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8 CREATING AND CONTESTING VALUE: THE EARTH, LABOUR AND EXCHANGE

Many coffee producers in the highlands reject the proposition that exchange can be just; the idea runs counter to their historical experience of agricultural production for the market. Justice, as a normative ethic, requires consistent foundations and predictable outcomes, the kind of conditions that have long been denied to marginal agriculturalists in market relations.¹²⁵ In Chapter 2 the complaints and proposals for reform of Costa Rican coffee growers were examined in relation to national struggles between farmers, processors and the state. This chapter picks up that theme in the context of El Dos. It demonstrates that elements of the ideology and official discourse of coffee producers, documented by scholars through the examination of speeches and newspaper articles (Acuña 1985, 1987; Gonzalez 1987), can be identified in the politics, moral adjudications and everyday struggles of producers today.

Although fair trade has introduced some consistency into aspects of economic activity, its assets and advantages remain opaque to producers. There are a number of reasons for this. Partly it is because fair trade is only one sector of the market and the prices received by growers continue to rise and fall dramatically. A second reason is the lack of scope for meaningful price comparisons, except with a 'ball-park' figure published in the press. Finally, the gate price received for a crop is not known for months after the farmer delivers it for processing, and the fair-trade premium is the very last payment made. These factors complicate attempts to create stable livelihoods or predict outcomes. Under such conditions, allegiance and financial ties to a processor influence whom a farmer sells to as much as do unpredictable projections of financial return (Sick 1999). More importantly, these complications are overshadowed by culturally informed ideas about how and where value is created and the way it is appropriated. This comes to the fore as farmers cede responsibility for market negotiations to the cooperative.

I begin this chapter by outlining a critique of Coopeldos made by some members, which seems to contradict both the scale of the cooperative's achievement and the commitment to service of 'small

farmers' that motivates it. In identifying the source of dissatisfaction, I initially focus upon the kind of tasks in which cooperative personnel engage and then move on to look at criticisms levelled at cooperative workers, or rather a particular class of employee. An analysis of the basis for this dissatisfaction returns us to the way *campesinos* define work and the creation of value through interaction with the force of nature. The opposition between those who till the earth and administrators and office workers who do not leads to a discussion of the moral and political dimensions of exchange. The argument is based around a labour theory of value; those who do not toil have no right to appropriate from those who do. In this, farmers seem to share something with advocates and consumers of fair trade; the idealisation of the creative value of working in nature and the right to retain the value so created. The problem is that in the North we miss local distinctions; cooperatives become synonymous with small farmers, and landowners and wage labourers are included in the category of producers.

In the minds of many *campesinos* the conundrum of reliance in the market on intermediaries who do not labour is resolved by emphasising links between production and consumption. This resolution is recognised by coffee farmers and cooperative personnel, and it is inspirational to the fair-trade movement; it can be considered a shared conversation on the politics of value. Here we can discern a scale of circuits or spheres of exchange. The first cultural reference point is a world that spontaneously provides all that we need to survive; and what nature freely gives should be generously distributed. When work (or energy) is expended there is satisfaction when the producer is also the consumer, and needs are realised directly from an interchange with nature (exemplified in subsistence activities *por el gasto*). When exchanges take place between producer and consumer, it is better done through known, local and reciprocal relationships that satisfy complementary needs. The concern is to distribute what is created from nature, rather than profit from the distance between parties that occurs in the impersonal market. The grower creates a use-value from nature and the consumer satisfies their sensual desire for that use value. The surplus value created in exchange appears to be excised from the chain, and life is not experienced as alienation, nor products as fetishised objects, as there is no notion of separation from value-producing activities, the instruments thereof and the things so made. The model is a distributive one that relies on the naturalism discussed in Chapter 6.

In the Christian version we begin with divine dispensation, distributed through nature. The Marxian model starts with human self-realisation through transformative work on natural materials. Both accounts engage with the Aristotelian problem of distributive

justice and seek to resolve the conundrum that although nature should provide all that we need, we cannot produce all that we consume nor satisfy all our wants within it. Intermediaries are condemned for their willingness to exploit this failure and to satisfy 'unnatural', unlimited desires. To this extent it is a cultural discussion about the inability to realise an idealised autonomy, to limit wants and so realise them in a direct relation with nature and to live exchanges through personal relationships, all in an increasingly attenuated, less local economy. In the conclusion we will identify this as part of our own cultural repertoire through looking at the history of economic and political ideas about value creation, by considering the condemnation of exploitative merchants and by examining early markets in England. Prior to the eighteenth century these were precisely run on moral grounds and regulated by legislation to ensure the surplus went to the producer; exchanges were between persons known to each other, and professional intermediaries were excluded or regulated (Carrier 1995).

INDUSTRY AND INDOLENCE: WORKING FOR COOPELDOS

The undeniable success of the Coocafé group, and Coopeldos in particular, often conflicts with views of the cooperative expressed among the membership base. In the early days of fieldwork I was struck and slightly puzzled by trenchant criticisms of an administration that pursued a remit to help small farmers escape exploitation and was clearly contributing to development in the area. It is not that the claims of 'sowing progress' were denied; people were generally quick to recognise that the cooperative was a powerful motor for development. Rather, the view of Coopeldos frequently voiced was an ambivalent one.

This was clearly expressed to me one day by Carlos. 'The cooperative is like our mother', he said. 'We want *mama cooperativa* to look after us, to nourish and feed us, we want her to be a good mother, but she is not. She keeps us lean and hungry while she grows fat, and we only just manage to keep our heads above water.' The 'bad mother' image neatly captured a common, though certainly not universal, view of the cooperative. The institution does have a familial air; it belongs to and has an intense and closely wrought relationship with the members and profound roots in the economic and social life of surrounding settlements. At the same time many producers looked askance at the increasing wealth and power of the company they own and sometimes expressed reservations and criticisms about the level of their share of that success.

The ambivalence with which the cooperative is viewed is part of a deeper problem: the position of the cooperative with respect

to farmers. The primary activity in which Coopeldos engages, the buying, processing and marketing of coffee, means that it plays the role of intermediary on behalf of its members, which places it in a problematic position as far as ethics and the notion of fair trade is concerned. The role of fair trade at the local and producer level, as administered through Coopeldos, goes beyond the securing of an acceptable price for coffee; it is also entangled in the value attributed to different forms and categories of work. At the same time, the depth of the cooperative's involvement in local projects, the services provided and the fact that many prominent cooperative functionaries are also locally active and respected draws the organisation into the moral sphere, a move which is encouraged by the discourse of loyalty and service to members. The cooperative, it seems, is caught between the requirements of business success and social and moral responsibility.

Coopeldos has about 30 permanent staff and is easily the largest employer in that part of the highlands. It offers a variety of employment in accordance with its range of activities and services. The office staff is made up of functionaries who run the bureaucratic side of the venture, including management, the credit department, accounts and sales. Then there are the retail employees who serve customers in the shops and make up and dispatch orders. The technical aspect of production and processing, such as the running and maintenance of machinery in the plant and agricultural extension services, depends on technically competent staff. A final group is composed of agricultural *peones* who may be permanent or employed temporarily and who work in the horticultural nurseries and coffee plantations belonging to the cooperative.

Although one might assume that the opportunity for employment in the cooperative would be eagerly sought, since it entails a guaranteed cash income, this is not necessarily so. Wages for agricultural work are low; a *peón* working for Coopeldos earns just over 60,000 *colones* (approximately \$200 during fieldwork in 1998) a month which, although reasonable by local standards, was below the national average and barely covered the basic living costs (*canasta básica*) as calculated by the government. The cooperative also imposes a rhythm of work that is not to everyone's taste; a six-hour working day leaves little time to see to other business, and if you miss a day, I was told, you could lose your employment. As we shall see, work in the offices of Coopeldos can also carry a certain stigma, which only partially compensates for the secure income it offers.

People in El Dos, as in many other parts of the world, often appraise people by their capacity for work, using the terms *muy trabajadora* (hard-working) and *valiente* (strong, or tough) for a positive assessment, and *vago* (lazy) for negative judgments. Sometimes the word *vago* was

used as a light-hearted form of self-admonishment, and it can also be used to describe particular individuals. However, the accusation of indolence also relates to categories or types of work rather than to the qualities of individuals. From the beginning I was struck by the frequency with which the cooperative employees were accused of laziness. For example, one commentator was dismayed by his visits to the cooperative offices; 'whenever I go down there the staff are sitting around, chatting, shuffling pieces of paper around on their desks; that is not work'. If, as this farmer insists, office and administrative duties do not constitute work, then what kind of activity fits this category? An answer was implicit in the way residents talked about people and their jobs. A reputation as a good, or *valiente*, worker is based upon involvement in agricultural labour. For example, as we saw earlier, though otherwise feared and considered untrustworthy, Nicaraguan migrant harvesters were frequently lauded for their resilience and their capacity for carrying out agricultural tasks. By contrast, office workers and administrators at the cooperative were frequently credited with good intentions, and sometimes described as *buena gente* (good people), but they were never called hard-working; indeed, accusations of laziness were most often aimed at those in the offices filling administrative and clerical positions. This was corroborated by the cooperative manager in a discussion on criticisms of the cooperative, of which he is of course aware. As he pointed out: 'they [the producers] do not consider what I do as work; if I go to San José or Europe on business they believe I am having a holiday, they do not realise I am working ten or twelve hours a day'. Similarly, many of my informants considered Costa Ricans to be lazy, specifically because they sought employment that did not require manual labour. For this reason, although the importance of education was not generally in doubt, the motives of those who continued into secondary school was sometimes questioned; 'they just want to avoid work', several people suggested.

At the centre of such categorisations lies a set of values that insists that buying and selling, and related bureaucratic occupations, are not really work. Beyond this, the contention is that those who appropriate most from the productive process are precisely those who do not toil in the true sense of the word.¹²⁶ This was made clear in a conversation with Faustino, who is unmarried and comes from a family with a large farm. He lives in his parental home with his widowed mother and his brothers and sisters. Faustino grows some corn, occasionally sows other vegetables and cultivates bananas, all for home consumption. He even has a few coffee bushes that he leaves to produce 'as God intended'. At one time he left the coffee unharvested but he has now taken to adding it to his brother's organic crop. Faustino keeps his costs to a minimum and makes an occasional

living from producing artefacts for the tourist trade. He also raises cattle on a remote farm several miles away, which can be sold to cover exceptional expenditure but do not provide a regular income. He has a number of avenues and strategies for juggling a livelihood, but refuses to engage in agriculture on a full-time basis. 'Of course, I could grow crops and sell them', he says:

But I don't like [commercial] agriculture. If I work and produce peppers, I take them to market and sell them to an intermediary for a pittance, say 1,000 *colones*. Once I have sold them the buyer will tell me to put them in a corner, and he will leave them there until someone else comes along wishing to buy peppers. The merchant will then indicate my produce, still standing in the corner, and will demand 2,000 *colones* for them (my translation).

At this point in his explanation I suggested that the intermediary had done nothing. 'No,' was his response, 'he has not even touched the produce.' In presenting his objections, Faustino is indicating a distortion in the 'natural price' that derives from the labour that has been expended in production, a distortion attributed to the merchant positioning himself between the buyer and the seller. The flip side of a system that relies on intermediaries taking a profit is that idealised situation in which the full value of the crop returns to the producer. Such an idea indicates a kind of 'mercantile utopianism', in which 'equity, distributive justice and harmony are realisable ideals in social and economic relations' (Acuña Ortega 1987:141, my translation).

The *campesinos* of El Dos share with the coffee farmers' movements that became active after the 1930s a hatred of bureaucrats, bureaucracy and taxation, a distrust of processors and the market and a love of rural over urban life. They do not openly articulate a rejection of 'the brute systems of domineering and cruel capitalism', unlike their earlier counterparts and official representatives of farmers in these struggles (Acuña Ortega 1987:149, my translation), but they do present themselves as an undervalued, exploited and marginal group. In the process many question the self-serving ambition and individualistic ethic of capitalism which, as we saw, they identify in institutional politics and associate with the market. This dissent, I want to argue, is anchored in the belief that true value comes from working the earth and interacting with the force God placed in nature. In the next section I highlight how this idea permeates the local economy.

LINKING CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Suspicion of administrative work and condemnation of intermediaries has serious repercussions for the cooperative and for the notion of fair trade. The fact that selling coffee on the market is a core activity

of Coopeldos raises a problem, since those employed by the business do not, following the dominant definition of the concept among *campesinos*, properly work. Wages paid to employees are therefore open to moral challenge, all the more so when the conditions of their employment seem to provide a security that contrasts starkly with the uncertainty of economic return that is integral to agricultural production.

The cooperative, it seems, fails to escape what Evers has called the 'traders' dilemma' (1994). Evers asserts that trade and its possibilities pose a challenge and a conundrum to peasant communities, founded on mutual help and solidarity. Profit sits uneasily with the moral values of the community, in which prices are determined by the use value of subsistence crops rather than the exchange value in the open market. A trader who buys at the subsistence rate through the activation of reciprocal ties and then makes a profit is judged as having betrayed the community by moving from values determined by use to those based upon exchange. Therefore 'any trader who wishes to trade with a view to accumulation – the key to the rise of the modern capitalistic world – faces an acute dilemma in regard to the misfit of his ethic of action (personal accumulation) and the ethic of his peasant society (community-distributive solidarity)' (Preston 1994:48). As we have seen, in El Dos the gap between these different ethics is highlighted and negotiated by promoting humility and vilifying egoism, and by the public works and ethic of service that people, particularly the better off and more influential, engage in.

Rather than take the traders' perspective on the problem I now explore a different rationale behind criticisms of the cooperative. To do this I return to the cosmology discussed in Chapter 6, which states that nature contains a force created by God for human use and benefit. There are three logical outcomes of this view. Firstly, all value ultimately comes from working the soil in accordance with divine dispensation. Secondly, and following on from this, work in nature provides the basis for subsistence. These ideas are implicit in the adjudications of people in El Dos, and are quite explicitly stated in Catholic doctrine: 'it may truly be said that all human subsistence is derived either from labour on one's own land, or from some toil, some calling which is paid for either in the produce of the land itself, or in that which is exchanged for what the land brings forth' (*Rerum Novarum* 1891 [1960]:11). In Costa Rica, where Catholic doctrine has played such a central part in social and political life, and where religious values and ideas permeate the countryside, it is hardly surprising to find shared discourses on the importance of labouring in nature (Barahona Jiménez 1975, Miller 1996; Williams, P. 1989). Lastly, and as an outcome of the two previous points, household

autonomy and natural order become synonymous with agricultural production and produce from the land.

If we take the first point as a kind of first principle for farmers, we can make sense of the objections to intermediaries and the condemnation of profit extracted by those who do not work the earth. The definition of value created by agricultural labour is central to Faustino's refusal to produce crops for the benefit of a merchant who does not work – highlighted by the fact that the intermediary does not so much as touch the product. It also clearly informs the documents and letters published during earlier struggles, which state, for example, that 'the public knows full well that up until now it has been the farmers, *or rather their work*, that has provided the ladder for the exporters to reach the pinnacle of wealth' (Acuña Ortega 1987:142, my translation, my emphasis). On this basis farmers can claim 'equitable compensation for all *human effort*' (Acuña Ortega 1987:142, my translation, my emphasis). Of course, contention can then arise over what constitutes 'human effort', but it is precisely on these grounds that farmers make their objections known.

Locating value in working the earth puts agriculture at the centre of society, and with this in mind we can return to the social relations that emerge in and through agricultural production and systems of distribution. As we have seen, farmers grow and have access to a variety of crops and animal products. Some foods, mainly fruits such as mangoes, oranges, bananas and avocados, seem to produce themselves, and grow in such abundance that they are considered open to access for all or are freely distributed and even squandered. Other foodstuffs, particularly root vegetables, are grown or produced around the house or on the farm and consumed in the home. Another group of products, including the staple bean (*frijol*), can also be exchanged or sold to neighbours, friends or acquaintances. Finally, things that cannot easily be bought or exchanged locally are sold exclusively for cash on the open market. Coffee is the prime example. In each of these scenarios goods move in different circuits and for different purposes; they can be destined for household or personal use, given away as gifts, exchanged either for goods or services, or sold for cash.¹²⁷ Such distinctions have frequently been thought about in terms of the distinction between use value and exchange value, or by reference to money and commodified and non-commodified parts of the economy.

But for farmers the question refers back to whom or what creates value and how the benefits of productive activities are distributed. Problems do not arise when people take and eat directly from nature, since this allows individuals and families to reproduce, and so the idea of autonomy is not compromised. In El Dos the possibility of directly consuming what nature provides gives a strong sense to the

environment as a common resource provided by God. Since no one has worked or made any other kind of investment to produce these items, everyone has, at least according to this principle, rights of access. Even when fruit trees are on private land, the owners display generosity by encouraging others to eat the fruit.¹²⁸ One man was incredulous that oranges could be bought and sold for money.

When crops and produce are created by human investment and effort, a more complex picture emerges. There is a long history of market activity; today some farmers continue to grow and sell vegetables within the local community or take foodstuffs such as cheeses to town for sale. There was never any suggestion that such activities by farmers were improper; since producers extract the value from nature, and therefore do genuine work, they have the right to dispose of the result of their labour. Neither is the destination of the produce deemed to be of moral importance. Producers may sell directly to the consumer or to an intermediary; they may dispose of the product in the way they consider expedient, since they have extracted it at the human interface with the force of nature. It is the state of being an intermediary – a ‘hyena’, ‘coyote’ or ‘wolf’, as they are sometimes described – who takes value without working that draws condemnation.

In each of these circuits – direct interchange with nature, exchanges in the local economy, and trading on the open market – the *campesino* as producer is linked to the consumer, and production to consumption, but in increasingly attenuated and obscure ways. This implies a scale that runs from foraging directly from nature, an often idealised state in which humans take what God gives generously through nature, to social interchanges in and between local households realised through the production, exchange and consumption of things, to transnational trade in which the consumer and producer never meet, though at times they might struggle or be encouraged to imagine the existence and world of the other.

For small farmers the idea of producing for direct consumption is a moral space in the economy, and labouring in nature to create value is a benchmark for ethical judgments. In practice, in a modern economy, this extreme position is always compromised. Many crops and animals do not reproduce on their own or only with human labour; cash inputs are frequently required. This challenges the view of agriculture predicated upon human interaction with the force of nature, complicates ways of measuring value and suggests something is wrong with the world. Perhaps for this reason organic and natural methods that employ inputs prepared from products taken freely from the local environment are seen as promoting God’s perfect world, and pestilence and disease taken as one sign of humanity’s fall from grace.

A second compromise lies in the practical limits of the idealised autonomous household. To succeed farmers engage in and must maintain social relations. This is particularly true for economic activities for the market. There are logistical difficulties to overcome, such as transport and processing, and commercial avenues, both for inputs and outputs, need to be negotiated. Doing this effectively requires various forms of expert knowledge. Landowners recognise that they can meet demands and obstacles better through sharing information, resources and expenses, than they can as isolated homesteaders. Relations between farmers are at least formally equal, and based upon complementary requirements and goals, so there is little need to distinguish between the rationality of making a profit from what they produce and the moral goal of reproducing the independent household. The two concepts are encompassed by the family farm.

More problematic are the unequal relations between the landless and those who own farms. The implication of this difference is entangled in personal and family projects of maximisation, and in Chapter 4 I considered work contracts largely in terms of goals and strategies; the negotiation for personal advantage of the short-term and often pressing need for labour, and the sometimes longer-term requirements of employees and employers. But there are limitations to explanations that represent these relationships as agreements between parties that allow them both to maximise their self-interest. Agreements are riven by inequalities and policed through power relations, which problematises the notion that they are the outcome of choices. There may be no compelling reason for farmers to offer anything more than minimum wages to workers; they could presumably use only the iron fist to make the landless poor work for a monetary wage and discard the velvet glove of the fringe benefits they offer employees. Even if satisfactory explanations for this can be given in terms of maximising behaviour and competitive advantage or as a way of disguising power relations it cannot explain why agreements take the particular form they do.

To do this we need to understand how inequalities are also embedded in and encompassed by social and moral considerations and ideas. As we saw, to maintain and support social relations around production, work contracts are underpinned by agreements that facilitate the reproduction of households. Often landowners offer temporary housing or eventually a plot on which to build a house, keep chickens and plant vegetables. They allow access to land on which to grow subsistence crops such as maize or *frijoles* that can then be consumed within the house or sold and they give access to the fruit from trees that grow on their land. Of course, such rights and benefits are given first and foremost to potential and actual

employees, local and migrant, just as food *por el gasto* first goes to the family, but they are extended to a general right to subsist. The offer of accommodation, work and access to land and food to families in need is presented in moral terms. The fact that social relations and duties are expressed in the idiom of the independent and self-sufficient household economy, in which production should promote reproduction through direct consumption of what is grown, is due to the central place of the right to be a homesteader in the Costa Rican national imaginary and the cosmology that maintains that view. That is, social relationships and agreements are inspired by the idea that, despite practical limits, all Costa Rican households should equally have access to land to work in order to live and to reproduce; cultivating food from a God-given natural world constitutes a subsistence ethic in which goods circulate in accordance with needs and uses rather than for profit and exchange for money.

THE 'TRADERS' DILEMMA'

The cooperative managers also acknowledge the problem of intermediaries but take a different view of the problem. Their concern with the producer-consumer nexus was succinctly spelled out in an interview with Guillermo Vargas, manager of the cooperative in Santa Elena: 'the more direct the link, the more the interests of the consumer and the producer can compliment each other. The more intermediaries with purely economic motives become involved, so the dialogue (between producer and consumer) breaks down.' Cooperative administrators do not consider themselves 'purely economic' intermediaries since they work on behalf of their members; they see themselves less as intermediaries and more as facilitators, since their interests are not solely economic. It is in this light that we need to consider the rhetoric of the cooperative in relation to its members; the *asociado*, according to managers, is rightly the final point of reference for the cooperative endeavour, its very 'reason for being' (*razón de ser*). It is telling that the failure of cooperatives was often accounted for by reference to the loss of this vision of service to the temptations of personal self-interest. In the minds of managers it is not the fact of extracting value without working the land that is problematic; it is rather a question of motive. Because the cooperative acts in the interests of and represents, indeed in some respects *is*, the farmer, they exonerate the organisation and staff from being seen as intermediaries.

Of course, there are practical limitations to the idea that the full value of a product should accrue to the producer. This ideal may be aspired to and approximated in the local economy, where foods may be shared in and between families or where farmers can

engage personally with buyers and consumers in markets so that exchange becomes embedded in social and moral ideas. However, there are practical difficulties of access and expertise in engaging with national and international markets for commodities such as coffee. The cooperative is a solution to that problem and it gathers members on that basis. So while many producers are supportive of the cooperative mission and remain staunch *cooperativistas*, other members remain suspicious of the motives, profit margins, and pay and conditions they associate with Coopeldos.

This returns us to the ambivalence expressed towards *mama cooperativa*. Sometimes the cooperative is considered a business (*empresa*) and described in terms of profits and expenditures, capital and turnover. At other times farmers and managers alike emphasise its social dimensions, so it is represented as a channel that moves goods and services on behalf of the members. A similar contradiction exists with respect to Coocafé, but in this case the role of providing both a service and being a channel becomes even more problematic. As we have seen, the conglomerate of different cooperatives that constitutes Coocafé has grown in power and influence, and at the same time the consortium has amassed considerable capital. Many farmers questioned the wealth of the group; 'Why does Coocafé need to develop such capital when it is only a channel and nothing more?' they would ask. It appears producers are wary of what has been created on their behalf, an institution of power and seemingly enormous wealth revealed to them in annual reports. Farmers would frequently engage me in conversation, querying the necessity for such a highly capitalised institution, and some even urged investigation into the organisation's financial dealings.

Here a local distinction between confidence and trust comes into play. One kind of relationship in El Dos is encapsulated in the notion of *confianza*. Early on in my fieldwork I fell into a discussion with a taxi driver on the relative merits of town and country life. In the town, it was claimed, there was no *confianza*. On the other hand, in the country, 'if I give you something then you give me something, that is *confianza*'. The personal relationships in local rural life confer security, since they build upon what has gone before and are based upon face-to-face relationships (Giddens 1990:34). But there is a flip side to this. As quoted in Chapter 2, a *trust* refers to a cartel, a means of monopolising interests, which ignores or denigrates the rights and priorities of others. On this reading *trusts* fix prices, impose conditions and ignore others in the advancement of their own interests; they generate uncertainty for those excluded from the *trust*. The word *trust* is commonly used in journalistic reports, but in El Dos reference is more often made to *argullos* or 'rings'.

We need to understand the ambivalence expressed by the small farmers of El Dos towards Coocafé and Coopeldos against this background of a history of dissent with respect to the structures within which coffee is commercialised. An ideology of independence, based upon direct production from nature, makes reliance on wider institutions problematic. In this context the farmers are particularly sceptical about the calculation of the final gate price they receive. Taxes are seen as iniquitous, since farmers believe they receive little or no benefit from them and the money gets swallowed up in bureaucratic structures or appropriated by corrupt officials. Acuña Ortega and his colleagues have identified a series of anti-fiscal movements among small Costa Rican farmers in the years 1922, 1937, 1947, 1951 and 1961 (1985:137). The principal target of these mobilisations was a profligate bureaucracy.

Growers are keenly aware of the differential between market prices advertised in the media and the final gate price they receive from the cooperative. They also know, and like to point out, that although the amount they get for their coffee fluctuates wildly, the price consumers pay remains constant, or only increases. As they often said: 'someone is making a mountain of money at the expense of both the consumer and the producer'. These comments imply two related things: intermediaries exploit the distance between producer and consumer without really working; and the problem can be resolved by forging direct connections between production and consumption, which is precisely what fair trade seeks to do.

In seeking an explanation for this difference between prices paid to producers and by consumers, some people attempted to enlist my support in researching where the 'missing' money ended up. For their part the cooperative was keen to divulge information on deductions for costs, taxes and the like. Potentially sensitive information was always made available under the policy of transparency, and during cooperative meetings with producers the manager went to some length to explain the mysteries of the commercialisation of coffee, including information on how prices were calculated and what deductions had to be made. Nevertheless, the conviction remained that all was not right in the division of the profits.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored cultural ideas behind the dissent expressed by farmers towards market intermediaries and shown how coffee processors and Coopeldos are caught up in such adjudications. Their dissatisfaction echoes earlier complaints against unscrupulous processors. However, my account differs from previous discussions in both its explanation and in documenting the persistence of

discontent. The authors who interrogate the ideology behind mobilisations of coffee farmers and their representatives in the middle decades of the last century provide evidence for a distinction made by coffee producers between the 'good' processors, who pay respectable prices, and avaricious ones, who are the target of growers' ire (Acuña Ortega 1985, 1987; Gonzalez Ortega 1987). They explain this by reference to the 'mercantile utopianism' discussed above, but take the farmers' apparent satisfaction with some processors as evidence of a 'bourgeois' mindset. The fact that complaints are still levelled against Coopeldos, a cooperative that has consistently paid prices at the top of the range, therefore merits investigation. One way to explain this is to recognise that these scholars seek to follow shifts in official discourse and, because they are concerned with the grounds upon which agreement were made, their arguments are tacitly informed by negotiation and compromise. My data suggest a more radical 'anticapitalist' subtext, in which *campesinos* value their exclusive right to the worth they get from the soil and take exception to those who appropriate from their efforts.

In forging relationships of a transnational kind, the cooperative places itself in a compromised position. Its local connections and contributions to social and economic life are esteemed but, in engaging in trade for profit, by virtue of its bureaucratic structure, and in its deduction of taxes, it is morally suspect. A fundamental dilemma emerges from the fact that the cooperative was created to give more direct access to the market, yet it requires administrative work and operates as an intermediary between the producer and the consumer, two things that many *campesinos* neither value nor trust. This contradiction creates the ambivalence towards *mama cooperativa* with which this chapter began.

The very existence of the concept of fair trade asks questions about the concept of the economy. By one definition the economic is about formal rationality employed to maximise self-interest. Costa Rican coffee farmers and workers understand this pragmatic side to life; like some economic anthropologists they use a language of chance, uncertainty and risk-taking, which renders life a struggle. *Campesinos* and cooperative managers associate this formulation primarily, though not exclusively, with the capitalist market, and they are by no means alone in this. And since it is in this market that they sell fair-trade products, the moral message is lost. Wires cross between producer and consumer, though this does not mean that fair trade cannot have practical benefits.

Following a different definition, the economy can be understood in terms of social and moral relations between people. Here, I believe, Western consumers and *campesinos* speak a similar language. At least the two worlds can be seen to speak to and so reflect each another.

We can use more scholarly arguments to help understand that process and to explore the appeal of fair trade rather than simply understand what it does or does not do.

From Mauss (2002 [1925]) we get one rendition of the more general principle of social reciprocity; the idea that a gift contains something of the giver and therefore creates a relationship between the giver and the recipient. The sentiment expressed by the gift, and the renunciation of self-interest implied, gives it a different cultural meaning to a commodity. It acknowledges a desire to connect to other people through objects; to the extent that fair trade seeks to forge a relationship between producer and consumer it constitutes part of the gift economy.

While Mauss focuses attention on exchange relations, Marx is concerned with production. He, and other classical political economists, begin with a labour theory of value. Although he stressed the importance of unmediated labour, Marx was primarily concerned with the consequences of living in a world in which we are separated from our productive activities. One consequence of this was exploitation of workers and producers, another was the experience of capitalism as alienation from ourselves from other people and from the things we make. I see fair trade as part of these conversations; analytical ideas which will now be explored by way of conclusion.