to 13 córdobas ($0.65) per pound. Even tortillas, which had cost a single córdoba for as

long as almost anyone could remember, rose to three córdobas each. For many Ciudad

Sandino residents, including Génesis socias, this did not mean that families necessarily

ate less all around. Rather, they and their families often skipped meals (socias often

worked all day at the co-op without food), and eliminated the most costly elements of

meals, such as vegetables, fruit, milk, cheese, and meat, or non-food related items like

clothing. For the majority of socias, the situation was more or less the same. Having, at

best, one wage earner in the family while the other was working without pay in the co-op

meant that the food budget bought less and less every month. Adelina explained that,

since the wage that her husband and son brought in working as carpenters bought less and

less of the family's provisions once Adelina started working without pay in the co-op, one

of her family's strategies was to not only cut out unnecessary elements of the food budget

—meaning that they were eating beans and rice for every meal every day—but also to

use laundry soap for showers as well (however harsh and itchy it was on the skin).

Moreover, Adelina continued, that tortillas cost 3 córdobas and that they frequently were

not oftentimes considered a luxury was perhaps the most visible sign that something was wrong in the economy, it was a *barbaridad* (atrocity) and *vergonzoso* (shameful) that someone somewhere was profiting off of the hunger of poor people: "Even during the 1980s, when war was everywhere, you know, there was at least still food...It doesn't matter to rich people how much a tortilla costs—they usually eat bread anyways—but we eat tortillas, beans and rice, or we go to bed hungry."

For families, the pressure of these rising prices often made working without pay for even half a day in the co-op even more difficult than it already was. Consequently, in a general assembly meeting in February of 2008, with with some socias missing even weeks of their work shifts at a time, it became clear that almost half of the membership were seriously considering dropping out of the project entirely so that they could pursue other job opportunities that would at least pay in the interim. This was the case with Giselle, for example, whose training as an accountant found her a job rather quickly and who dropped out of the co-op and has not returned. Several other socias, discovering a loophole in the rules and regulations regarding their labor-based buy-in for membership, found outside work during the day and payed unemployed neighbors or friends a small amount to work their shifts at the co-op. Still other socias, who had started a small bakery enterprise during the OW, decided to revive the project in order to make ends meet while maintaining their membership in the co-op. As Sandra explained, it was not meant to be a long-term project, but rather something to "bring in some money in the mean time so that [socias] could, in the long term, still work towards building the cotton

spinning cooperative. By late February, as the socias started to dig the foundation of the building, complaints began to emerge between socias and non-socias, usually men who were working as proxies—especially regarding the quality of their work, the men's treatment of women workers, and disappearing supplies—and other socias, whose schedules were now saturated with other projects like putting together a bakery or working other jobs, could no longer find the necessary amount of time to attend co-op meetings or participate in a meaningful dialogue about the co-op's progress. Combined with flagging donations via CSD from the U.S. for materials, the progress quickly came to a standstill.

In March of 2008, unsettled by the socias' use of proxy labor, contrary to what they saw as a fundamental part of the social process of becoming a socia, as well as by the bakery enterprise, almost as much of a distraction from the task at hand as the OW was, CSD offered the new Génesis junta directiva a deal. If the junta would vote to disallow socias' use of proxy labor, ensuring that all labor was done by socias themselves, then the NGO would find a way to match every hour of buy-in labor (valued at 7 córdobas or $0.35) with an equal amount in wage so that socias could return to work at the co-op yet still have some income. The socias accepted the deal, and although many complained that the meager wage of about 50 córdobas per day was still insufficient to cover their costs of living, almost everyone agreed that it was better than nothing. The following week, they returned to work laying the foundation of the cooperative. As of this writing, the Génesis cooperative has completed the main structure of the facility, and

CSD has acquired for them the necessary production machinery, purchased with a loan of 230 thousand dollars, the collateral for which includes about 100 dollars scraped together from individual donations, CSD's personal retirement funds, as well as the land and the building. After a significant delay due to the aforementioned internal issues in the cooperative as well as financial limitations, Génesis anticipates beginning installation in January so that training and production may begin in early February.

CONCLUSIONS

In a trenchant critique of the use and abuse of the concept of "rationality" in economics, John Adams writes:

> The strength of the concept of rationality is perhaps that it insists that in some underlying way all people are the same...a welcome alternative to many colonial racial doctrines and to many early views in development economics of the peasant as a hopelessly inert drudge, to be saved only by being pulled headlong into industry...Still, in making this simplification all has been lost of what might most directly be called the "cultural content" of peasant life...There is no *content* in being rational. The content comes from the cultural and attitudinal realms and it is the interaction of those realms with specific economic circumstances that gives rise to observable behaviors about which something useful can be said. [1982:666]

Something similar could and, in many cases, still should be said about consciousness. The strength of the concept is similar to that of rationality: people are not isolated beings, they live, labor and learn in "definite relations" with one another. Yet, at the same time, there is no content in consciousness itself, outside of a *consciousness of* some set of historical, social, environmental, or economic relations. The content, in other words,

comes from the specific "social processes," in Harvey's (1996) term, that exist independent of the wills of individuals.

E. P. Thompson (1966) demonstrated with great aplomb the intersection of these various social forces in the formation of working class consciousness in England. This consciousness, in other words, did not come about by way of the tides of history, but rather through a historical (which is to say, social, cultural, and economic) process in which the working class underwent a total transformation of its imagination of itself in relation to society. As John Burdick (1998) further points out in his study of the black consciousness movement and its close affinity with popular religious traditions in Brazil, certain social phenomena cannot simply be dismissed as breeders of false consciousness (e.g. ideology, religion) while others are embraced *a priori* as "true" (e.g. class, political economy). The distinction between false and true consciousness, in fact, is an unproductive dichotomy if the manifestation of social consciousness is continuous with the warps and wefts of the social fabric. To take the content of a thought or act or social process as a mere appearance, dissolving the particular in the universal (here the economic substructure), is a kind of destructive analysis, as it were, because social consciousness is, if anything a *Gestalt* in the sense that a shared political subjectivity, sense of community or idea about what is "right" or "just" is greater than the sum of those individual sentiments.

If, on the other hand, the work of understanding social consciousness is taken to be ethnographic—acknowledging, of course, that the term *consciousness* is a very

provisional and by no means universal tool social analysis—what is opened up in the

process is a renewed understanding of the many ways in which people from disparate

social locations may chart their courses toward a shared, political outlook: How do

people come to understand themselves as part of historical, economic, gendered,

environmental, or racial struggles? How do those people narrate, collectively and

individually, personal or social transformations? Or, alternately, how might the language

and vocabulary of consciousness also be appropriated for political effect? In order to

answer these questions, however, it is first necessary to move beyond a simplistic notion

of consciousness as an objective social phenomena that is "gained" or "ratcheted up" and,

by being confused with an object, tends to obscure the ongoing and emergent social

process of organizing, arguing, debating, compromising, and changing one's mind that

inevitably goes on beyond the scenes of consciousness-raising. Karen Brodkin (2007)

gives a great deal of insight into the ethnography of consciousness in *Making Democracy*

Matter: Identity and Activism in Los Angeles. Centering on the stories of 16 activists

recounting their journeys toward political consciousness and activism in service workers'

unions, Brodkin suggests that, for some, becoming the target of "othering" and

encountering the "powers of institutionalized whiteness" galvanized activism, while

others charted their course instead through experiences of escaping privilege and

undergoing radical, sometimes painful, changes in thinking. Brodkin therefore stresses

how the political and the personal came together for these activists, forming an

"organizing tradition" that is invigorated by, if not shared experiences, then shared

understandings of "who we are" and political subjectivities rooted in what is right and just.

In the case of Génesis, *conciencia*—or rather the concept of civic solidarity, which elicits the same kind of process that Brodkin (2007) describes—is perhaps better thought of not as social "consciousness" so much as social "conscience," referring to the moral values, feelings rectitude and integrity, and the faculty to therefore distinguish actions as right or wrong. Yet, instead of operating from within an individual, civic solidarity as a kind of social conscience works on the level of a social process, organizing and sustaining equitable, professional relationships between socias and making power and knowledge transparent, regardless of individual difference. It is, in other words, an ongoing process of "aligning oneself" against the onslaughts of economic hardship, divisive, self-interest, and the temptation to forego broad, social inclusion in the creative process—a vision of organization that ironically becomes visible in the aftermath of the OW and the fragmentation, conflict, and mistrust that it caused.

Although the OW has since its inception in the 1960s been built upon the recognition that all development projects are inscribed in concrete relations of power— between communities and their surroundings, between funders and beneficiaries, and among the stakeholders themselves—the ideas of organizational and artisan consciousness differs sharply from the full range of the social process that is involved in socias' organizational strategies and consciousness-building techniques. For the OW, consciousness, by contrast, occupies the narrow space of "objective" interactions between

workers and the material world, and it is for that reason that participants may be said to have "consciousnesses" that fall into rough-hewn typologies. It is also by virtue of the concept's decontextualization from the many dimensions of its underlying social process, stripping the idea down into a narrow set of "objective" material practices, that the OW may claim to "instill" consciousness by creating the "ideal conditions" for effecting transformation. The usefulness of an ethnography of the OW is that, in the encounter between the two discourses of *concienca—conciencia* as articulated by the workshop practitioners, on the one hand, and *conciencia* as social conscience or civil solidarity in Génesis' already established practices of organizing, on the other—conflict arises, but certainly not without churning up in its wake heated discussions about what is right, just or fair in the workplace.

In her discussion of the concept of "scenario," performance studies theorist Diana Taylor (2003) provides a useful dramaturgical tool for conceptualizing the impact of the OW on the already existing social processes and practices of organization in Génesis. Taking as a starting point the assumption that embodied practices function as sources of social knowledge, Taylor's scenario is similar to Foucault's (1972) notion of "discursive formation" insofar as both function as analytical devices for challenging the apparent unity of the various "stages" upon which social action takes place. The idea of scenario, in particular, allows one to examine social action in terms of the rules governing performance—rules that otherwise appear as natural unities—which is to say the specific "meaning-making paradigms that structure the social environment, behaviors, and

potential outcomes" (Taylor 2003:28). By calling into view the rules and norms of

embodied behavior, moreover, scenarios point out that agency and the social production

of knowledge are not free-floating, but rather mediated or constrained by "scenes,"

"scripts," and "frames."[59]

Meaning-making paradigms, however, are irrelevant if not inscribed in particular

social contexts. In the case of the OW, I argue, the construction of the scenario was in

motion the moment that Tobías held introductory meetings with Génesis socias in order

to outline the goals and methodologies of the workshop. To be sure, that scenario may be

imagined to pre-exist any specific rendition of itself, encoded in Tobías's blue binder and

his many references to "typical" OWs. Yet, the inscription of the OW as a meaning-

making paradigm in the particular social context consists primarily in the shaping,

molding, and scripting of the roles of socias as "participants" in and "organizers" of the

workshop and in the disciplining of their behavioral or mental patterns according to an

ideology of organizational consciousness that identifies individualism, spontaneity, self-

sufficiency, and other artisanal behavioral forms as inimical to optimization. Of course,

this is not to say that Génesis socias passively accept those roles. Rather, as the

ethnographic account of the workshop suggests, they bring to bear on the situation their

own interpretive frameworks, allowing to resist or shape those scripted roles on their own

terms. What is more, in the case of the Génesis OW, the construction of a common

scenario, a shared meaning-making paradigm, is obviously incomplete, given that,

despite the OW's goals, segments of the participating population remain unfamiliar with

the basic tenets of the workshops ideology, methodology, or goals. The strange effect of the incompatible frames that socias then bring to the project is to produce cleavages between those who came to understand themselves as "organizers" of the project and those who were merely "participants" in it.

The concept of scenario is useful, Taylor writes, because it allows the analyst "to keep both the social actor and the role in view simultaneously, and thus recognize the areas of resistance and tension" (2003:30). Yet, that utility quickly comes to an end if one does not also contextualize the scenario's implementation within a broader field of social forces and competing scenarios. James Clifford (1988), for example, warns against the tendency to make particular cases in microcosms of something more general. If mistaken for an objective statement about reality rather than a space-clearing theoretical tool for social analysis, that is, performance can itself function to de-contextualize social action. Perhaps even worse, as Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett writes, understanding performance as a statement about social reality is a kind of "genre error" in which it appears as if "one man's life in another man's spectacle" (1991:407). Social reality appears to be the same as the models that purport to explain it, when it should be clear that life is not, of course, a stage for those who are living it. Or as Erving Goffman succinctly puts it, "Social life is dubious enough and ludicrous enough without having to wish it further into unreality" (1974:2).

As Goffman (1974), Lakoff (2004), and others (e.g. Montoya 2007) have pointed out, however, this does not necessarily mean that we should abandon the performative

approach entirely. Rather, we have to move away from the idea that performance is somehow an objective representation of social reality and instead understand concepts like scenarios and scripts as political tools for people to bring to the fore certain ways of certain situations and suppressing others—not for building the frames of interpretation from the ground up, but rather for manipulating them, bending them to one will, in order to achieve a (unconsciously or consciously) desired effect. In the case of the Génesis OW, treating scenarios as a political tool is a particularly useful for separating out the idea of the OW (and its suppositions about consciousness and objective activity) from the already existing social processes of organization among socias. In this perspective, the workshop does not so much create the "ideal conditions" for effecting transformations of consciousness among its participants so much as the ideal conditions for the implementation of its own ideologies about consciousness, the related method, and of course the project itself, dependent as it is on funding, political supporters, and participants.

The idea that the OW is somehow self-contained, that it is a "proven solution" for employment generation in radically disparate locations like Central and South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe, is ultimately based on the presumption that its typology of consciousness and its radical method of conscientization are so flexible that they can be successfully implemented anywhere. The world, after all, is walled off into the Included and the Excluded, and the key reason why the poor cannot pass between the two, it would seem, is their organizational mentalities. Yet, what is missing in the OW's focus on

consciousness and conscientization is recognition of the fact that unemployment and poverty cannot always be attributed to the consciousness of the unemployed and impoverished; there exist structural political and economic determinants outside of those individual mentalities—determinants which came to the fore during and after the workshop—the solution to which is not merely a shift in frame but a total reconfiguration of political and economic power. In this sense, it is useful to draw a comparison between the OW's method and the "culture of poverty" thesis, first articulated by Oscar Lewis in the mid-1960s. A careful reading of Lewis (1961) shows that he understood that abolishing poverty would require massive structural change—that only "by creating basic structural changes in society, by redistributing wealth, by organizing the poor and giving them a sense of belonging, of power and of leadership...the culture of poverty could be overcome" (Lewis 1966:405). Yet, Lewis nevertheless locates the "culture" of poverty in 70 plus interrelated traits—resignation, fatalism, low aspirations, low literacy rates, isolated from mainstream institutions, common law marriages, early initiation into sex, dependency, present-time orientation, lack of impulse control, weak ego structure, inability to defer gratification—that exist on the level of the individual and, as a whole, constitute a "way of life, remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines" (Lewis 1961:xxiv-xxv). Arguing that the poor are enmeshed in an intergenerational quagmire of dysfunctional values and behaviors, Lewis pathologizes the poor, reflects an ideological process of "blaming the victim" (Ryan 1976). Though Lewis generates expressive ethnographic portraits of poverty, as Eleanor

Leacock (1971) critiques, he nevertheless fails to link macrostructural political and economic forces in any way to the ideologies, individual values, and, indeed, "culture" about which he speaks, making his empirical asserts about poverty psychologically reductionist. The culture of poverty, in other words, is treated as a self-enclosed static moral condition, without connection to the contradictions of capital and production or the very real political and economic structures that arise therein.

Many of the same critiques may be registered with the OW, but, rather than treating class as a static moral condition, it instead proceeds from the subject-object relationship of production. While De Morais presumes a direct connection between relations of production and consciousness, like Lewis, however, he fails to articulate the connection between consciousness and the political economic structures that condition the possibilities of action. Ideologically and methodologically, targeting the consciousness of the participants—problematizing artisanal consciousness as an obstacle to development while treating organizational consciousness as a solution—surely underlines the mentalities associated with work but at the same time ignores the outside world, as it were. Even as a cursory view of the OW's implementation over the years demonstrates, these wider national and transnational political and economic transformations have also had tremendous effect. Likewise in the case of the Génesis OW. The presumption that consciousness is something that can be "instilled" (conscientization as the tool for doing so) belies the many historical, cultural, political, and economic contingencies and determinants that lie well outside the

individual and are involved in the social process of organization and supposes that poverty and unemployment is somehow ingrained in intractable psychological or cultural process, not in economic and political dynamics that are produced by the organization and control of the economy by a class with interest in paying workers as little as possible. For the OW, of course, bracketing these structures may be a methodological starting point, given the entrenched nature of formal structures of formal structures of power, or even a strategically cultivated image to frame the OW as a "proven solution" to employment generation. The OW is built upon the recognition that all development projects are inscribed in concrete relations of power, what is essentially overlooked is that, while conscientization may be effective strategy for organization, there also exist structural determinants of poverty and unemployment outside of that.

It is an ethnographic fact that people come together and work together; that they may see in one another parallel experiences; that they may cultivate the inspiration to affect social change together; that they may construct meaningful identities and narratives together; that they may develop strategies for dealing with interpersonal conflicts, political subjection, and economic deprivation together; and that, over time, they may even see themselves not as acting alone, but as part of a larger whole with common aspirations, ideas, outlooks, agendas, and goals. In the case of the Génesis cooperative, however, the social process through which such a social transformation occurs is not a mere matter of social consciousness in the sense that individuals may one day 'wake up' to find the structures of social existence illuminated and their minds enlightened. Rather,

the "organizing traditions" they develop, to borrow Brodkin's (2007) term, occur by means of a process of "aligning oneself," often through incremental adjustment of ones ideas and actions. This is perhaps the key difference between the OW's idea of consciousness, on the one hand, and the Génesis cooperative's idea of *conciencia,* or civic solidarity: while the former is narrowly concerned with the effectiveness of mentalities of work, the latter is, on a very fundamental level, cultivated on the level of social conscience, of ideas of just and unjust in relation to others through experiences of sociality.

Understanding that social conscience, like social consciousness, is inextricable from particular social processes in turn requires us to understand, as Gananath Obeyesekere points out, that "conscience is inextricably linked with ethics and ethics with culture" (1990:188). The link between ethics (or morality) and culture (or society) was of course set out long ago by Émile Durkheim in his notion of "collective consciousness," which in the original French reflected a similarly ambiguous distinction between conscience and consciousness (*conscience collective*) and which was intended to refer to the symbolic forms of collective representation that the group projects for itself. In Durkheim's vision of consciousness/conscience, morality and solidarity are intimately linked within the concept of conscience collective, which is itself treated as a *sui generis* reality that must be obeyed by reasons beyond those of the individual. Morality and solidarity, in other words, are not independent or even universal systems, but rather are imperceptibly different from sociality itself.

Of course, one need not reify morality, solidarity, ethics, or collective consciousness as social facts, as 'things,' or as totalities with objective characteristics, as Durkheim does, in order to understand that each have a powerful existence in social relations.[60] In the case of Génesis, what individuals envision in their actions and interactions as "good" and "desirable" is a kind of social conscience/consciousness, but it is not be defined by some external law. As the idea of "aligning oneself" communicates, visions of equitable, democratic, and fair social relations are built upon the collective negotiation of conflicts, differential power, as well as the many difficulties associated with material, political, and economic life. As a social process, then, the mentality, for lack of a better word, of respect and professionalism despite differences is not something that can be engineered or instilled from afar because it is a delicate matter of adjusting one's own actions and attitudes. This conciencia—what Génesis socias often refer to as "civic solidarity"—is very much intertwined with, beholden to, and in active dialogue with a range of material practices and social imaginaries, values, relations, and institutions. And at a very basic level, it is a matter of fairness in the workplace in the sense that it is, if not an objective projection of society's vision of itself, a vision of what equitable, democratic, and just relationships of work should be.

NOTES

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[44] The Portuguese term *conscientização* was introduced in Freire (1970) and has been translated to English as *conscientization*, which is the meaning intended here. The English term *capacitation*, likewise, derives from the Portuguese *capacitação*, and it is de Morais' meaning that I use here (Carmen & Sobrado 2000).

45 Freire was invited by President João Goulart and the Minister of Education, Paulo de Tarso Santos, in 1962 to stage more than twenty thousand literacy workshops for as many as two million people in Brazil, which was expected to have a dramatic effect on the democratic process in Brazil, given that literacy continued to be a requirement for suffrage. Of course, this was all cut short with in March of the same year, following a speech in which Goulart promised to nationalize the country's oil refineries, a military coup led by Brazil's army generals seized power. Those who had worked with the Goulart administration were labeled traitors and imprisoned, and Freire himself was condemned as an "international subversive," comparable to Stalin, Hitler, Peron, and Mussolini. Freire consequently spent 75 days in a small prison cell in Recife, an experience, he says, that proved to be a catalyst for "[throwing] light on the power relations made opaque by the dominant class" (Freire and Shor 1987:31-2). From the Nordeste province of Brazil, de Morais had been working variously as a journalist for a local newspaper, a musician in a jazz band, as well as for the Ford Motor Company, where he rose to the position of a line supervisor. There, de Morais, claims, he began to ally himself with life-long industrial workers and involved himself in trade union activity, work stoppages, and strikes. In the 1950s de Morais became a clandestine member of the communist movement (the communist *party* had been outlawed). He participated in political economy seminars in Recife, but it was the logistics of running those meetings, coordinating the activities of more than 50 people and the need to maintain a low profile, rather than the sessions themselves, that taught de Morais about the need for strict organizational discipline (Sobrado 2000:15). Freire's ideas, which have since influenced well-known scholars such as Cornel West, Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren, and bell hooks, were influenced by de Morais, whom he calls "amigo irmão, velho de guerra" (Freire and Shor 1987:135). De Morais and Freire eventually parted ways due to enforced exile, but they continued to be friends.

46 Leont'ev, Vygotsky and Luria collaborated in the 1920s to develop a Marxist alternative to the behaviorism (stimulus-response mechanism) that was the favored explanation of human behavior being developed in the U.S. and Western Europe. Leont'ev's psychoanalysis, known as "activity theory," represents the systematization of this theory and would later become institutionalized as the leading psychological doctrine in the Soviet Union. In contrast to behaviorism, "activity" consists of the human processes "that realize a person's actual life in the object world by which he is surrounded, his social being in all the richness and variety of its forms" (Leont'ev 1977). The core of this proposal is a rejection of the concepts of mental process and behavior, which are taken to be inherently reductionistic, recognizing no discontinuity between the firing of a neuron and discussing politics. According to Leont'ev, the concept of behavior, in particular, is too mechanical and abstract, reflecting an erroneous way of thinking about the distinctness of conscious, living human beings—as criticized by John Dewey in 1896—that assumes that external influence ultimately leads to a response, even if there are equally abstract intervening variables like "motivation." By contrast, Leont'ev situates his theory of activity in "the process that active subjects use to form real connections with the world of objects" (1979:42), which is not a mechanical mode of thought so much as a "systems" mode. Leont'ev comments, activity is "a system with its own structure, its own internal transformations, its own development" (1979:46). It is a kind of dynamic envelope enclosing both subject and object (something he refers to as the "molar unit of life"). In this way, human activities can be thought of as more complex and wide-ranging, involving systems of both subject-object interaction and individual-group interaction, irreducible to the direct relation between genes and behavior.

47 In Carmen and Sobrado's (2000) view, "total marketization" is marked by the transition from the welfare state into the neoliberal state, which is essentially a transformation in the logic of redistribution. The welfare state, that is, ensured that wealth was redistrbuted before it was even produced, rather than acting on already existing forms of capital. The transition, moreover, was catalyzed by the apparent tension between "equity" and "private liberty." Hence, those who clamored for individual freedom, lower taxes, less state, and less big government—following the Thatcherite line that there is no such thing as "social wealth" and "there is no such thing as society"—targeted the state as the primary agent of equitable distribution.

48 De Morais is careful to point out that this is not to say that the "ideological structures of organization that are typical to the small producer...[are not] excellent in their own right and in a non-conflictual environment" (Sobrado 2000:17). Artisanal consciousness is only valued as "'bad habits,' a 'deviations,' or a 'vices' when transferred to the the totally different—that is, complex—social organization."

[49] PROCCARA was initiated in 1973 as a state-affiliated program, but from 1977 onwards the workshop was transferred to the private sector. The Honduran Institute for Rural Development (IHDER), a leading private institution, applied this method in concentrated technical trainings for enterprises and cooperatives in the Atlantic region, the major export crop-producing zone of Honduras. According to PROCCARA, the experimental workshop appeared to be "a practical exercise, as well as a theoretical one which allowed a group of participants to internalize the participatory mechanisms of organization at the highest level which the status of the workshop participants would allow. In each case this level will be determined by the praxis which emerges from the role which each individual plays in the productive process with social division of labor. The self-managing enterprise created in each Experimental Workshop will itself provide for the most urgent needs for production-related technical training. More intensive and permanent training emerges from the way itself, the multiple production and service provision activities organized during the 15 to 20 consecutive days the Workshop lasts" (PROCCARA/INA 1976:4).

[50] The 23 courses in that the Tampaón directors chose included the following: health nursing, plumbing, sewing, accountancy, carpentry, radio and television, general mechanics, adult literacy, veterinary sciences, entymology, needlework, apiculture, electricity, cattle raising, brickwork, mechanics, baking, agriculture, cooking, soldering, confectinary, tractor mechanics, and driving skills.

[51] Though he never officially became president, Torrijos was the leading power in the government military junta until 1981. The Constitution was rewritten during his reign, his clientelist use of jobs at public institutions created a political class of loyalists, and hundreds of opponents were disappeared, tortured, or exiled. Despite that, Torrijos demagogic populism and infrastructure project appealed to many.

[52] Interestingly, the involvement of these international organizations had a greater effect than to give access to capital or political opportunity, it also opened up to the program other unexpected advantages. The FAO's involvement, for example, was part of a different scheme by the national director of PROGEI, who managed to bypass the money devaluations that Brazil was experiencing at a rate of about twenty percent a month by transferring the government funds to the FAO, and because it was international agency it was able to 'dollarize' those so that they would not lose their value. This allowed PROGEI to draw on uninterrupted financial support.

[53] The Paraíba PROGEI was the largest of these field laboratories, with more than four thousand people participating in thirty different courses in semi-professional training. Interestingly, many of its participants were not content with the modest goal of forming micro-enterprises in the informal economy and so pooled their resources to form much larger community enterprises that would go on to be notable successes. Elsewhere, such as in the Alagoas PROGEI in 1995, de Morais claimed that the workshops "covered 90 per cent of the municipalities of the state of Alagoas and helped considerably in reducing the grave financial situation that has held down this poor state in Brazil's Nordeste for so long" (2000:177)—an exciting claim, but unfortunately one with no specifics to back it up.

[54] The officials who co-op members chose to be members of the junta directiva in this initial stage tended to have educational or professional work experience. Joaquina, because she had experience as a lawyer, was elected president. Swanny, a woman in her twenties who had some college education but had been unable to continue due to finances, was elected vice-president. And Vilma, who had a degree in accounting, was the logical choice for secretary/treasurer. Three "vocales" were also elected, Juana, María, and Verónica, whose responsibility was to maintain vigilantly the democratic process within the group.

[55] Spanish collective nouns are typically masculine when they contain one male subjects, even if there are fifty females. I choose to use the term *socias* because cooperative members refer to their collectivity in such terms.

[56] U.S. Federal Reserve interest rates dropped to below 0.25% during this time period, and one effect of interest rates decreases is that money is less of a means to preserve wealth over the long term. Thus, people have tended to invest in food commodities, which may, and which causes an increase in demand and therefore price.

[57] According to Civil Coordinator economist Adolfo Acevedo, the cumulative inflation rate for food since Ortega took office in 2007 is 39%. Between September of 2007 and July of 2008, the price of rice increased 40.8%, oil 66%, bread 43%, beans 33%, and milk 33%. This is of course exacerbated by the fact that wages have not been adjusted concomitantly (Envío 2008)

[58] At the end of 2005 the price of a food basket made up of a collection of 25 basic food items was 2,700 córdobas, or 135 dollars, per month (BCN 2005). In March of 2008 it was 8,000 córdobas, or 400 dollars (BCN 2008). In January of 2009, it rose to 8,700 córdobas (MITRAB 2009). Thus, as the Instituto Nicaragüense de Seguridad Social (INSS) estimates, an average Nicaraguan family in 2008 was capable of procuring about a 26 percent of the basic food basket, compared to in 2001 when their incomes covered about 70 percent (. This change becomes even more dramatic when it comes to light that only 80 thousand wage earners of the 3.5 million people of working age people in Nicaragua are registered with the INSS.

[59] Ortner (1989) developed a parallel idea that she terms "cultural schemes." Key scenarios/cultural schemes are:

> preorganized schemes of action, symbolic programs for the staging and playing out of standard social interactions in a particular culture...every culture contains not just bundles of symbols, and not even just bundles of larger propositions about the universe ("ideologies"), but organied schemas for enacting (culturally typical) relations and situations. [1989:60]

[60] In fact, by doing so, Durkheim constructs a kind of unidirectional causal link between instituted morality and psychology, completely absent of any putatively "outside" influences on human behavior, such as the materiality of existence (Hagens 2006). In a critical introduction to Durkheim's *Sociology and Philosophy* (1967), Adorno presents a critique of the concept of collective conscience that may be more broadly applied to the idea of consciousness in general. Rather than a loyal and explanatory introduction, Adorno argues that, by treating morality as a 'social fact,' by situating morality within the state and thus opposite or above individuals, imposing its moral force on them, Durkheim's moral thought amounts to an apology for the predominant state of the social. Conferring a "status of mere atoms" upon individuals, that is, Durkheim's presupposition of the social as the condition of possibility for normative obligatory morality hypostatizes the rupture between the individual and the social and makes it into law (Adorno 1995:278). While the rupture does in many ways exist, it also forecloses on the possibility that social reality could be different from what it already is. According to Adorno, Durkheim's moral thought lacks "criteria to distinguish between what a society truly is and what it believes itself to be" (1995:247). Moreover, Durkheim "replaces the objectivity of principal societal life processes with the objectivity of conscience collective" (1995:247). In response, Adorno finds Marx's conceptions of sociality as 'second nature' and 'continued natural history' useful. These concepts describe how society's individuals have a tendency to acquire the given social reality as an immutable entity with inherent laws, such that society's individuals transform so that they are no longer able to imagine any other reality than the one characterized by the political economic system of capitalism

CHAPTER VI

FAIR TRADE AND TRANSLATION

How 'fair' is fair trade? Is fair trade really a democratic, participatory, and

equitable solution to conventional trade? By what standard should one measure the

inclusion of producers, especially, in decision-making, their participation alongside other

groups, or the equity of their interactions? In sheer terms of profit relative to the

conventional market? The 'balance' of profit distribution with fair trade retailers? Or

should fairness, which is ultimately a matter of power, be expanded to account for other,

non-economic dimensions?

In this chapter I want to engage these questions by unpacking the concept of

"participation" among Génesis socias in the early stages of the cooperative's

construction. On a fundamental level, participation reflects upon the division of labor

among the various groups involved in the project—the NGO, the retailer, and Génesis

socias—as well as the definition of their roles with respect to the others. While that

division of labor links these groups under the heading of a common project, that is to say,

in ascribing certain tasks and defining certain areas of expertise, it also delimits each

group's capacity to shape various aspects of the project and the policies, practices, and

objectives that drive it. Moreover, the division of labor is matched by a division of

knowledge, particularly about the fair trade movement. The first part of this chapter

therefore seeks to assess the participation of Génesis socias by examining their knowledge about the broader fair trade movement: What is the purpose of fair trade according to these producers? How is fair trade organized? And who are the fair trade consumers?

An analysis of the relative participation of these fair trade groups, particularly the degree of shared decision-making power, administrative control, and producers' knowledge of fair trading strategies, gives critical insight into the wholly unfair aspects of the movement while at the same time clearing space for understanding how it may be made more democratic, more participatory, and more equitable. If the division of labor and knowledge in fair trade is, in reality, characterized by a high degree of social inequality, empowering NGOs and fair trade retailers to define policy, to direct on-the-ground practices, and to represent producers while at the same time relegating producers themselves to commodity production as "passive suppliers of product" (Utting-Chamorro 2005; Paul 2005:135; Blowfield 2004:78), the second question I want to pose in this chapter is, how can producers become active participants in the construction of "fairer" trade, as it were?

One area of improvement for fair trade is in the politics of representation of producers. It is well documented that fair trade advertising schemes often attempt to 'lift the veil' on production by presenting biographical information about producers and producer communities (e.g. Fridell 2007; Waridel, Lappé, and Lappé 2002:27-31; Raynolds 2002; Jaffee, Kloppenburg, and Monroy 2004; Zaccaï 2007; Hudson and

Hudson 2003; Simpson and Rapone 2005:55; Lind and Barham 2004; Fisher 2007). Yet,

what has remained comparatively unexplored thus far is how fair trade advertising does

not simply "educate" consumers by providing them with disinterested knowledge about

production. Rather, given that the movement is very much a part of the advertising

spectacle of late capitalism, the distinction between fair trade and other marketing

strategies is often a bit indistinct. Fair trade advertising, as elsewhere in the advertising

world, is not a reflection of the conditions of production so much as a set of

representations that are actively constructed in order to manipulate desire, to appeal to a

person's political and social self-identity, and to generate an imaginary ethic of care

toward distant others (Raynolds 2002; Dolan 2005; Watson 2006; Shaw and Shiu 2002;

Dolan 2009; Carrier 1995; Friedman 1999). Contrary to the neoclassical theory in which

price mechanisms encapsulate all of the required information about a product (Wilkinson

1997), these extra-economic aspects of consumption have increasingly been recognized

as a key axis in current competitive strategies in the post-Fordist period (Harvey 1990).

In this sense, fair trade attempts to (re)connect producers and consumers economically,

politically, ethically, and psychologically. But, like all other forms of advertising, fair

trade is also semiotically constructed in order to traffic in specific "political ecological

imaginaries" and in order to facilitate for consumers a sense of "solidarity in

difference" (Goodman 2004:891). It is therefore important to understand the process by

which those representations are constructed. In pairing testimonies with colorful

photographs, how (and by whom) are choices regarding representation made?

In the second half of this chapter, I attempt to destabilize the received image of fair trade and to highlight the politics of representation in fair trade advertising by drawing on an account of socias' and my attempts to create a collaboratively produced website. Emerging from the recognition that, within fair trade's established division of labor, advertising often reflects the aesthetic and ideological choices of Northerners rather than producers themselves, the original goal of the collaboratively produced website—with photos, quotations, and narratives generated, selected, and arranged by socias themselves—was to clear space for greater power of self-representation among producers. This is, however, not really what happen in the end. Claiming expertise in the master logic of marketability, CSD (with the input of Clean Clothes) ultimately had the final say in choices regarding translating, editing, and arranging the website, which, conceptually speaking, had the effect of "filtering" the socias choices according to the NGO's ideologies of acceptability (eliminating what they perceived to be "negative" content) as well as their pre-conceptions about what is appealing to potential donors and consumers. An analysis of the disciplinary power involved in the molding and shaping this fair trade "text," as it were, sheds light on the persisting disjuncture between fair trade production and consumption.

SOLIDARITY WITH WHOM? FAIR TRADE KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

In fair trade research inequality has recently come into sharp focus as structuring on a very fundamental level the relationships between various groups, especially in terms

of the distribution of profits (Murray and Raynolds 2000; Raynolds 2002; Renard 2003; Lyon 2006). What has received much less attention, yet is in many cases more directly related to the relative empowerment or disempowerment of fair trade producers, is how, completely apart from profits, their participation in the broader movement is also structured by inequality. While participation presupposes some degree of membership in a political community, that is to say, social division of labor may at the same time limit the abilities of certain groups to influence the political process. In this way, participation, like wealth, is structured by basic inequalities. And like wealth, inequalities of participation may manifest in terms of access to decision-making apparatuses, administrative control, and, perhaps at an even more fundamental level, knowledge about the conditions of one's actions. In his foundational book on the sociology of knowledge, *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), Karl Mannheim illuminates the close relationship between knowledge systems (particularly scientific knowledge) and the social conditions in which they emerge. Because knowledge, he argues, is inseparably intertwined with activity and influences one's participation in "the life of society" (Mannheim 1936:xxix), it stands to reason that the relative distribution of knowledge, as it were, is directly related to the relative distribution of power. So too in fair trade. Knowledge and information are important determinants of power, and the party who is thought to hold more knowledge and information tends to hold more power as well.

Ethnographically speaking, one way of measuring producers' participation and empowerment in fair trade is to examine producers' knowledge of fair trade. As Gereffi

(1994) argues, there are two major types of commodity chains: (1) those which are 'producer driven' (such as automobiles) where the concentration of capital and proprietary knowledge in production allows producers to dominate the industry and (2) those which are 'buyer driven' (such as garments) where brand-name distributors dominate the chain via their control over the design process and market access. Mounting evidence suggests that fair trade falls into the latter (Dolan and Humphrey 2000; Gibbon 2001; Ponte 2002). While fair trade is in most cases a better option for producers than conventional trade, that is, this does not mean that producers have available to them knowledge about the market's inner workings, its purpose, or the people that it claims to connect in relationships of fairness and solidarity.

As Shreck (2003) points out in a study of small-scale banana production in the Dominican Republic, access to export markets was one of the principal benefits of fair trade certification, though at the same, producers really share an unambiguous commitment to supplying any export market, fair or conventional. In fact, even the banana producers from certified fair trade associations have a very limited level of understanding about fair trade (c.f. Tallontire 2000). According to Shreck (2003), although slightly more than three-quarters of the producers interviewed were listed as members of the fair trade-certified associations, only half identified themselves as fair trade farmers. When asked more specifically about the fair trade initiative, such as its benefits and how it worked, even these producers demonstrated only an elementary and partial understanding. Producers often mentioned that they knew there was something

called "fair trade" (comercio justo) market, but they could not elaborate what that meant. One producer responded: "Max Havelaar [the name of the fair trade organization that worked with these farmers originally] is a guy form Europe and he likes us small farmers, and so he buys our bananas." Significantly, none of the producers in Shreck's (2003) sample knew what the minimum prices guaranteed by the FLO were, how they were determined, or other regulations that the FLO put in place, such as the required long-term commitment with fair trade partners. Lyon's (2006) research in Guatemala shows similar results. While almost all cooperative members interviewed could articulate the inequities they faced in global agricultural commodity markets, only three out of 53 surveyed were familiar with the term *fair trade*, instead understanding the arrangement in terms of "market access" (c.f. Tallantoire 2000:175) or international aid (Shreck 2002). This lack of information regarding the role they play in fair trade networks, Lyon (2006) summarizes, is symptomatic of the international fair trade structure in which producers have limited decision-making power and administrative control (Renard 2003). It also lessens fair trade's ability to capture the priorities and values of its intended beneficiaries (Blowfield 2004:78).

In January of 2008, in the aftermath of the Génesis OW and as the consequences of rising food prices were beginning to manifest in the cooperative, I conducted a similar series of individual and group interviews in order to determine what level of knowledge Génesis socias had of comercio justo at this very formative stage in their project. Though socias generally understood themselves to be the intended financial beneficiaries of the

project—which is, of course, in sharp contrast to the socias of The Fair Trade Zone in which it was commonly stated that others were profiting from the workers' labor—they also understood their future roles as almost entirely limited to commodity production. Their limited knowledge of the immediate circumstances of the network as well as the broader fair trade initiative—insofar as knowledge is something of a precondition of power at the same time that it is itself conditioned upon power— reinforces that perspective that producers are relatively disenfranchised from apparatuses of control. In a survey of forty Génesis socias, while all socias identified CSD as a source of financial and legal support, only two people (the president and the treasurer) were able to identify the main client organization (Clean Clothes) with which their cooperative would eventually work. Five of forty cooperative members identified "*comercio justo*" as the intended market of the spinning plant, six others identified variations on that term such as *cadena limpia* (clean production chain), and the remaining 29 were unfamiliar with the term. And while all members expressed ideas about what "fair" trade and "dignified" work (*trabajo digno*) meant in their own philosophies and in the context of their own lives, no cooperative members recognized that fair trade was an initiative that, in other contexts such as coffee production, involved certification organizations and regulations regarding the relationships between producers, distributors, and retailers. In a group interview in early February 2008, I asked socias what kind of people they imagined typically bought fair trade merchandise. After a long pause, one socia came forward and speculated that fair trade consumers were likely "poor people like us who want to

purchase a high quality product at a low price." Several other socias confirmed this impression and proceeded to suggest that the goal of fair trade was to connect producers with people who could not afford the high prices, especially for clothes, that corporations typically charged. In that way, fair trade enabled the poor to be in solidarity with one another and to essentially bypass the exploitative tactics of *capitalismo salvaje* (savage capitalism).

Unwilling to speculate any further, socias then asked me about my own understanding of fair trade and my own impression of fair trade consumers. To socias' great surprise, I explained that fair trade typically connects upscale markets in the U.S., Canada, and industrialized European countries with "underdeveloped" countries. And instead of catering to poor people, fair trade instead markets toward "socially conscious" activists and well to-do consumers who can afford to pay an above-market premium for the goods. It is perhaps needless to say that the discussion that ensued touched off a debate that lasted on and off for the next several months.

While the various ins and outs of the organization of fair trade, its certification strategies, and its general price structure provided a constant source of confusion, it was instead socias imaginings of (or rather, imaginary relationships with) consumers that evoked the most charged responses. Over those months, socias pressed me for details about these fair trade consumers, and as a long-time fair trade consumer myself, I explained the best I could the various motivations for buying fair trade, including the wish to express solidarity by "voting" with one's dollar. As time passed, discussions

morphed into discussions about what fair trade *should be*, such as the widely agreed upon notion it would be better to allow people to support themselves, instead of making them depend on "charity" (*caridad*) from the wealthy class. For Adelina, in particular, the fact that fair trade was not really about solidarity but rather charity was offensive:

> Rich people discriminate against you, even if you are middle-class, neither poor nor rich...The way that they interact with you, they refuse to talk to you...they drink purified bottled water, they wipe their hands on their shirts after they shake yours, and they act like they have to protect their wallet when they're around you. They put up a wall between you and them, and they look down on you...Then, they say they pity you and that they want to help you.

While most socias did not share her position and argued at length with her about it, they nevertheless agreed that fair trade could not really be about solidarity.

In a conversation with Hernán one late February afternoon, for example, I was explaining the feeling of solidarity that consumers might feel by choosing to support a fair trade business rather than a conventional one when Hernán interjected. "That's not solidarity," he said:

> Solidarity is not a one way street, it goes two ways...You express solidarity, and others express it back. For a person to have solidarity in the heart, truly, he has to have something at stake as well...because your liberation is bound up together.

Taken aback by the frankness of his statement, I grinned ironically: "Are you saying that you don't feel solidarity with those people, those fair trade consumers in the United States?" Hernán grinned back: "How could we when we do not even know who they are? They know so much about us, but we know nothing about them!" If having something at stake, in his terms—or one might even say, risking something—is a criterion for solidarity, then surely fair trade consumers, from producers points of view at

least, could not be said to be risking much or expressing much solidarity at all. Hernán later explained, "I've known people to risk their jobs, even their lives, in order to express solidarity with workers unions…Giving somebody some money when they need it…is not solidarity…it's charity."

While fair trade consumers often express feelings of ethical connection with fair trade producers—an imaginary connection that sometimes may even motivate them to makethe purchase—the reverse is not true at all. The economy of fair trade knowledge is structured by a very basic inequality such that, while consumers may feel like they know a tremendous amount about producers and may even feel that exchange is an act of compassion and care (Dolan 2008), producers know almost nothing in return. Instead, from producers' points of view, it would seem that the market continues to be an anonymous space, little different from conventional trade apart from the relative economic benefits (e.g. Jaffee 2006). Perhaps even more generally, while fair trade occupies an increasing amount of "shelf space," as it were, in the consumption patterns of the United States, Canada, and Europe, it continues to be relatively unknown among producers. The reason for this is clear: fair trade is a "buyer-driven" market in terms of price as it is a buyer-driven market in terms of participation (Garaffi 1994).

THE COLLABORATION

One morning in March of 2008, I had just found my gloves and shovel and was about to start another day's work with the Génesis socias in the ongoing project of

digging the foundation for the factory when a group from the junta directiva approached me. Having just left a meeting in CSD's main office, they had just been petitioned to collect information for a new website for the cooperative and, not knowing where to begin, they wanted my help. "You aren't very good at construction anyways," pleaded María. Perhaps reacting to the look of surprise and, later, indignity (I had imagined myself as at least keeping pace), she continued, "Don't worry, you're good at other things, and that's what we need right now….We've got enough work hands, we need someone who likes to write things down, and, of all of us here, that's you."

Of course, once the idea sunk in I eagerly agreed and was intrigued by what the process of building a website from beginning to end, selecting photos, constructing individual and group portraits, and generally telling the story of the Génesis cooperative could tell me about the politics of representation in fair trade. There was, of course, already a great deal of advertising for the cooperative that had already been produced by CSD and Clean Clothes as part of a recent donation drive, called "Making Stone Soup with Génesis," that they had staged in order to continue to fund the project in the now officially "recessed" economy. Given that the drive had worked, CSD obviously knew something about telling the story of Génesis in an appealing way to their network of supporters. On the other hand, however, those were pamphlets and fliers constructed from beginning to end by CSD. I pondered, what would a website look like if Génesis socias had free reign to tell their own story in their own terms? How would they choose

to represent themselves individually and as a group to the "conscientious consumers" that we had been talking about over the past month and a half?

Eager to pursue a "collaborative" research project that took into account the interests, questions, and concerns of research participants as well (e.g. Lassiter 2005; Tuhiwa Smith 1999), I returned to the junta directiva later that week and asked them to volunteer a few people with whom I could form a *comité* (committee) charged with the collective task of building the website in the manner in which socias saw fit. As a group, I imagined, we could engage in a real dialogue about how socias wanted to represent Génesis and themselves. And as a dialogue, the resulting self-representation would not only have the potential to expand socias' heretofore limited participation in fair trade, it would also more fully and more faithfully realize the educational "consciousness-raising" concerning the lives of poor and working class that fair trade often espoused.

Over the next three months, our website committee held weekly meetings in a small, cement-walled annex to CSD's main office that the NGO had set aside for us. Gradually, we sketched out a basic framework and defined five different areas to cover, each corresponding more or less to a "tab" on the site:

(1) *Nuestra Historia* (Our History)

(2) *Cooperativa Génesis* (the Génesis cooperative)

(3) *¿Dónde estamos?* (Where are we?)

(4) *¿Qué es una cooperativa?* (What is a cooperative?)

(5) *Perfiles de Soci@s* (Profiles of Cooperative Members)

We spent the first two weeks identifying strategies for staging new photos or collecting old ones, for gathering information, and for organizing that information.

The first, "Our History," came perhaps the slowest. Little by little, in these meetings, the committee reconstructed a timeline of events, referring back to CSD staff and other cooperative members when in doubt. The narrative started with the initial organization meetings of the co-op in 2006, including the election of the initial junta directiva, then moved on to the initial phases of the construction process in February of 2007, much of which I recounted in Chapter V. CSD provided us with their database of digital photographs, which documented the multiple stages of the construction and the skeleton of the facility slowly taking shape as well as others that depicted organizational meetings with CSD, within the junta directiva, and in the general assembly. As other socias continued to work outside, the website committee poured over photo after photo, a process which triggered powerful memories about their experiences clearing the land with machetes, transporting sand from Trinidad Central, mixing cement, working with the block-making machine. Meanwhile, with fleshing out a timeline of "Our History" with experiences of socias, I took detailed notes. The committee remembered their own hardships, but also recalled some of the more cheerful moments and the generous support that they received from CSD, including the support that the NGO had in turn organized for them from the Interamerican Development Bank (BID) in the form of a training session in financial accounting. When it came to the topic of the OW in October of 2007, committee members willing detailed the conflicts that arose, the hardship and damage

that the conflict caused within the cooperative, as well as the lessons learned about working together with respect and keeping moving forward. "We've always tried to make democracy a foundation of our business," explains Hernán, "and this has been as difficult a process as pouring the foundation, the concrete foundation, itself." Debating over aesthetic issues as well as the relevance of content, the committee eventually decided upon three photos to demonstrate the progress of the facility's construction (Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3), one depicting the momentous occasion of signing of the Acta Constitutiva (Figure 4) as well as three more photos of organizational meetings at various stages (Figure 5, Figure 6, and Figure 7). It was one Friday afternoon as we were sitting in our blue plastic chairs in the annex reflecting on the problems of the OW, María suddenly announced that she had decided what the slogan should be: "*La solidaridad es nuestra fuerza, y ella nos llevará*" (Solidarity is our strength, and it will raise us up). It was taken to a vote the following week at a general assembly meeting and the motion passed.

After a few weeks and with my prodding (sadly, my own departure date was quickly arriving in June), we began to move forward with other sections. For those entitled "The Génesis Cooperative" and "What is a Cooperative?" the committee, to my surprise, decided to outline the constitution of the cooperative in their own terms. We outlined—in what was sometimes, admittedly, painful detail—the fundamental tenets of cooperative organization, the requirements for becoming a socia, the rights and obligations involved in being a socia, the regulations regarding work in the cooperative,
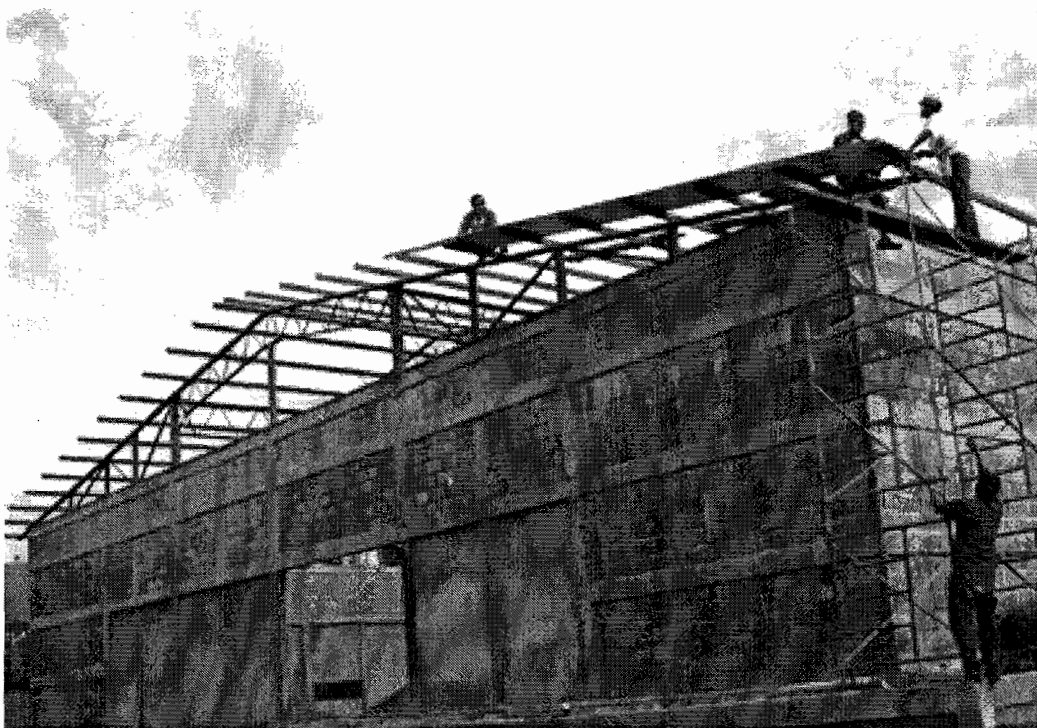
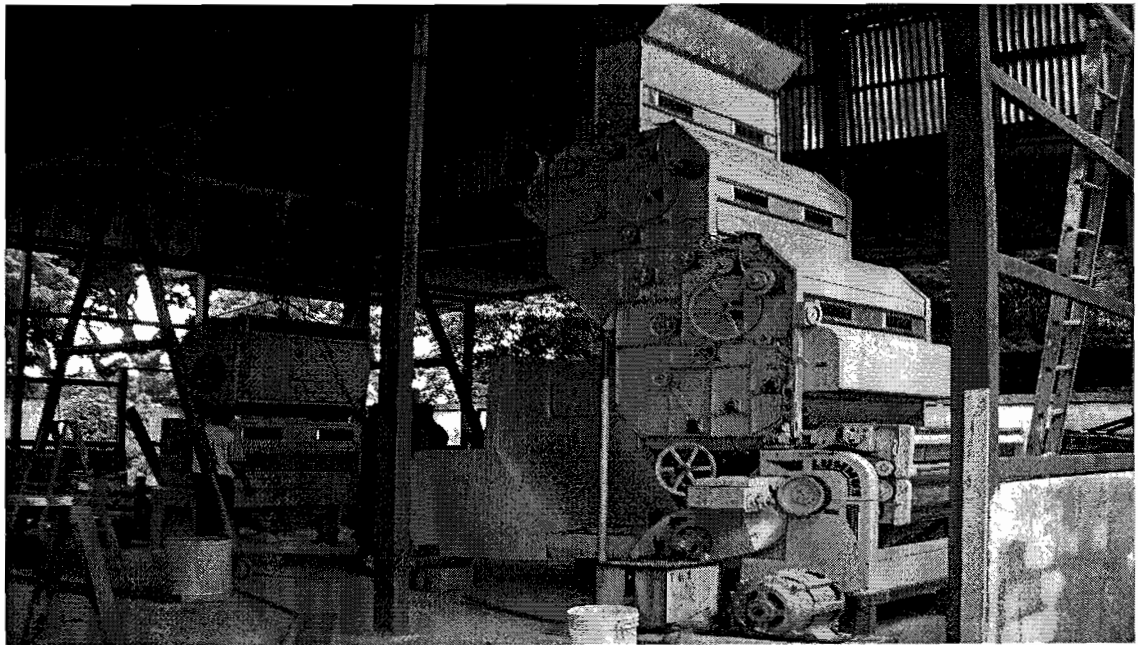*Figure 1: Clearing the land*

Figure 2: Beginning the roof

Figure 3: The cotton gin

Figure 4: Signing the Acta Constitutiva

Figure 5: An early organizational meeting with CSD

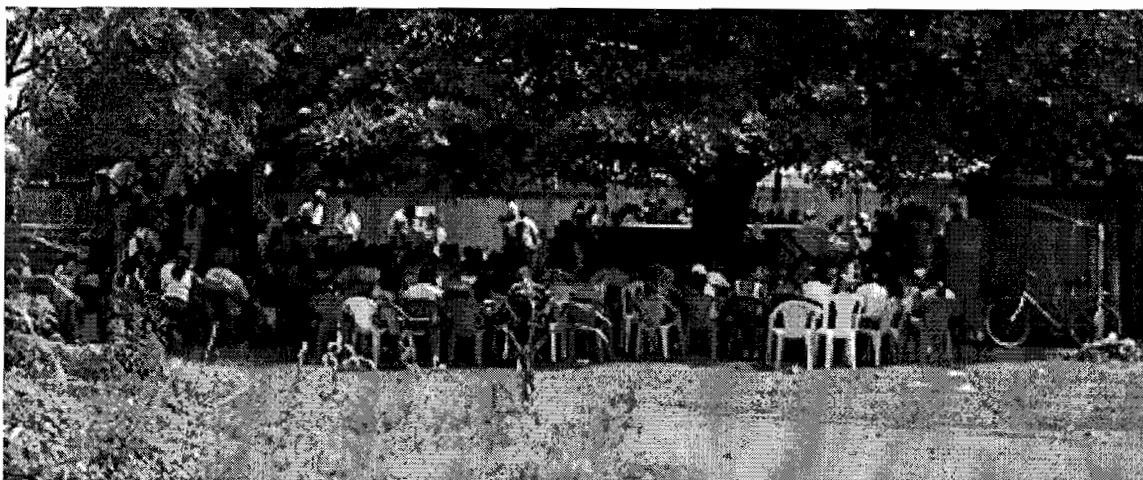*Figure 6: A junta directiva meeting*

Figure 7: A general assembly meeting

and the organization of the administration and direction of the cooperative. Our notes, not surprisingly, looked like sections from the cooperative's constitution because it was, in fact, that document that we poured over and were attempting to summarize. Though my patience oftentimes wore thin, I tried my best to keep an open mind to the detail-oriented nature of this exercise. I finally pulled aside Joaquina one day and posed the question that had for weeks been on my mind: "Why is it necessary to tell donors or clients or whoever about the legal structure of the co-op? Do you think that they need to hear about that? Shouldn't we spend our time on something else?" Joaquina responded, "*Mi hijo*, people need to know that we are professionals. Why would you want to do business with a group of people who are unprofessional?" She pointed in the direction of The Fair Trade Zone, "*¿Sabes?* You were over there with us at that meeting with *la fundación* [CSD] and *la zona* [The Fair Trade Zone]."

In May we eventually reached the third section, "Where are we?", the website committee decided to leave our cramped office space and conduct something of a

demographic survey of the cooperative. Each of us took a segment of the group and, as

the other socias continued to work digging the foundation, we collected basic

information, such as age, family size, and the *barrios* (neighborhoods) of Ciudad Sandino

socias hailed from. Several months previous, I had held an interview with the mayor of

Ciudad Sandino, Raymundo Flores, had been given a packet of information regarding the

city, including unemployment and poverty rates, maps, and other data. I gladly

contributed these resources to the committee, who decided it would be best to start with a

map of Ciudad Sandino in relation to Managua (Figure 8), move on to a map of the

various barrios of Ciudad Sandino (Figure 9), describing the differences between each

barrio from which socias hailed, and summarize the basic demographic information of

the cooperative in relation to the city:

Génesis Demographics:	*Ciudad Sandino Demographics*
• 40 women, 6 men	• 61.5% women, 38.5% men
• ages between 21 and 69	• 48% below 24 years of age
• Average family income of approximately $200/month before entering the cooperative	• Average family income of approximately $150/month

I contributed some disposable cameras that I had brought with me, and committee

members took photos of these barrios on their walk home (Figure 10, Figure 11, Figure

12, and Figure 13) as well as the new Cone Denim free trade zone, a building the size of

about 16 football fields, that was built in 2007 at the cost of about $100 million

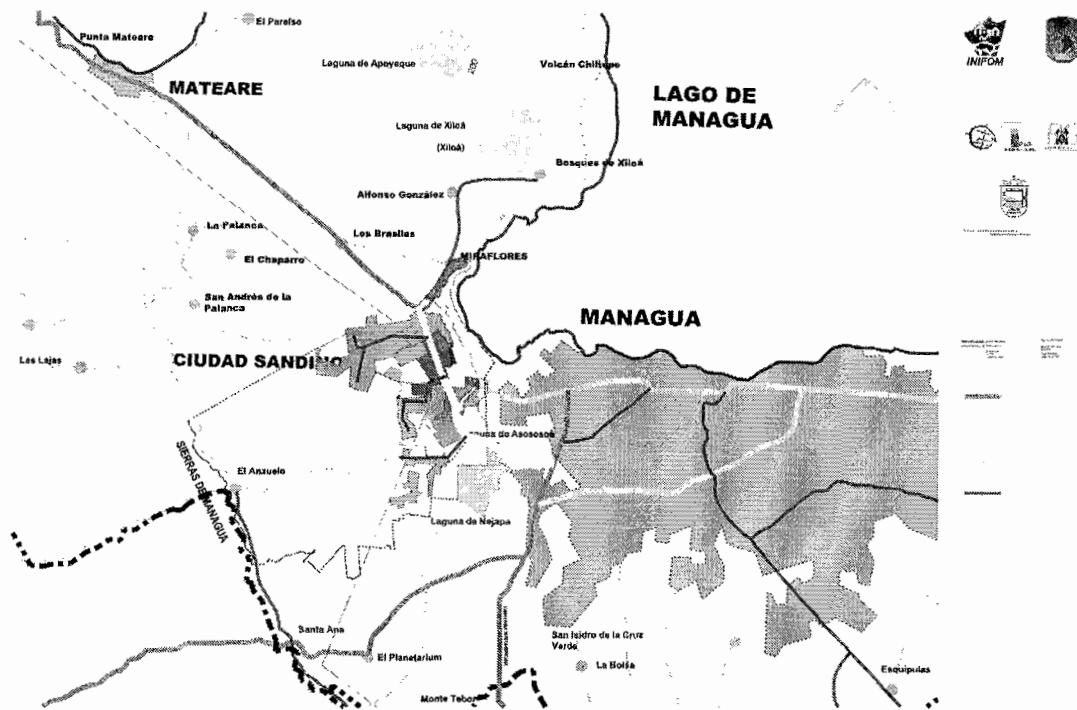(including the cost of a four lane concrete highway) but, notably, went out of business

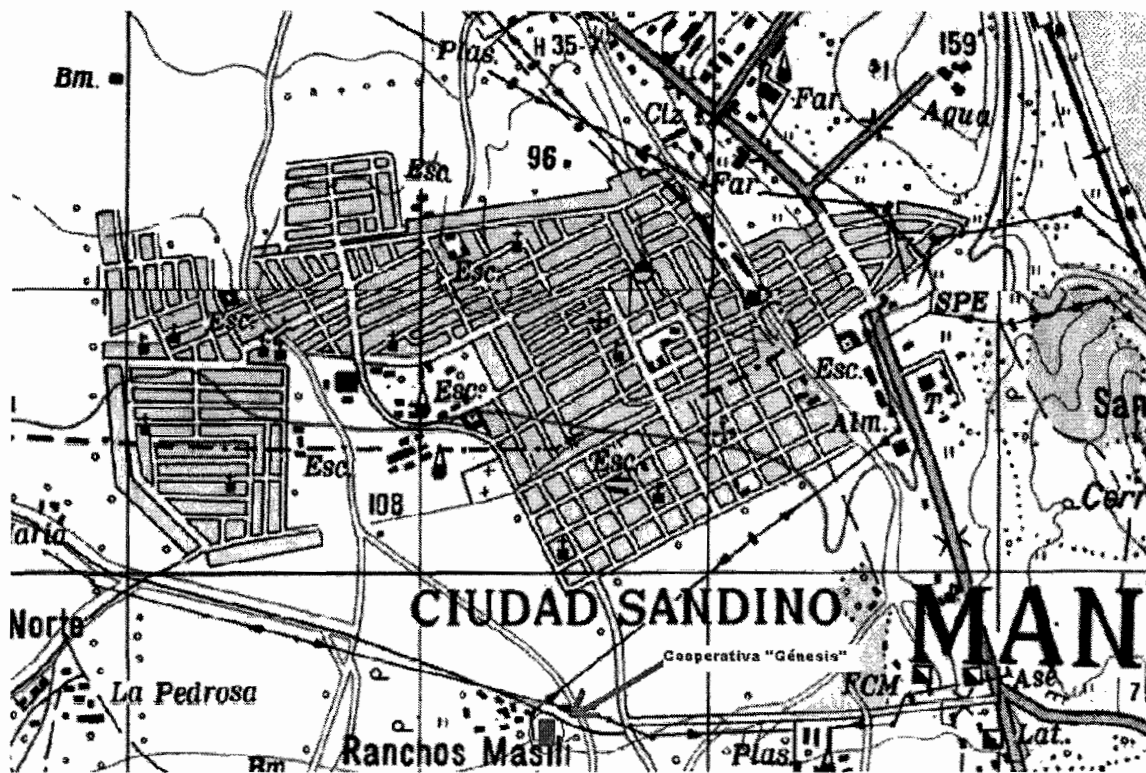*Figure 8: Map of Ciudad Sandino in relation to Managua*

Figure 9: Map of Ciudad Sandino

during the economic crisis of 2008, leaving 800 workers unemployed (Figure 14).

At the same time, the website committee also started work on the "Profiles" section, for which socias also played around with the idea of naming it *Testimonios* (Testimonies). The basic idea of having individual profiles was to allow socias to tell something about themselves as individuals and their stories of coming to and working in the cooperative. We printed out sheets of paper for each socia and asked them to answer the five questions that the committee determined to be most important them: (1) Birthplace and family life, (2) work history and education, (3) how and why they joined the Génesis cooperative, (4) what they have learned while working in the cooperative, and (5) what they hope to achieve by working in the cooperative. In order to connect these stories to faces, the committee then decided to borrow a digital camera from CSD to take "profile" photographs for each person. For those few who were were not able write, committee members asked the questions verbally and transcribed their responses. Socias were excited about the prospect of having their faces on a website, and so within a week all 46 returned their sheets completed. A selection of their responses is available in the Appendix.

THE WEBSITE GOES UP

By the time that profiles were returned and our website committee managed to compile all of the information that we had collected about the cooperative's history, about Ciudad Sandino, and about individual socias and their profiles, it was already early June

Figure 10: Photo of Zona 8, Barrio Bello Cruz, originally built between 1972-1979
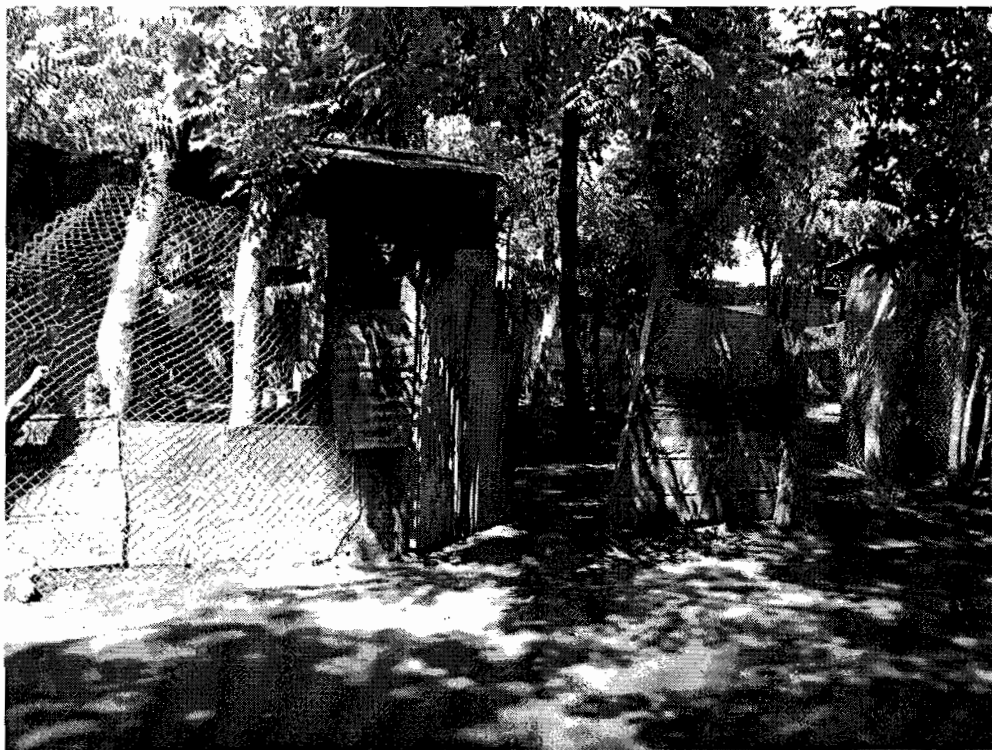

Figure 11: Photo of typical house in Nueva Vida, Ciudad Sandino, built after Hurricane Mitch in 1998

Figure 12: Photo of houses near Mosatepe, originally built between 1989-1997

Figure 13: Photo of a house in Villa Soberana, a new development built between 2004-05
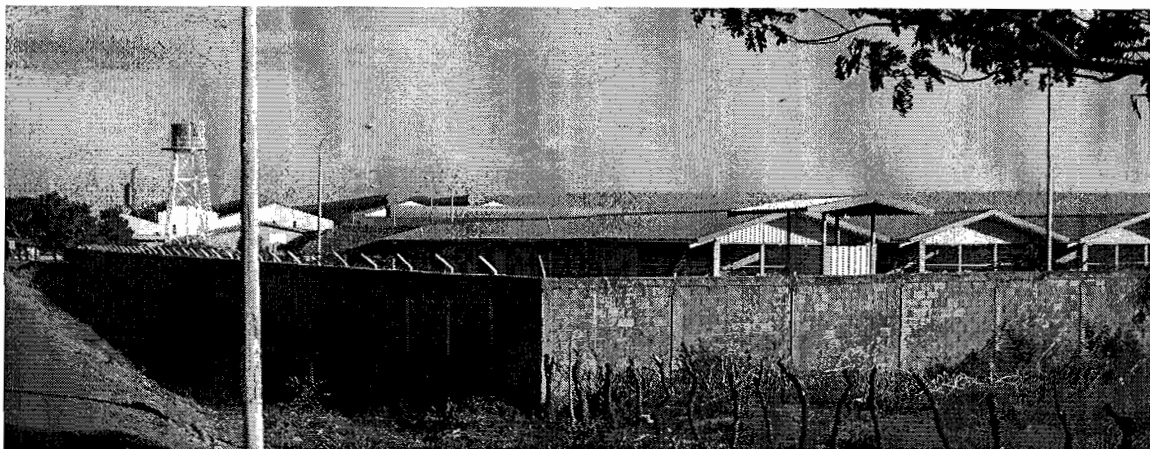
Figure 14: Photo of a the Cone Denim facility near Villa Soberana, a registered free trade zone in the production of Levi Strauss jeans.

and I had only two weeks left before my field season came to an end. It was, to say the least, a chaotic time, in which I could barely manage to organize my own things, let alone keep up with website business. I eventually handed over the project to the rest of the website committee, recognizing that no one really had any expertise in writing website code, and returned to Oregon.

Two months later, I learned that the socias eventually turned the information we collected over to CSD, who had a person on staff, Melissa, who was willing to translate the material to English and to put it up on the NGO's own web domain. When the website was up, it became very clear that the task of "translation" meant not merely a matter of turning Spanish into English. As Melissa explained, there are some things that make sense in Spanish that do not make sense in English, and there are some things that make sense for socias to say that do not make sense for donors in the U.S. to hear. "The idea," she continued, " is not to alienate people, but to draw them into a relationship with one another." What Melissa is recognizing in a way is that, beyond the matter of

language itself, translation is also a matter of "language ideologies." As Schieffelin et al. (1998) explain, language ideologies are cultural representations, whether explicit or implicit, that exist in the intersection of language and human beings in the social world and link language to identity, power, aesthetics, morality and epistemology. The idea that certain sentiments can be expressed in one language but not another, that is, is based on a model of that language. At the same time, languages also play a central role in the functioning of power such as in schooling, law, and mass media. Thus, the task of translating language is also a task of translating social events, representations, and actors into their appropriate categories and roles. Moreover, as Bourdieu (1977) argues, language is not merely about the communication of ideas, but may also have a role in affecting the distribution of material capital. For example, as Bourdieu points out, in Western European contexts, those who speak the standard dialect of their national language will be able to get higher-paying jobs than those who do not speak it. Language is thus integrated into a kind of linguistic market, where it has currency and receives certain values depending on the particular market (i.e. context) in which it is offered. Within speech communities, this linguistic capital depends heavily on the competence of the speaking, and, by the same token in the case of translation, that capital depends heavily on the marketability, as it were, of statements according to the recipient's expectations and desires. In the case of the Génesis website, the subtraction, addition, and modification involved in translation, as Melissa understands it, is not to change the

words or even their meanings but rather to shape a portrait of the cooperative according to how CSD believes it should be received by potential donors or clients.

Although for this reason it is very much impossible to register and analyze all of the changes that CSD made, I nevertheless want to point out some of the specific choices that Melissa made because doing so illuminates the "marketing logic" involved in the politics of representation in fair trade. Some choices, in fact, were not about modifying or eliminating information at all, but rather emphasizing relative importance. For example, in the narrative about the History of the Cooperative that the website committee had first constructed, Melissa chose to expand upon socias' mention of the contributions of donors and of international delegations in making the cooperative a reality. To the committee's text, she added a photo of socias working alongside an international delegation from the United States. (see Figure 15) as well as the following text:

> The last two years working with the Génesis project have been a real faith journey. We started the co-op with no funding for the building or machinery at all. We just knew that this project had to happen and that we would find the money somehow. *We have not been disappointed.* Over time, the money has trickled in, mostly from individual donors. The cooperative is where it is today because of the investments of people from all over who have come together for this cause. To date, we've invested more than $130 thousand in the building, but we're not done yet. We are lacking $100 thousand, and we need the continued support.

I talked with Melissa about her choice to amp the presence of donors up, and she told me that "donors like to hear that their money is actually making a real difference...That's why they donate and why they continue to donate." The added description of international delegations from churches and universities in the United States, by the same logic,

provide readers with an example of people "doing good" and "getting dirty" with socias, showing that solidarity is indeed within the reach of people like the readers. At the same time, Melissa continued, it is also important to emphasize the hard work of cooperative members themselves. "It's not surprising that many people in the U.S. perceive Latinos to be lazy," said Melissa, "and so we have to be careful to emphasize the sweat of cooperative members, too, in order to show that their contributions are being matched by hard work on the other end." It was for that reason, it would seem, that Melissa also chose to rhetorically embellish upon the conditions of socias' manual labor in the early stages, while at the same time de-emphasizing immaterial, organizational labor.

Melissa additionally decided to change the website's representation of Ciudad Sandino, claiming that donors are not likely to care very much about the relatively minor details of different barrios. She therefore replaced the maps of Ciudad Sandino with a single map of Nicaragua (Figure 16) and many of the photos of various kinds of Ciudad Sandino housing taken by the website committee with images that CSD had used previously in presentations to donors (see Figure 17, Figure 18, Figure 19, Figure 20). "Nicaragua is a place of contrasts," explained Melissa, "of startling differences between rich and poor and of beauty and ugliness."

Melissa's "cultural translation" also involved the suppression of certain kinds of information that she perceived to be damaging to the relationship that she was trying to construct between the cooperative and potential donors. Thus, with respect to the profiles section—which was otherwise left untouched—Melissa chose to remove what could
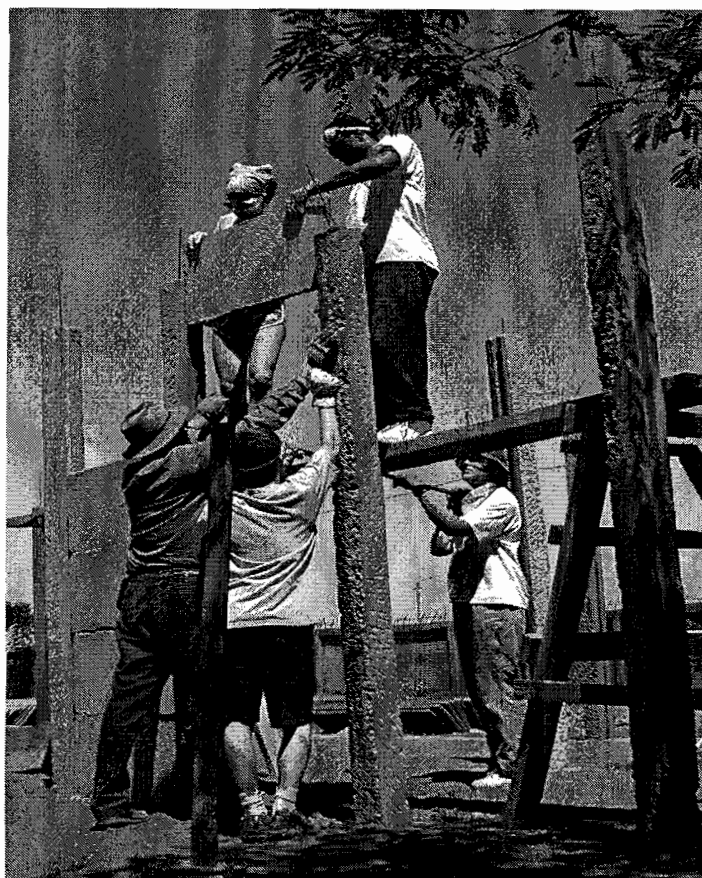
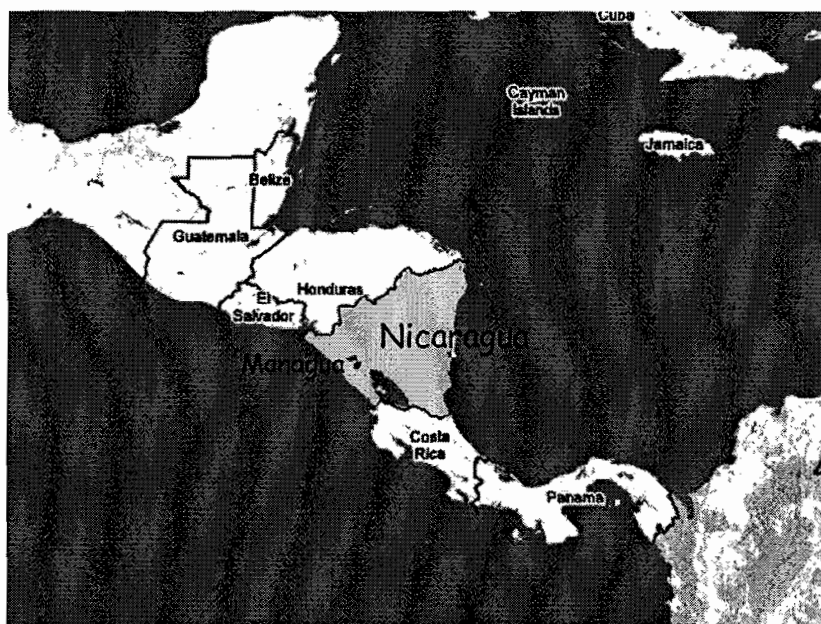*Figure 15: Volunteers working with losetas on the outer wall of the Génesis facility.*

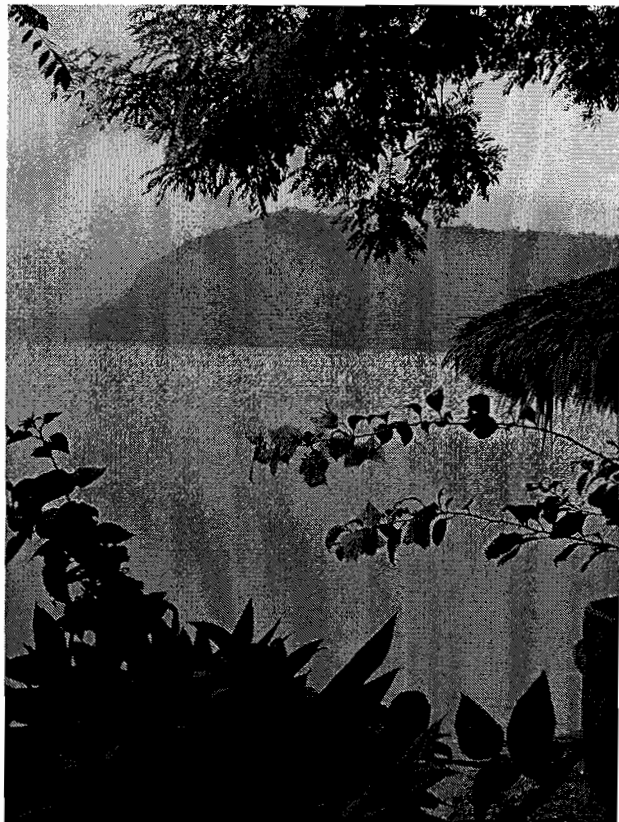*Figure 16: Map of Nicaragua appearing on Génesis website*

Figure 17: Photo of Lake Managua

Figure 18: Photo of burning trash in Nueva Vida
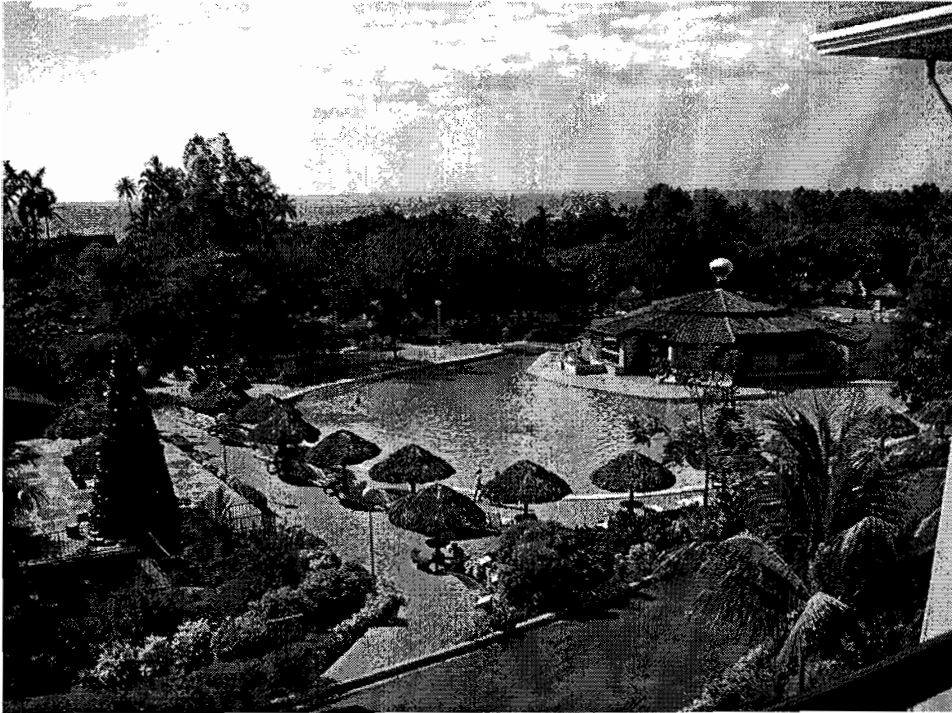
Figure 19: Photo of coastal resort

Figure 20: Photo of Nueva Vida in 1998, shortly after Hurricane Mitch

potentially be controversial information about, for example, a socia's participation in the Contra war, support for the Sandinistas, a critical opinion about capitalism and the imperialism of the U.S., as well as some images that simply did not make sense, like mention of enduring hunger and "*desnudez*" (nudity) while working to build the cooperative. When it came to the discussion of the dynamics of the cooperative itself, likewise, what got the axe was almost all discussion of infrapolitics and conflict. "Although conflicts and disagreements are of course the rule," explained Melissa, "donors do not like to imagine that there is anything but solidarity between cooperative members....Quite frankly, they just don't understand that poor people also fight with one another, they want to romanticize them and continue to think that they're somehow nobler than us and don't suffer from the same problems that we do." She continued, "To some extent, you know, you have to give them that because if you try to challenge their opinions or preconceptions too much, they react poorly." This was particularly the case with the events surrounding the OW. However much it was a reality and however much socias claimed that the conflict resulted in a renewed sense of solidarity and responsibility to one another, Melissa claimed, mention of fraud or theft from the cooperative could easily sour donors on the idea of contributing because "all of a sudden it becomes uncertain where their money is actually going."

CONCLUSIONS

Initially, I was upset at some of the changes that CSD made to the project that was intended, at least in my view, to be an exercise in autonomous, self-representation for socias. Melissa de-emphasizes conflict irked me in particular because it was so clearly, in my observation, such a large part of the experience of fair trade and of being a cooperative member. Eventually, however, once I had a frank discussion with Melissa and also socias about this, it became clear that, although I had attributed self-representation the highest of values in generating the idea of a collaborative project, it was instead self-determination that socias were after. As it turns out, in fact, socias had turned the project over to CSD with full knowledge that they would edit it and make it palatable to donors.

With the publication of Luke Lassiter's *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography* (2005), collaboration has recently enjoyed an upsurge in anthropological research. Collaborative ethnography, in particular, has marked an important shift in the way in which scholars formulate research questions, position the researcher within the investigative project, and define the relationship between researcher and "the researched"—all questions that have typically been omitted from scholarly publication. "Collaborative" research can thus be thought of in terms of a critical alternative to underlying colonial assumptions of anthropologists as positivist, "knowledge-gatherers," as it were, framing ethnography instead as occurring "with" people rather than "on" them or "about" them (Tuhiwa Smith 1999). Collaborative ethnography rejects the arrogance

of positioning the researcher as the only one capable of collaborating (i.e. participant-

observation), and instead argues that critical research practices should be conducted hand

in hand with research participants—from fieldwork to writing—and with a purpose of

bringing about positive change. As Luke Lassiter writes, collaborative ethnography is

designed to:

> emphasize a more fully and critically conscious approach to the power relations
> inherent in all ethnography. Anthropologists and other social scientists called into
> question both the hegemony of Western-situated knowledge and the structures of
> power that engender ethnography. In an effort to resolve this "crisis of
> representation" feminist and postmodernists initiated a sustained critique of the
> ethnographic practice itself—from fieldwork to writing that lasts to this day. The
> critique and its implications for founding a reciprocal and collaborative
> ethnography on intersubjective grounds serve as the contemporary context for the
> building of a more deliberate and explicit collaborative ethnography—one that
> seeks to more honestly grapple with the divisions between the Self and Other,
> between object and subject, and between academic and community-based
> knowledge, but also with the complexity of representing human experience in an
> ever-changing postcolonial and postindustrial world. [2005:48]

Of course, although Lassiter (2005) is right that the movement toward collaborative

ethnography in its current form was largely initiated by feminists and postmodernists, it is

also true that research "subjects," have also pushed back and critiqued researchers'

narrow, often unilaterally defined projects. While ethnographers, in particular, often find

themselves in the awkward position of going to the field with a research project in mind

when there quite clearly exists more pressing and more relevant information to expose, it

is usually the research participant who finds out ways to put ethnographers' skills to use.

Research participants often emphasize the need to affect social change in projects. In my

case, for example, socias approached me with the idea of building a website together, rather than the other way around.

It was, however, my error to assume, rather myopically, that the major contribution of such a collaborative project would be to the matter of self-representation in the text. Following from the insights on ethnographic representation of pioneering feminist anthropologists like Ruth Behar (1993) and June Nash (1979), who observed that the collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge could be expressed by breaking up the monophonic authority of the ethnographer with regular and lengthy quotes, I sought to re-center socias' narratives of themselves by encouraging detailed descriptions of conflict as well as solidarity, pessimism as well as optimism, and individuality of socias as well as their commonalities. Moreover, by drawing on the approach of the testimony and refusing to stage quotes as quotes in the website, to refuse to "[confirm] the final virtuoso orchestration by a single author of all the discourses in his or her text," as James Clifford writes, I sought to encourage "a more radical polyphony" full of political, intentional, and metaphorical complexity (1988:50).

Even as critically engaged methodology, however, my underlying assumption was that self-representation is some kind of transcendent good, when in reality what is of much greater value to socias is self-determination: agency not simply in the realm of one's representation of oneself to other people, but the ability to effect change in their own lives. In this sense, the fact that, once I left, socias turned over all of the information that we had collected and with the recognition, even the objective, that CSD would mold

it to their own purposes, can be seen as socias' understanding of the (economic) value of strategic essentialism. Constructionists, of course, reject the idea that there is an essential fact of existence that precedes social, economic, and political processes. The term *strategic essentialism*, however, argues that there is no pure order or essence in what it means to be human (or a specific kind of human) but, at the same time, recognizes that, as a "rhetorical maneuver," essentialism nevertheless has its place (Fuss 1989; Spivak 1988). Strategic essentialism asserts that the use of essentialism for useful ends, as opposed to strictly epistemological ends, depends on who is using it, how it is being used, and to what purpose. Socias, in other words, saw the utility in playing to donors' sympathies, expectations, and desires, as they also saw the utility of, in Turner's words, the "Romance of otherness...[turning] to ethnic and cultural identity as a means of mobilizing themselves [in this case, representation of themselves] for the defense of their social and political-economic interests" (1993:423). However socias might choose to represent themselves, that is, the inevitable fact is that fair trade consumers, like donors to fair trade projects, are frequently called to "ethical action" through demonstrations of difference, as opposed to sameness, and always within the strict political, social, and cultural limits of acceptability (Dolan 2005:370)

From the beginning, the language of "fair" is actually quite heteroglossic and polyphonic, in the sense that it is characterized by the co-existence of sometimes radically different meanings, ideologies, and experiences (e.g. Bakhtin 1981). But what an analysis of the construction of fair trade advertising shows—perhaps even about fair

trade more broadly—is that, against these centrifugal forces of difference are ranged

centripetal forces that, through active repression or exclusion, create a single unified,

institutionalized discourse.[61] While these disciplinary effects may be realized on the

everyday level of a politics of translation (Hansen 2007), so too, as I have shown in

previous chapters, do they come to bear on the actions and ideas of socias through the

normalizing forces of persuasion and coercion. In the case of fair trade advertising,

however, the master logic continues to be marketability. While many are eager to show

this tendency to absorb cultural difference within specific frameworks—what Wilk calls

"structures of common difference" (1995:111), in which exchange is encouraged to be

different but only in specific ways that do not challenge the basic structure of the market

—to be characteristic of the system of global capitalism on a systematic level, it is really

the demands of marketability and profitability that constrain the choices of individual

people. In fair trade, the way that this plays out for consumers is in the creation of a

perceived (imaginary) relationship of compassion, care, and solidarity with a not-too-

radically different other. For producers, on the other hand, there is no illusion of any such

thing, just a compromise for a marginally better outcome.

NOTES

[61] As Bakhtin writes, the novel, too, is heteroglossic: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles...a diversity of social speech times (sometimes even a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices" (1981:262). Bakhtin poses in the novel in contrast to poetry, in which the unity of style and the unity of an individual person realizing himself in this language are prerequisite. In his work on Rabelais, for example, Bakhtin 1984:42) shows a specific case of heteroglossia between unofficial and official cultures, represented by the folk and vulgar language on the one hand and the Latin and polished language on the other. Heteroglossia breaks down the frontier between these two cultures. In carnival heteroglossia sets free "forbidden" and comical meanings from the established dogma. Polyphony is not synonymous with heteroglossia. Polyphony refers to the many-voicedness of texts in which characters and narrator speak on equal terms. The narrator does not speak over the character's heads, giving the reader privileged moral or physical information. The characters narrate themselves, and the narrator never knows more than they do. The narrator is not obtrusive, omnicient, but rather one voice among other.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: RE-VISIONING FAIR TRADE

It should come as no surprise that many ongoing debates about NGOs and cooperatives parallel those about fair trade (Fridell 2006, Fisher 2007). Like NGOs, which are often conceptualized as agents of neoliberalism in the context of disappearing state-sponsored social welfare, and cooperatives, which have, conversely, been imagined to be precursors to socialism, fair trade exists in contrast to mainstream, seemingly coherent and self-contained "capitalism"—almost as if it needed an antithetical Other in order to conjure itself into existence.

In many ways, in fact, that is precisely what fair trade marketing does, if not fair trade itself: packaging draws sharp distinctions between an equally imaginary world of cruel and anonymous exploitation and an alternative, imaginary world of solidarity and partnership. Yet, once we move beyond fair trade's projected image of itself, empowered by the advertising spectacle of late capitalism, the lived reality of fair trade is far more complex. Fairness, likewise, once a straightforward matter of dividing up profits, empowering the poor, and generally leveling the playing field, is shot through with all the subtle conflicts of ideological disjunctures, of different experiences of work and labor, of unequal access to capital and political opportunity, of asymmetrical power, and of

disparate concepts of social and economic justice. What an ethnographic approach to fair trade production shows us, in other words, is that fair trade is not an alternative to the conventional market economy and neither is it somehow enveloped by it. Rather, the persisting metaphors of inside/outside the capitalist "system" obfuscate the greater point that all economies, even market economies, are sustained by a range of (often conflictual) processes as diverse and intensely variegated as the rest of social and cultural life. The goal of this concluding chapter, then is to deconstruct the idea of the fair trade "economy," as Gibson-Graham (1998, 2006) suggest, revealing the shifting yet constitutive forms that give fair trade its purchase: human motivations apart from self-interest, values apart from exchange value or use value, and the multiple plays of power apart from domination and resistance that, as a whole, determine what is right, just, and fair.

FAIR TRADE AND NEOLIBERALISM

Perhaps one of the most common academic debates regarding fair trade is the extent to which fair trade either challenges or reproduces the structures of neoliberalism. On the one hand, some scholars argue that alternative trading strategies like fair trade and corporate social responsibility importantly shape neoliberal market structures, and their success in doing so is in no small part due to the fact that they operate very much "within" neoliberalism as opposed to against it (Taylor 2005). Fair trade, in particular, functions variously to critique conventional production and consumption standards, to re-

embed commodity production and distribution in "equitable social relations" to democratize international trade, to demystify global relations of exchange, to challenge market-based competitiveness based solely on price, and thus also to challenge the anonymous capitalist relations that fuel exploitation (Grimes 2005, 2000, Raynolds 2000). Still others have extended the argument even further, suggesting that the semiotic production of commodities that express ecological, social, or place-based values, such as fair trade and organics, traffic in particular "political ecological imaginaries," even moral economies, that facilitate a sense of solidarity in difference, upheld by a series of basic principles about people's rights in trade (Goodman 2004, Simpson and Rapone 2000). In other words, fair trade represents a form of resistance to neoliberalism in the Polanyian sense of protecting land, natural resources, and labor from the ravages of the market.

On the other side of the debate, however, alternative trading strategies are seen as functioning to extend the reach of neoliberal logics and practices. Julie Guthman (2007), for example, ventures that voluntary food labels are part of the larger neoliberal trend to decentralize the governance of market mechanisms while also allowing non-economic ascriptions of cooperation, solidarity, or environmental responsibility to be valued and traded in the global market (Fridell 2007). The standards that are developed in fair trade and organics, that is to say, establish the boundaries of acceptable behavior and implement specific structures of enforcement—a practice that does not challenge neoliberalism so much as produce new modes of (neoliberal) governmentality that essentially validate the absence of state control over the economy and locating regulatory

mechanisms in the market (Mutersbaugh 2005). Indeed, Heynen and Robbins (2005) note in their discussion of the neoliberalization of environmentalism that these strategies are quite typical of neoliberal regulation. Market-based regulation is governed by complex arrays of private, NGO, and multilateral entities, it attaches economic values to ethical behaviors (creating markets where none existed before), and it often "devolves" regulatory responsibility to consumers.

THE MORAL ECONOMY

The extent to which these debates about fair trade mirror the anthropological ideas of the moral economy versus the market economy are striking. In economic anthropology, it has been commonplace to embrace the methodological approach of starting with non-economic norms and values as a way to re-vision economies as essentially "submerged," in Polanyi's (1957) term, in social, political, and religious contexts, rather than autonomous of them. Indeed, it is this imagination—that certain economies exist apart from society while others that are intimately connected with society—that gave birth to the idea of the moral economy (to be contrasted, of course, with the market economy).

The notion of a moral economy reflects the works of Karl Polanyi (1957) and E.P. Thompson (1971), and has often featured the extraordinary phenomenon of poor, pre-market people contesting the dictates of a much more capitalist economic order (Scott 1976). While Polanyi (1957), on the one hand, contributed the distinction between

embedded and autonomous economies—in which the former are typically ancient or primitive and submerge production and transaction in social, political and religious institutions, and the latter typify modern, impersonal markets and are conceptualized as apart from society—Thompson (1971) popularized the term *moral economy* and explained how and why the transition between the two often generate social and political unrest, even sustained violence. Drawing on an extensive study of eighteenth-century English food riots, Thompson discovers the "delicate tissue" of traditional norms and reciprocities unable to accommodate the "cash-nexus" of the emerging market order (1971:78-9). The clash between the two worlds was often explosive, and those who were at the mercy of the emerging market order often regarded the transition as unjust.[62] Generalizing from the particulars of the food riots, Thompson conceives moral economy, at its most basic level, as a historically mediated popular consensus about the distinction between legitimate from illegitimate practices (1971:131-6).

In the long view, the prevailing idea of the moral economy can be said to have emerged in the heat of a disagreement over the "economic" approach to human behavior, particularly rational choice and related theories (Booth 1993:653). In response, traditional moral economists have argued that the economic approach to economic behavior fails to engage the many instances in which behavior is instead shaped by non-economic institutions and values. This position led Scott, for example, to write about peasants in early twentieth-century Burma and Vietnam in terms of the "the central fact that the peasant is born into a society and culture that provide him a fund of moral values,

a set of concrete social relationships, a pattern of expectations about the endeavors of others, and a sense of how those in his culture have proceeded to similar goals in the past" (1976:166). Instead of a set of prefabricated assumptions about human beings as atomistic and narrowly utilitarian, the more appropriate emphasis is upon the "structure of a shared moral universe, a common notion of what is just" (1976:167). Or in Hahn's words, the moral economy concerns economic activity as it is woven into the "web of social life...ideas about justice, independence, obligation, and other aspects of social and political life, rooted in specific relationships and refracted through historical experiences" (1983:685).[63]

If the moral economist's critique of rational choice theory can be stated as an opposition to an oversimplified understanding of individual human motivation, then the reverse could be said as well. From the rational choice standpoint, the moral economist's insistence on systems of cultural meaning reflects a misplaced concreteness that cannot help but subsume individual motivation within it. The debate needs not end there, however. As Granovetter (1985) points out, embeddedness—the "master assumption" (Booth 1994:563) of moral economists—is in the end the degree to which economic behavior is affected by or submerged in social relations. Yet, traditional moral economists do not treat it in this way. For them, so deeply is economic behavior embedded that "social relations" ultimately become what individuals think in economic behavior, and think otherwise they cannot. The view of social relations presented by moral economists, in other words, reflects not what actually happens between people, but

is rather elevated to a concept so abstract that it becomes a kind of "generalized morality," a widely shared set of "implicit agreements to certain kinds of regard for others" (Granovetter 1985:489), thus losing sight of what actually happens. Generalized moralities, however, are not social relations, because social relations involve a flux of concrete and specific interpersonal ties that are "continuously constructed and reconstructed during interaction" (1985:486). They are not fixed systems of norms and values, internalized through socialization. If they were, behavior would be automatic, even mechanical, making individual action or experience irrelevant to knowledge of the structural whole.

In his account of ancient Greece, Booth (1994) shows how the moral economy model may proceed differently, without having to abandon the central principle of embeddedness in favor of self-interest and rational choice. According to Booth, the "moral architecture" and economy of ancient Greece can be understood not in terms of something that filters down into the behavior of individuals, but rather in the fundamental "ends" and "values" of the primary economic unit, the household—what Arnold (2001), drawing on Booth (1994), refers to elsewhere as "social goods." The household, Booth argues, rests on careful, even rational calculations of utility. As such, the role of the wife is to manage the servants and children, and the role of overseers is to discipline the slaves. But the central issue for the master is how to motivate the wife and the overseer to do his work efficiently (Booth 1994:659). However, in contrast to what we may expect, the value of the master's efficiency is not in maximizing wealth. Rather, it is in

maximizing his own leisure, the value of which is that it is a prerequisite for meaningful

participation in political affairs and, indeed, for a "good and beautiful life." The moral

architecture, in other words, may define the "ends" or "social goods" of economic

activities—in this case, "detachment from provisioning activities" (1994:660)—but it

does not structure the activities themselves.[64]

The ethnographic approach can also be seen as a partial resolution to the conflicts

between the formalist and substantivist approaches. "Bracketing" general morality as

well as the model of the rational, fully informed individual—which is to say, suspending

belief in the taken for granted assumptions that elevate these things to the status of

universals—the phenomenology of labor, proceeding instead a subjective standpoint, is

capable of comprehending the cultural self-understandings of the actors themselves, their

sense of propriety, justice, obligation, and the like. At the same time, rooted in an

intersubjective framework that takes social relations not to be an objective matter at all,

but rather in constant, dialogic flux, economic action, including labor, is not unified by

any one logic, but rather determined substantially by the concreteness of those

interactions. The concept of the moral economy has brought into sharp relief the

structural interrelationship between religious, political, social, and cultural institutions

and economic activity as well as the many possible culturally and historically mediated

ideas about what are legitimate and illegitimate economic practices. What it has often

missed, however, is that the morality is not general at all, it is constituted and

reconstituted by its lived engagement in concrete, social relations.

FEMINIST ECONOMICS AND THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF FAIR TRADE

Similarly, common approaches to feminizing the economy have involved adding

in the heretofore ignored domestic sphere or sector, attributing value to women's unpaid

labor and recognizing the socially and culturally-mediated questions and concerns of

women in the "whole" economy. Much like the moral economy, the contribution of

feminist economics has thus been to challenge the distinction between the economic

(here, conceptualized as a male-dominated sphere) and the non-economic or domestic.

There exists a basic affinity between economic anthropology and not only moral

economy but also feminist economics. Taking the idea of economic activity to be not an

a priori matter of self-interest or structure but rather an empirical question about the

complex interrelationship between social, cultural, and moral concerns and the material

world—in its revised form significantly less distinguishable from non-economic activity

—economic anthropology and feminist economics both allow us to begin in the *terra*

firma of experience and pose important questions about the "ends" towards which

productive and consumptive activities are put.

The task of re-conceptualizing "fairness" in fair trade—of dignified work, of

motherwork, of the idea of balanced exchange (as opposed to the basic assumptions of

the business contract), of self-determination (as opposed to self-representation)—

demands just this kind of gendered analysis. As the cases of The Fair Trade Zone and

Génesis cooperatives show, there is no such thing as a "pure" economy—be that a free

market ruled by an invisible hand, a cooperative, or an entire "alternative" economy—

liberated from abiding questions of inequality and injustice or the particularities of social and cultural location. Gendered questions and concerns, in particular, have shaped almost every aspect of the lived experience of work. As cooperatives, The Fair Trade Zone and Génesis socias have fostered a generalized sense of respect, mutual responsibility, and a democratic governing structure for determining who "counts" as a member of the cooperative and what is considered to be action consistent with that framework that reflects not only a class-based idea of common management and cooperation but also the ideas, values, and goals of women and mothers—foremost among them, the role of the hope-giver of the family and the goal of providing a future for their children. At the same time, their ideas of solidarity and partnership in the broader context of fair trade lay the groundwork for a critique of fair trade in terms of "balance" as well as the fair and unfair use of power across social, cultural, and economic difference.

With those realizations in mind, it is no longer possible to hold onto an idea of the economy—even an alternative economy—that is so adamantine as to be indifferent to the peculiarities of its instantiation. Indeed, only at great cost can we sustain the idea of the economy as a subject unto itself, acting either in an inert field—expanding, contracting, inflating, slowing down, speeding up, yet evacuated of the lives that charged it with meaning. As Amartya Sen (1987) points out, one of the consequences of such the "engineering tradition" of economics is the tendency to construct workers as cogs in a machine, possessed of a certain kind of stupid contentment.

Economic imaginaries have played powerful roles in all kinds of politics, especially for those who are interested in constructing alternative futures—economies devoid of exploitation, hierarchy and rank, economies based on principles of self-sufficiency and sustainability, and economies of infinite growth—especially in opposition to the apparent economic realities of capitalist industrialization. Yet, fair trade is neither enveloped by the capitalist, market, or neoliberal system, nor an alternative to it, a form of resistance to its domination. Rather, taking the principles of economic anthropology and of feminist political economy as a starting point, fair trade can instead be understood as a debate—a debate about what values matter in trade, understanding that exchange value is not the only relevant one, and about what the purposes of labor or exchange or consumption within the many possible interpretations of a good life. Goodness, like fairness, however, is not a given, but rather contained within disparate as well as shared frameworks of meaning, across which broader fields of power work. To think of fair trade as an alternative economy is not only to overstate the consistency of its message in critique of other forms of trade but also to miss the many ways it falls short of social justice.

NOTES

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[62] The prevailing concept of the moral economy has, in fact, attempted to explain conflict and resistance. Scott's (1976) analysis of peasant rebellions in early twentieth-century Burma and Vietnam depicts peasants as rebelling out of their desire to resist intensifying European colonialism and to restore ancient peasant ways and rights. Eric Wolf (1969:276) explains peasant wars in Cuba, Russia, China, Mexico, and Algeria in similar terms, emphasizing the predatory nature and culturally disruptive effects of "North Atlantic Capitalism."

[63] From the other camp, the most common response has been that the norms and reciprocities of any given moral economy are fundamentally reducible to the terms of self-interested political economy. Popkin, for instance, argues that "by applying theories of individual decision-making to villages, we can begin to develop a deductive understanding of peasant institutions and move the analysis back one step to the level of the individual. By using the concepts of individual choice and decision-making, we can discuss how and why groups in individuals decide to adopt some sets of norms while rejecting others" (1979:18).

[64] In the study of inequality, a corollary to social goods can be found in Amartya Sen's (1995) concept of "capabilities." What matters, in other words, is the "capabilities" or the "choice set" an individual faces, not the choice he or she actually makes.

APPENDIX: PROFILES OF GENESIS SOCIAS

LEIZA

Nací en Telica en el municipio de León, soy segunda hija de cuatro hermanos, mi padre era agricultor, cosechaba algodón y ajonjolí, mi madre era ama de casa. As mis 65 años no he aprendido a leer ni escribier, pero es uno de mis objectivos. No aprendí a leer porque mi padre murió y mi madre tuvo que trabajar en una comunidad muy remota, la escuela quedaba a 10 kilometros de mi casa. Vine a Managua antes del terremoto del 1972, y me trasladé al OPEN 3 (ahora Ciudad Sandino) posteriormente. Ahora tengo 65 años de edad y habito en la Zona 8 de Ciudad Sandino. Tengo seis hijos y soy soltera.

Yo me di cuenta de este proyecto por una vecina y vine a las reuniones que estaba haciendo en CSD. Y me gustó la propuesta, de varias reuniones nos mostraron el terreno donde trabajamos y me entusiasmé aun más con el proyecto. En este momento la cooperativa está en marcha hemos hechos bloques, losetas, vigas de hierro. Ahora estamos más organizados, pero no siempre. Hemos tenido muchos problemas entre nosotros, no siempre nos hemos confiado. Hemos pasado tiempos muy difíciles pero gracias a Dios y nosotros lo hemos superado.

I was born in Telica en the municipality of León, I'm the second daughter of four siblings, my father was a farmer, he harvested cotton and sesame, and my other was a homemaker. At 65 years old, I have not learned to read or write, but it is one of my goals. I didn't learn to read because my father died and my mother had to work in a very remote community where the school was 10 kilometers from my house. I came to Managua before the 1972 earthquake, and I moved to OPEN 3 (now Ciudad Sandino) afterwards. Now I am 65 years old and I live in Zone 8 of Ciudad Sandino. I have six children and I am single.

I learned about this project from a neighbor and came to the meetings that were happening at CSD. I liked the proposal, and several meetings they showed us the spot where we would work and that excited me even more about the project. Now, the cooperative is in the process of making blocks, losetas, and iron beams. We are now better organized, but we haven't always been. We have had many problems between us, we haven't always trusted one another. We have been through difficult times, but thanks to God and ourselves we have overcome.

KASSIA

Tengo 29 años de edad. Nací en Ciudad Sandino, mi mama era ama de casa y mi papa era albañil y siempre han vivido en Ciudad Sandino. Tengo un hijo de 7 años de edad, soy madre soltera y vivo con mis padres. Me integré a la cooperativa y me gustó por eso decidí seguir en ella, no estaba trabajando. En esta cooperativa he aprendido

mucho. He recibido varias capacitaciones, también he aprendido a relacionarme con

otras personas. Lo más difícil ha sido el trabajo en el terreno porque he aprendido a

hacer los materiales de la construcción de la empresa hasta la construcción de ella.

Espero que sea positivo para un futuro algo que me beneficie a mi y a mi familia y a mis

compañeros.

I am 29 years old. I was born in Ciudad Sandino, my mother was a homemaker

and my dad was a bricklayer, and they have always lived in Ciudad Sandino. I have a 7

year old son, I am a single mother and I live with my parents. I joined the cooperative

and like it, so I decided to continue, as I wasn't working. In this cooperative I have

learned a lot. I have received various trainings. I have also learned to relate to others.

The hardest thing has been working in the field because I've learned to make building

materials. I hope the cooperative will provide a positive future, something that will

benefit me and my family and my colleagues.

JOAQUINA

Nací en El Sauce en el Departamento de León en 1960. Toda mi familia paternal

y maternal somos de origen Leonés. Toda mi generación dedicada a la producción

agrícola de consumo. Soy la número cinco de 13 hermanos, mis papas, procrearon 15

hijos, dos fallecieron: uno a corta edad y otro a los 20 años, después del triunfo

revolucionario.

Soy madre de cuatro hijos: dos mujeres y dos varones de 29, 26, 18, y 15 años respectivamente. De mis dos hijas tengo cuatro nietos, tres niñas y un varón. Tres de mis hijos trabajan y vivimos cada uno independiente, sin embargo pendiente de ayudarnos unos a otros, significa que el problema de uno es problema de todos.

Estoy soltera, nunca he sido casada, espero poder cumplir este sacramento, encontrar a alguien católico y que acepte ser parte en mi comunidad.

Estudié derecho en la universidad y Pos-Grado en Derecho Procesal Penal en las Reformas. Antes de pertenecer a la Cooperativa Génesis me dediqué por veinticuatro años a la vida militar, renuncié a la vida militar para integrarme de lleno a la vida social desde el año 2000. Fui miembro honorario de la Fundación Padre Miguel (QEPD) y desde el Año 2005 formo parte de la Junta Directiva. Actualmente administro y dirijo un comedor popular beneficiando al adulto mayor de la Zona 8 (y adulto mayor familiares de socios de la cooperativa Génesis).

He aprendido mucho en el aspecto de la Construcción. He reforzado conocimientos en todos los aspectos. He realizado trabajos de construcción que nunca había realizado, pero sobre todo he aprendido a convivir con todo tipo de personas. Ha sido una gran experiencia porque no es lo mismo haber estado vinculada tanto tiempo con personas con disciplina y cortesía militar impuesta. Gracias a Dios que me regala cada día paciencia y tolerancia por que cuanto la necesito.

I was born in El Sauce in the department of León in 1960. All my mother's and father's family are originally from León. All of us were dedicated to agricultural production. I m the fifth of 13 siblings, my parents had 15 children, two died: one in infancy and another at age 20, after the revolutionary triumph.

I am a mother of four children, two women and two men, aged 29, 26, 18, and 15 years respectively. My two daughters have had four grandchildren, three girls and a boy. Three of my children work and live independently, yet each helps the others, meaning that one problem is everyone's problem.

I am single, I have never been married, but I hope to experience this sacrament, to find someone who accepts Catholicism and can be part of my community.

I studied law and post-graduate in Criminal Procedure Law Reform. Before joining the Génesis cooperative, I spent twenty-four years in military life, but gave up military life in 2000 to integrate filly into society. I was an honorary member of the Father Miguel Foundation (FUNPAMI), may he rest in peace, and since 2005 I have been part of the Board. Actually, I manage and direct a soup kitchen benefitting the elderly of Zone 8 (as well as elderly family members of the cooperative Génesis).

I learned a great deal with respect to construction. I have done construction work that I have never done, but mostly I've learned to live with all kinds of people. It was a great experience because it is not the same to have been associated for so long with military imposed discipline. Thanks to God that He has gifted me patience and tolerance when I have needed it.

JENIFER

Mi mama se dedicaba a la siembra y cuido de ganado en la finca de sus padres. Al morir mi abuelo, se tuvo que trasladar a vivir a Managua en compañía de su mama, formaliza la unión con mi papa, un electrista. Como consecuencia de una inundación, se trasladan a vivir a Ciudad Sandino (OPEN 3) donde nací, junto mis cinco hermanos.

Soy madre soltera de tres hijos educados, disciplinados, estudiosos. Estudié administración de empresas actualmente trabajo como capacitadora en la organización red de Mujeres María Elena Cuadra, temas como Enfoque de Género y Economía de la Mujer. De esta forma obtengo un ingreso económico para mantener a mi familia.

Ha sido una bella experiencia, he puesto en práctica mis conocimientos y por primera vez he estado dirigiendo a un grupo de hombres y mujeres, dedicando todo mi tiempo. He aprendido a tener paciencia, a comprender y ser comprendida, a escuchar y ser escuchada. El respeto que debe prevalecer, a poner en práctica el concepto de cooperativismo. He enriquecido mis conocimientos, hoy sé qué es cooperativismo realmente lo vivo. Estamos construyendo nuestra empresa, de la que somos socias y dueñas.

Lo mas difícil para mi ha sido la TOLERANCIA, me he dado cuenta que al final quienes piensan diferente tienen los mismos objectivos, que es llevar adelante nuestro proyecto, ser arte y parte de este gran proyect. Nuestra misión es atraer a más y más familiares nuestros a que sean parte de este proyecto.

Espero que juntas dejemos sentados precedentes y que nunca más se nos excluya, ni se nos imponga el machismo ni otros mitos que alienan a la mujer tratando de opacar el papel importante que jugamos en la sociedad. Hemos demonstrado que somos capaces de salir adelante aun con todos los obstáculos en el camino. Ha sido difícil y duro sin embargo no imposible, un día muy cercano estaremos celebrando el éxito de este esfuerzo que al inicio muchos y muchas dijeron "Eso no es posible." Hoy es posible. Lo estamos logrando, ánimo! Adelante! Somos capaces, podemos alcanzar las metas que nos propongamos, siempre y cuando nos mantengamos firmes y confiado que juntos podemos. Gracias a Dios que nos puso en el camino a dos Fudaciones que desde el inicio nos dieron la Mano, y en toda la solidaridad han estado presentes, económicamente.

My mother dedicated herself to the raising and care of livestock on her parents' farm. When my grandfather died, they had to move to Managua to live with her mom and to formalize the union with my dad, an electrician. As a consequence of a flood, they moved to Ciudad Sandino (OPEN 3) where I was born, alongside by five siblings.

I am a single mother of three educated, disciplined, and studious children. I studied business administration and am currently working as a trainer in the women's network, María Elena Cuadra, on issues such as Focus on Gender and Women's Economy. By this means I earn an income to support my family.

It has been a beautiful experience, I have put my knowledge into practice for the first time, devoting all my time to leading a group of men and women. I've learned to be patient, to understand and be understood, to hear and be heard. Respect must prevail in order to implement the concept of a cooperative. I have enriched my knowledge, and not I know what it is like in real life to be part of a cooperative. We're building our company, of which we are members and owners.

The hardest thing for me was tolerance. I realized that ultimately that those who may think differently may also have the same objectives, to carry out our project, and to be part of this great project. Our mission is to attract more and more of our family to become part of this project.

I hope that together we allow precedent and that we will no longer exclude, neither imposing machismo nor other myths that alienate women and try to obscure the important role we play in society. We demonstrated that we can move forward despite all obstacles in the road. It has been difficult and tough but not impossible. One day very soon we will celebrate the success of this effort. At the beginning, many said "That's not possible." It is now possible. We're achieving it! Forward! We are able, we can achieve the goals that we set out, as long as we remain firm and confident that together we can. Thank God for putting us on the road to the two foundations that, from the moment we shook hands, full economic solidarity has been present.

OLIVER

Nací en Ciudad Sandino en 1989. Mi padre es comerciante. Tengo tres hermanas, mi abuela y mis padres. Actualmente soy soltero, estudiante de tercera año de Secundaria y trabajo como socio de la Cooperativa de Producción Industrial Hilandería Génesis.

Me integré a esta cooperativa por invitación de otra socia, desde el inicio ya que yo tenía deseos de trabajar en un lugar estable donde se respeten los derechos de los trabajadores. Actualmente en la cooperativa soy fiscal del sindicato.

Durante todo el tiempo que he estado en la cooperativa, he aprendido diferentes habilidades y considero que la organización y comunicación que tenemos me ayudará a tener buenas relaciones humanas con todos los cooperadores. Lo más difícil para mí es mantenerme firme. Hemos soportado hambre y desnudez por alcanzar una meta.

Que es ver a todos mis compañeros y compañeras trabajando dignamente en una cooperativa que con mucho esfuerzo estamos impulsándola. Con fé, esperanza y mucho amor.

Espero de esta cooperativa que ayude a la población a levantar su nivel de vida ya que será fuente de trabajo en una sistema capitalista que no permite la igalidad

I was born in Ciudad Sandino in 1989. My father is a businessman. I have three sisters, my grandmother, and my parents. I'm currently single, in my third year of high school, and I work as a member of Génesis.

I joined the cooperative at the invitation of another member because I was wanting to work in a stable place that respects the rights of workers. I'm currently in the cooperative's union representative. In my time in the cooperative, I have learned different skills, and I believe that the organization and communication we have will help me have good relationships with all other members. The hardest thing for me is to stay strong. We have endured hunger and nakedness to achieve a goal.

That is seeing all my colleagues work with dignity in a cooperative that, with great effort, we are trying to move forward. With faith, hope, and much love.

I hope that this cooperative helps people to raise their living standards, as it will be a source of work in a capitalist system that does not allow equality.

YASMÍN

Nací en Managua, tengo 41 años de edad. Soy casada, tengo tres hijos: dos varones (13 y 21 años) y una mujer de 15 años. Tengo 37 años de vivir en Ciudad Sandino. Mi madre es de Boaco y mi padre de Rivas, somos cuatro hermanos y yo soy la tercera.

Me integré a la cooperativa el 5 de febrero del 2007, ha sido mi primer trabajo y mi primer experiencia. Nunca pensé aprender a hacer bloques, losetas, pilares, armar viga, hacer mezclas, en fin todo lo relacionado a la construcción.

También he aprendido a relacionarme con personas de distintos caracteres, actitudes, a ser tolerante, y a saber llevar las relaciones humanas. Me gusta mi trabajo y

el proyecto de hilandería. Tengo la fe en Dios que un día hecha nuestra fabrica, tendré

un trabajo fijo y digno, para poderles dar un futuro mejor a mis hijos.

I was born in Managua, and I'm 41 years old. I am married, have three children, two sons (13 and 21 years old) and a daughter, 15 years old. I have lived for 37 years in Ciudad Sandino. My mother is from Boaco and my father is from Rivas, and I am the third of four siblings.

I joined the cooperative on the 5th of February in 2007, which was my first job experience. I never knew how to make blocks, tiles, pillars, beams, or make cement mixes—in short, everything related to construction.

I have also learned to relate with people of different characters, attitudes, to be tolerant, and know how relate to people. I like my job and the proposed cotton gin. I have faith in God that one day our factory will be finish, I'll have a decent and steady job and will be able to provide a better future for my children.

ASCENSIÓN

Tengo 35 años, vivo en Ciudad Sandino en la Zona 8. Nací en Ciudad Antigua, Nueva Segovia, mis padres se han dedicado a la agricultura.

Vine a Ciudad Sandino en 1990 porque quería seguir estudiando pero me dediqué más a trabajar y después me casé y formé una familia de las cuales la conformamos cuatro personas, dos menores y dos adultos.

Cuando me integré en esta cooperativa fue por medio de una amiga que me invito a una reunión y como estaba desempleada creía que se trataba de empleo, pero fue de este proyecto que nos hablaron y decidí integrarme y aquí he aprendido muchas cosas. Una de ellas es convivir con diferentes caracteres de las personas que creo que es una de las cosas más difícil que he experimentado en el tiempo que he estado en la cooperativa. Espero tener un empleo fijo y dar empleo a otras cabezas de familia.

I'm 35, I live in Ciudad Sandino in Zone 8. I was born in Antigua, Nueva Segovia, my parents worked as farmers.

I came to Ciudad Sandino in 1990 because I wanted to continue studying, but I had to work, and afterwards I got married and started a family of four people, two children and two adults.

When I joined this cooperative, it was through a friend who invited me to a meeting and, as I was unemployed, I thought I should try to get a job. I decided to join, and I have learned many things here. One is to live with people of different characteristics, which has been one of the hardest things I've experienced in my time in the cooperative.

I hope to have a stead job and give employment to other households.

ELIZABETH

Tengo 38 años de edad. Vivo en Ciudad Sandino en la zona 11. Nací en Managua y vine a Ciudad Sandino a la edad de 8 años. Mi mama es de oficio costurera. Mi trabajo es hacer repostería pero me encuentro desempleada. Tengo mi esposo y tres hijos, dos mujeres de 21 y 22 años y un varón de 15 años. Formamos una familia de cinco personas.

Cuando yo me integré a esta cooperativa miré que era un proyecto interesante, he recibido varias capacitaciones de las cuales he aprendido mucho, porque siempre he opinado en aprender mucho para salir adelante. Con este proyecto pienso que mi familia y otras familias mas vamos a salir adelante o por lo menos teniendo un trabajo digno y sin maltrato. Lo mas difícil ha sido ir aprendiendo paso a paso desde los materiales de nuestra empresa hasta la construcción porque nunca había trabajado así en un proyecto de construcción. Espero que en un futuro todo sea bueno para mi y mis compañeros.

I am 38 years old, and I live in Ciudad Sandino in Zone 11. I was born in Managua came to Ciudad Sandino when I was 8 years old. My mom works as a seamstress. My job is to make cakes but I have found myself unemployed. I have my husband and three children, two daughters of 21 and 22 years old and a boy of 15. We are a family of five.

When I joined this cooperative, it looked like an interesting project. I received several trainings in which I have learned a lot. It has always been by view that one must learn a lot to succeed. With this project I think my family and others are going to get ahead or at least have a dignified work without mistreatment. The most difficult part has been to learn step by step to build our business because I have never worked in a construction project. I hope that in the future everything will be good for me and my colleagues.

EUGENIO

Nací en Masatepe, departamento de Masaya en 1962. Mis padres se dedicaban a la agricultura y el comercio, llegamos a vivir al antiguo OPEN 3 (hoy Ciudad Sandino) en el año 1972, buscando mejoría económica. Mi familia la componen cuatro miembros. Curse mis estudios universitarios de Derecho en Managua y estudie las técnicas de Construcción hasta su conclusión en el Instituto Nacional Tecnológico (INATEC), en Managua.

Me integré a la cooperativa el 4 de Febrero del 2007, anteriormente me dedicaba al comercio y trabajos de construcción domiciliar. He aprendido muchas cosas desde el punto de vista de desarrollo social y económico, producto de capacitaciones sucesivas sobre relaciones humanas y derecho cooperativo, entre otros. No hay cosas difíciles, lo importante es aprender a hacerlo y con participación.

Espero ver realizado este gran proyecto, por el futuro de todos mis compañeros y compañeras, lograr triunfar todos y mejorar nuestro nivel de vida.

I was born in Masatepe, in the department of Masay in 1962. My parents were involved in farming and trade, and we came to live in OPEN 3 (today Ciudad Sandino) in 1972, looking for an economic improvement. My family has four members. I attended the university for law in managua and I studied construction in the National Technological Institute (INATEC) in Managua.

I joined the cooperative on February 4, 2007, and had previously worked in sales and housing construction. I have learned may things from the standpoint of social and economic development, the product of trainings on, among other things, communication and cooperative law. There are difficult things, but the important thing is to learn how to participate.

I hope to see this big project done for the future of all my colleagues, and to improve our standard of living.

HERNÁN

Nací en Managua, Nicaragua en 1950. Soy casado, procreé tres hijos, todos mayores.

Vine a la cooperativa en los primeros días del mes de febrero del año dos mil siete, invitado por una compañera miembro activo quien por esos días se dedicaba a ha

hacer campaña convocando a quienes estuviesen dispuestas a integrarse al proyecto, que inicialmente e pretendió fuese exclusivo para mujeres.

Lo que me motivó a la integración, fue principalmente las características del proyecto, que proponía una experiencia productiva y de mercado nuevo, combinando el trabajo con respecto en igualdad de derechos, condiciones, equidad y justicia social.

Para mí de manera particular a parte de una opción de trabajo que la necesitaba , me ofrecía una nueva experiencia laboral, productiva, y económica, pero además me permitió demostrarme a mi mismo que podía superar la inactividad, los temores y la incapacidad en la que estaba sumido, producto de las recomendaciones medicas, después de haber sufrido una lesión cardiaca, y a la vez salir al paso a la desgraciada discriminación que sufrimos todas las personas a las que después de cumplir cuarenta años le está negado por la ley a un puesto de trabajo formal en este país.

Desde los primeros días he sido parte del consejo de dirección, y he aportado en la organización y dirección del trabajo. Actualmente ocupo el cargo de tesorero de la Junta Directiva.

I was born in Managua, Nicaragua in 1950. I'm married and I've had three children, all older.

I came to the cooperative in the first days of February 2007, invited by an active member who in those days was campaigning for people to join the project, which was initially intended to be exclusive to women.

What motivated me to join was mainly the characteristics of the project, which proposed a productive and new market while maintaining an idea of equal rights, equitable conditions and social justice.

Particularly for me, it was work that I needed, and it offered me a new labor, productive, and economic experience, but also one that allowed me to demonstrate to myself that I could overcome inactivity and the fears of of my inability to work, the product of medical advice after I suffered a heart attack, and started to suffer the discrimination against all people who after turning forty in this country is denied formal work.

From the earliest days I have been part of the board, and have contributed in organizing and directing the work. I am currently serving as treasurer.

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