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The Challenges of Mainstreaming Fair Trade: A Case Study of the Day Chocolate Company

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Abstract

Fair Trade (FT) has the potential to make a major contribution to the social, economic and environmental goals of sustainable development (SD), but this depends upon achieving greater penetration of mainstream markets. Entry into these high-volume, mainstream distribution channels, however, brings with it certain problems. In particular, it accentuates a tension that is fundamental to FT's *modus operandi*, working both "in and against the market" (Barratt-Brown, 1993: 169). That tension might be captured in the following questions:

- How can we achieve the economic expansion of FT without simultaneously compromising – or even reneging on – its core ethical principles?
- Is it possible to preserve the movement's basic values in the face of commercial success?
- Do mainstreaming strategies risk reducing the ethical core of FT products to the status of a mere augmentation?

This paper explores how – and how successfully – one FT organisation, the Day Chocolate Company (DCC), navigates the challenges of FT marketing. FT principles, and specifically part-ownership of the company by the Ghanaian producer cooperative, Kuapa Kokoo, are integral to the organisation's *raison d'être* and brand meaning. At the same time, the company sees itself in many respects as a conventional business, positioning its 'Divine' offering in the mainstream marketplace. The company seeks to balance these dual aspects to its own and the brand's identity without diluting either. Essentially, the brand comprises an affordable range of FT chocolate targeted at the UK mainstream market and sold alongside familiar brands such as Cadbury and Nestlé. The organisation's most recent advertising campaign embodies a radical departure from existing approaches. It represents an innovation designed to achieve buy-in from a wider audience of "chocolate-lovers", as opposed to "ethicals",¹ without rendering FT's social

¹ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

proposition secondary. It thus provides an expedient opportunity to explore the challenges FT faces at this critical juncture.

The campaign forms the focal point for analysis. Its constituent ads are analysed alongside the organisation's other marketing materials using an approach analogous to Altheide's (1996) ethnographic content analysis and semiotics (a theory of signs exploring the generation and communication of meaning through symbols). This analysis is supported by interview data. Overall, the case highlights the challenges associated with balancing FT's myriad conventions, and the accentuation of those challenges as FT reaches a critical juncture. It suggests that one way to manage these difficulties might stem from the synergistic use of multiple communication channels to sell both the chocolate product and the FT message. The implications for FT's potential contribution to the goals of SD and for the future development of FT marketing are considered.

Introduction

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The Research Context and Literature

The contribution of FT to SD goals has increasingly been viewed as dependent on a mainstreaming strategy which embodies a “growing orientation for and toward the market” (Renard, 2005: 430). This strategy has been gathering momentum as shown by mapping the trajectory of FT marketing.

Figure I

The Trajectory of FT Marketing: A Growing Orientation For and Toward the Market³

1. Goodwill Selling/Charity Trade (1950s-1970s)

Producer-driven products marketed to “ethical hardliners” in a period of impromptu relations between producers and NGOs. Products marketed on the basis of social solidarity as another form of philanthropy.

2. Solidarity/Alternative Trade (1970s-1980s)

Producer-driven products marketed to a “committed band of ‘alternative’ consumers”. Producer relations formalised.

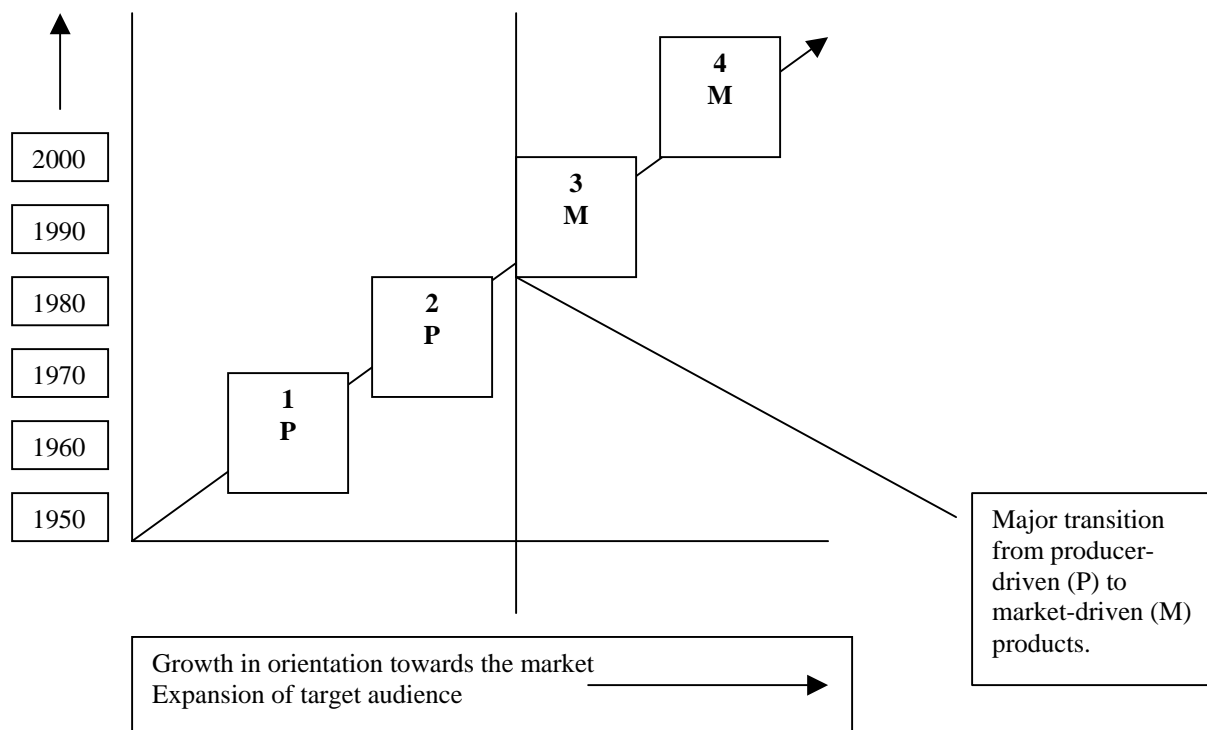
3. Mutually Beneficial Trade (1990s-2002)

³ Adapted from Tallontire, 2000; Nicholls & Opal, 2005; Hockerts, 2004.

Market-driven products marketed to “reflexive” and “upmarket” consumers. Neglect of consumer in phases 1 & 2 recognised; consumer marketing, product development and product quality prioritised. First certification schemes allow mainstream organisations to participate in the FT concept. A major transitional phase; products become market as opposed to producer driven.

4. Mainstream/Direct Trade (2003 onwards)

Market-driven products marketed to “do what I can” group. FT cooperatives begin dealing directly with large corporations and supermarkets. Supermarkets launch own brand FT products. Nestlé launches FT coffee.



A

s FT continues on this voyage, it would seem it has arrived at a critical juncture where the choice of future direction could see the re-definition of the concept itself (Low & Davenport, 2005a; Renard, 2005). This choice is characterized by two polar arguments. First, that strong branding, promotion and advertising strategies are fundamental to FT’s market development process and that ‘commerciality’ should become the overriding consideration. Smith (2003: 17), for example, argues:

Charity is not a strategy. ...While the current success of [FT] brands is laudable, it is the leaders in the field that are putting 'desire' ahead of 'charity' and winning consumer preference...it's so unlikely that consumers would ever be prepared to reframe a brand in their own minds from one that they feel they ought to buy to one that they actually want to buy.

Such calls are supported by several quantitative studies asserting that consumers buy for personal reasons, not societal ones (e.g. Boulstridge & Carrigan, 2000; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001). Further evidence comes from the contribution of mainstream retailers to FT's substantial growth with Tesco⁴ becoming the UK's biggest FT retailer (Nicholls & Opal, 2005), helping FT sales grow from £92 million in 2003 to £140 million in 2004 and the product category grow to include over 1,000 products (The Co-operative Bank, 2005).

The counter-argument is that if FT continues on this voyage, it will lead to the appropriation and subsequent metamorphism of the concept into something altogether weaker (Mutersbaugh *et al.*, 2005; Moore, 2003; Renard, 2003, 2005; Low & Davenport 2005a, 2005b). FT's growing attractiveness to the commercial sector could see the absorption of the concept's "more convenient elements" and the demise of its "more radical edges" (Low & Davenport, 2005a: 143). Raynolds (2000: 306), for example, discusses the potential subversion of FT by "profit seeking companies seeking to refashion this progressive movement into a niche oriented marketing scheme". So too, Low and Davenport (2005b: 494) discuss the dangers inherent in the apparent shift of the FT message from "participation in an international programme of trade reform" to "shopping for a better world". Failure to communicate what Strong (1997) terms the "human element of sustainability" as well as the products' commercial credentials could see its role limited to what Hudson and Hudson (2003b: 423) term "a feel-good conscience cleanser for the well-to-do Northern consumer".

The mainstreaming project risks transforming the FT offering from a product with an ethical core to a product concept in which ethics represents a mere augmentation. Traidcraft, for instance, now adopts a sales strategy based on the quality of their products which "happen to be [FT] as

⁴ Tesco is the UK's largest supermarket chain.

well” (Humphrey, 2000: vii). Within a case study of Cafédirect, Hockerts (2004: 24) refers to the “inversion” of the FT rationale whereby “rather than being a development instrument, [FT] has become a quality management tool”. Such a weakening of FT’s pedagogical function leads Renard (2003) to voice doubts about the role of FT in inducing social change and about its ‘alternative’ status. Growing concern about the dilution and appropriation, when combined with this apparent reduction of the products’ ethical core to an augmentation, has led to calls for an ‘about-turn’ to take FT back to its origins (calls which have become increasingly vociferous with Nestlé’s recent launch of a FT certified coffee).

Thus, it would seem FT is caught in a crosswind; its transition has been temporarily halted as it is pushed in two opposing directions. Its continued projection along a trajectory of increasing commercialisation could potentially see the weakening of FT principles and the gradual fading of its message of change. At the same time, however, an ‘about turn’ risks isolation from the mainstream and a subsequent inability to “deliver the extent of change that is necessary to meaningfully assist producers” (Low & Davenport, 2005a: 152).

The resolution of this marketing dilemma requires a better understanding of the tension between the ethical values at the heart of FT and the imperatives of the mainstream marketplace. The literature’s polarisation of the choices for FT in this fourth phase is unhelpful. Rather, FT’s continued voyage would seem contingent upon the construction of a bridge between FT’s commercial and SD objectives, which could help ensure it navigates the polar demands of FT marketing without subordinating either. This paper explores these issues through a case study based on the Day Chocolate Company.

Research Methodology

A single case study is useful in being able to deal with a full variety of evidence and for descriptive and exploratory purposes (Yin, 2003). In the case of FT, the challenges of integrating the commercial and SD dimensions are apparent in the marketing materials of FT organisations. Therefore an analysis of DCC’s materials was a primary focus of this study, with an emphasis on interpretation and meaning, through two analytical approaches. The first is analogous to Altheide’s (1996) ethnographic content analysis, and the second is informed by semiotics. This

analysis is complemented by semi-structured interviews, transcribed for analysis. Single company case studies are often criticised in terms of their external validity and generalisability; however, the aim here is to generate theoretical propositions that might be explored further in future research. As Walton (1992: 122) proposes:

The logic of the case study is to demonstrate causal argument about how general social forces take shape and produce results in specific settings. That demonstration, in turn, is intended to provide at least one anchor that steadies the ship of generalisation until more anchors can be fixed for eventual boarding.

Case Background – The Day Chocolate Company

In 1998 DCC launched Divine as the first ever FT chocolate bar for the mainstream UK market. It was intentionally positioned to compete against familiar brands, including those of Cadbury and Nestlé, rather than as gourmet or organic chocolate sold through speciality or health food shops (Nicholls & Opal, 2005). The brand is available alongside mainstream chocolate brands in more than 5000 UK retail outlets.

Divine products can be seen to parallel closely, even mimic, the mainstream chocolate offering:

Hopefully our products do not distinguish too much from the mainstream, that's kind of the point....We've worked hard to deliver what the chocolate consumer might expect, that is, in terms of taste, the chocolate was developed to satisfy the British palette. Also prices are not punitive, and the products can be found where you might expect to find chocolate, in supermarkets, in forecourts...⁵

DCC works hard to ensure “all parts of the conventional marketing mix are effective” (Doherty & Tranchell, 2005: 174). This becomes particularly evident upon examination of the brand's taste profile, pricing and distribution strategies, with the brand positioned as “quality” and “desirable” products that are also “affordable”.⁶ However, Divine products also make a significant departure from the mainstream offering through a social proposition that comprises the offering's raison

⁵ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

⁶ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

d'être, taking it well beyond what Tiffen and Zadek (1996: 51) term "normal product selling propositions".

DCC's overarching objective is to:

...improve the livelihood of smallholder cocoa producers in West Africa by establishing their own dynamic branded proposition in the UK chocolate market, thus putting them higher up the value chain. To achieve this mission a range of clear intermediate objectives are set out, which include paying a [FT] price for all cocoa used, ... raising [FT] awareness among consumers and retailers, and being highly visible and vocal in the [FT] industry, hence acting as a catalyst for change [Tiffen, 1998] (Doherty & Tranchell, 2005: 167).

Thus, as well as selling a mainstream chocolate offering, DCC seeks to educate consumers about the meaning of FT and the need for trade reform. This is important not only in terms of its SD objectives but also its commercial objectives; farmer ownership and paying a FT price comprise a unique selling point (USP). According to a Senior Manager at DCC, "farmer ownership is not something we've added on afterwards, we're built out of this. It is not just a CSR policy, it is why we are here". Communication of the FT concept thus becomes an important brand building exercise. Divine chocolate products are marketed not simply as "heavenly" products, but differentiate themselves further as "heavenly" products "with a heart".⁷ To succeed, Divine needs to balance these twin dimensions. Point of sale (POS) information for Divine indicates their inextricability:

Divine [FT] chocolate is made with the best of the best [FT] cocoa beans (or Pa Pa Paa as they say in Ghana) grown by a cooperative of Ghanaian cocoa farmers called Kuapa Kokoo....Every melting mouthful of delicious Divine [FT] chocolate guarantees the cocoa farmers get a fair and secure price for their crop and a chance to work towards a better future....Divine chocolate tastes so good because it contains natural ingredients, real cocoa butter, real vanilla, and it's certified GM free.⁸

⁷ Leaflet available at POS, see Appendix I.

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Divine products are premium quality products whose value added translates into a better return for cocoa farmers. A new advertising campaign for the brand represents an innovation aimed at balancing the twin demands of FT marketing; that is, the sale of a commercial product in the mainstream marketplace and communication of a social proposition. DCC wanted to take “a new and audacious step” in their communications which are aimed at chocolate-loving women in the UK, including those who have not necessarily thought of themselves previously as FT buyers.⁹ The campaign forms a focal point for the analysis.

Analysis and Discussion

Advertisements

Advertising seeks to communicate differentiation, often amongst products with minimal technical differences, by providing a product with an image. The effectiveness of this image in terms of product distinction is bound up with its embeddedness in a “system of differences”, for the “identity of anything depends more on what it is not than what it is” (Williamson, 1978: 24). DCC’s efforts to mimic the mainstream taste profile (and to stress the similitude of their products in this regard) underlines that the difference is not in the chocolate. The difference is in the process that brought these products into being, and the creation of differentiation and a brand identity must stem from these more intangible process characteristics.

Ads must communicate this difference to somebody. The signs they use “depend for their signifying process on the existence of specific, concrete receivers, people for whom and in whose systems of belief they have a meaning” (Williamson, 1978: 40). This leads us to a second major function of ads: to establish a relationship between the product and the consumer. Increasingly, this is achieved through lifestyle associations; ads frequently emanate a particular style. This style represents what Goldman (1992: 133) terms a “semiotic abstraction” comprised of “visual signs” that say “who you are”. This connection between the product and consumer is often reinforced by the repeated equation of commodity images with ‘you’ as denoted by L’Oreal’s “Because You’re Worth It” or Budweiser’s “This Bud’s for You”.

⁹ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

FT ads also have a further set of functions, for they are seeking not only to sell a product but also to communicate (some might even say sell) a “message of change” (Low & Davenport, 2005b: 494). Instead of two functions, a FT ad will consequently have four distinct functions: two at each level.

Figure II: A Taxonomy of Fair Trade Advertising: Fair Trade’s Dual Aspect

1. Sell a branded product in a FMCG market.	1a. Communicate product differentiation. 1b. Establish a relation between the product and the consumer.
2. Communicate a Social Proposition.	2a. Communicate the product’s (ethical) difference. 2b. Establish a relation between the producer and the consumer.

Advertising’s two primary functions each have a related, but not identical counterpart in terms of the second aspect of FT: namely communicating a social proposition. There, the functions are these: first, to communicate the product’s difference on an ethical level from rival ethical products; second, to establish a relationship not between the product and the consumer, but between the consumer and the producer.

In terms of function 2a, consumers no longer face a simple either/or choice between an ethical or non-ethical product alternative. Rather, they face an ethical brand choice. This requires advertisers to differentiate FT products not only from mainstream alternatives, but also from other ethical market offerings. In the case of DCC, this difference lies in the fact that not only do their products guarantee a fair return to producers, but the company is itself partly owned by the producers’ cooperative, Kuapa Kokoo.¹⁰ Producer ownership is integral to the ATO’s brand meaning and is seen as a USP (Nicholls & Opal, 2005). Function 2b is crucial to the fulfillment of FT’s pedagogical function and the achievement of a *lasting* change in society’s norms and values (Levi & Linton, 2003). FT has long striven to ‘reconnect’ producers and consumers,

¹⁰ Of its 99 ordinary shares, 52% are owned by the NGO Twin Trading, 33% by the Ghanaian cooperative of cocoa farmers, Kuapa Kokoo, and 14% by the Body Shop International.

lifting the shroud of commodity fetishism to unveil commodities' productive origins (Hudson & Hudson, 2003b). This unveiling process is designed to “educate consumers to move beyond their own self-interest in making purchasing choices” (Murray & Raynolds, 2000: 67) and provides a platform for the creation of new “social bonds” between these hitherto divided parties (Murray & Raynolds, 2000; Raynolds, 2000; Raynolds, 2002; Renard, 2003).

One way in which an ad might be able to operate on these two different levels simultaneously is through double meanings or what Goldman (1992: 131) terms “punning”:

Punning furnishes an efficient method of joining meanings by simultaneously differentiating, collapsing and recombining at least two clusters of meanings. The pun's motion invites readers to realise double meanings and thereby generates a new meaning for a product look or fashion style (Goldman, 1992: 131).

The campaign represents a clear attempt to fulfil both functions on both levels through such use of double meanings. It comprises part of a strategy to “push past core ethicals”¹¹ and target consumers attracted to differentiation and quality in their purchase decisions whilst also being “receptive to a message that appeals to their ethical sensitivities” – that is, as long as this does not necessitate a compromise on other product features and values (Nicholls & Opal, 2005: 170). The campaign thus seeks to combine ethical values with statements about unique and premium quality in order to generate a new meaning for the Divine product, a meaning which seeks to broaden the brand's appeal without losing sight of DCC's social and political *raison d'être*.

In the foreground of each ad is a striking image of a glamorously attired African woman. Her expression is almost seductive, her poise also challenging. Her attire traditional and yet at the same time reminiscent of something found on a Parisian catwalk. She sports a westernised hair style and her features are accentuated by mascara and lipstick. Between her fingers is a piece of luxuriant Divine chocolate. Each is pictured against a rural Ghanaian backdrop.

Each ad features prominently a segment of text which very obviously carries a double meaning: for instance, “Decadently Decent”; “Craving Another World or Just Another Piece?”. Each

¹¹ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

strapline clearly manifests FT's dual aspect. In one the product is both "decadent" and "decent". In another the implication is that the product will satisfy your craving for both luxury chocolate and a better world.

FT's dual aspect is also apparent within each ad's imagery. Thus, in terms of the second function of FT advertising, the distinctly African landscape is intended to lift the shroud of commodity fetishism (Hudson & Hudson, 2003b), introducing the idea of cocoa's origins into the psyche of the British consumer. This was seen as a primary objective by DCC:

Chocolate is different from products such as coffee. Previously, there was no talk of Africa. Chocolate didn't come from Africa, it came from the corner shop. With other products, people knew where they came from. This didn't happen with chocolate. We've taken people on a very long journey...¹²

This journey is perhaps crucial to engagement with the proposition. A Senior Manager at DCC argues that once consumers (and retailers) become aware of the reality of cocoa production in Ghana, they "cannot unknow it".

There is another layer to the ads' journey through an African vista. Consumers are invited to consume the landscape, an exotic landscape of warm sunshine and tropical palms, an authentic landscape, far removed from the "machines and high-pressured corporate world that characterise the 21st century" (Wright, 2004: 674). The ads thus provide consumers with a sense of escapism which fulfils their yearnings for commodities with cultural and sensory ties (Daviron & Ponte, 2005).

The focal figure in each ad is also distinctly African, representing a further attempt to unveil cocoa's origins and so facilitate the communication of FT's social proposition. As with the landscape, the ads' portrayal of a cocoa farmer is infused with multiple meanings. Such "punning" (Goldman, 1992) helps to build a bridge between the taxonomy's two levels.

¹² Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

Each image marks a radical departure from the traditional rendering of FT farmers. Indeed, there was a deliberate attempt to confound consumer expectations in this regard. For DCC what is important “is the presentation of empowered people, not victims in need of charity”.¹³ Consequently, the women are according to DCC, “not the kind of women you expect to see”.¹⁴ Rather, each model’s semi-westernised, yet distinctly African portrayal could perhaps be seen as a deliberate attempt to suggest her role as an equal partner in order to communicate the brand’s ethical differentiation; that is, farmer ownership.

The dominance of the images by such a strong and independent, yet attractive and glamorous, female can further be seen as attempt both to appeal directly to the target audience (female chocolate consumers aged 18-35) in a commercial sense, and also to establish the relation between the consumer and producer so fundamental to the communication of FT’s message of change. At one level her portrayal is characteristic of ‘postfeminism’, that is, the unification of feminism and femininity (Goldman, 1992), and thus can be seen as an attempt to reflect back the lifestyle aspirations of the target segment. At a second level, the presentation of lifestyle associations in this way ensure the target consumer and producer have something in common which could provide a foundation for the creation of the new “social bonds” (Murray & Raynolds, 2000; Raynolds, 2000; Raynolds, 2002; Renard, 2003) so intrinsic to FT’s sustainability message.

Finally, the models’ portrayal can further be seen to define, in essence, what the product offering is *not*; the advertisements do not allow you to pity. The purchase of Divine is no charitable act; the ads seek to sell a high quality, luxuriant product. This is clearly apparent from their assertion of the products’ ‘divinity’. The ads’ vibrancy and, in particular, the predominance of rich blends of golds, browns and beige in ad one, insinuate correlations between sumptuousness, richness, opulence and the product. This is reinforced by the portrayal of glamour and extravagance.

¹³ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

¹⁴ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

DCC aims to “take a quality, desirable, [and] aspirational product to the mainstream market”.¹⁵ Like their straplines, the ads’ imagery represents a striking attempt to meet this challenge. It attempts to fulfil the twin demands of FT advertising, the sale of a quality, desirable product and the communication of FT’s sustainability aspirations, at both levels. It invites readers to realise double meanings, creating the potential for the generation of a new meaning for Divine products. The social proposition as suggested by the straplines is reinforced by the presentation of cocoa’s origins. The brand’s ethical superiority is reinforced by the strength and independence of the focal figure. In this way the ads assert the products’ ‘divinity’ in an ethical sense. At the same time, the notions of exoticism, richness and decadence invite an additional layer of interpretation; they assert the products’ ‘divinity’ in the sense of consumption pleasure. Moreover, the models’ embodiment of ‘postfeminism’ serves to both reflect back the lifestyle aspirations of the target segment and provide a foundation for the formation of “social bonds” (Murray & Raynolds, 2000; Raynolds, 2000; Raynolds, 2002; Renard, 2003) between producers and consumers.

However, there is perhaps a hidden danger in this use of “punning” (Goldman, 1992) to reconcile the taxonomy’s twin demands. This lies in the apparent conversion of “local realities” to “provide a pleasurable consumption of the exotic” (Wright, 2004: 674). The consumer’s attention is drawn to lush and romantic visions of Ghana; a distortion of producers’ reality. Ad 1 contains an additional layer, a hot dusty African village with simple mud dwellings, roofed with sheets of corrugated iron. This, however, is not in focus, literally and very deliberately; you could mistake them for thatched huts. Thus, there is something for the mainstream consumer who may look superficially; they see the romanticised, attractive image they expect. Yet there is also something for the informed consumer who might be expected to see ‘through’ the image to the realities of globalisation. The village, then, might be deemed an optional stop-off point. Consumers could pass through the village without stopping to note its primary features; the social and agricultural origins of the product become blurred. The social proposition appears as *Hintergrundinformation*.¹⁶ With the second and third ads, the village appears to have disappeared from the consumer’s itinerary altogether. Moreover, the womens’ glamorous attire

¹⁵ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

¹⁶ Background information.

represents a similar distortion; they were all given money to have their hair professionally coiffured, were made up and dressed in fabrics bought especially for the photo shoot.¹⁷

The ads perhaps succeed in the creation of a distinctive image for Divine products that fulfils the demarcation and relationship functions of the first component of FT's dual aspect. However, in so doing, there is a danger that FT's social proposition is reduced to a style. Primacy, it appears, has been granted to the consumption process with the danger that communication of the social proposition is rendered secondary. It appears to have been 'commodified' and thus is in danger of being subsumed by function one. An important parallel can be drawn here with Goldman's (1992) account of commodity feminism.

Goldman (1992: 131) discusses the advertisers' conversion of feminism into "sign values" and the subsequent 'fetishisation' of the movement into "an iconography of things". According to Goldman (1992: 131) advertisers appropriate feminism, "they cook it to distil out a residue – an object: a look, a style". Feminism thus becomes:

something that is not so much a social movement with a particular politics and ideology and a desire to change the world, but a state that can be attained by consuming the right goods: certain objects will signify 'feminist lifestyle', and that is all that is required. 'The feminist' is constructed as just another consumer category amongst others" (Corrigan, 1997: 73).

So too, the conversion of local realities, emphasis on brand glamour and consumer escapism apparent in the Divine ads could see the FT movement reduced to a consumption style; that is, its 'commodification'. Indeed, Bryant and Goodman (2004) and Goodman (2004) suggest this is already happening. Goodman (2004: 902) suggests a re-working of the commodity fetish to the advantage of those involved in FT:

The operationalisation of this re-working is at once the removal of the commodity veil, but also a replacing of the fetish in the images of indigenous producers, tropes of productive, tropical nature and meanings of alternative development.

¹⁷ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

Such ‘commodification’ of the ethical relationship which is so integral to FT could, however, lead to superficial engagement with the concept and a sense of “sufficiency” (Langeland, 1998) amongst consumers, whereby a few ethical purchases amount to a sense of “having done one’s bit” (Laessoe, 1996, cited in Langeland, 1999: 89). Indeed, such ‘de-politicisation’ could be responsible for what Purvis (2006: 36) terms the “paradox of [FT]” whereby:

while growing numbers recognise the mark, bandy the term about and buy the products occasionally, few can say how [FT] began or what it really means.

There is certainly a danger that its reduction to a product augmentation suggestive of individual lifestyle choices could see it become a passing fad which goes out of fashion just as quickly as it appears to have come into fashion.

Point-of-Sale

A discussion of the effective use of POS information is beginning to emerge in the ethical consumption literature under the rubric of social and values-based labelling (cf. Zadek *et al.*, 1998; Barham, 2002). POS information can be important to attract consumers, since many are first introduced to the ideas of FT in the supermarket (Eurobarometer, 1997), and to confirm an earlier decision made away from the site of purchase (Zadek *et al.*, 1998). Such labels distinguish themselves from conventional commercial labels by a focus on process and quality (Barham, 2002). In terms of process, social labels comprise:

...words and symbols associated with products or organisations which seek to influence the economic decisions of one set of stakeholders by describing the impact of a business process on another group of stakeholders (Zadek *et al.*, 1998: 1).

The interior of Divine product packaging is printed with text explaining the FT business process, as embodied by the brand, and encouraging consumers to participate in this ‘alternative’ trading process by advocating the benefits for producers (e.g. funds for sustainable agricultural practices, village schools and clean water supplies). This is reinforced by the appearance of the FT certification mark together with the Christian Aid, Comic Relief and Day logos on the product’s

exterior. Each logo, and the FT certification mark in particular, functions as a “central element in communicating [FT] values and establishing consumer trust” (Nicholls & Opal, 2005: 158).

The narrative and logos are based upon a redefinition of the concept of quality to encompass non-market values (ethical, cultural, personal) that “are impinged upon in one way or another by an overly market-dominated economy” (Barham, 2002: 353). Consumers are not prepared, however, to discard pre-existing definitions of quality related to appearance, taste, price etc. Indeed, the taste profile and price positioning of Divine are seen as crucial to the leveraging of a strong market position.¹⁸ The brand therefore must manage consumer preferences for both types of information within the constraints of what can feasibly be conveyed on product packaging.

The difficulties associated with this challenge are exacerbated by the conflicting roles each separate definition of quality implies. Pre-existing definitions portray the consumer as a “chooser”, whereas the definition inherent in FT discourse points to the consumer as a “citizen”; “choosing as a citizen leads to a very different evaluation of alternatives from choosing as a consumer” (Gabriel & Lang, 1995: 174). The “chooser” operates in impersonal markets; unencumbered by social obligations, he or she makes rational purchase decisions that maximise individual utility (Gabriel & Lang, 1995). In contrast, consumption as a citizen implies consideration of one’s choices, their meaning and moral value (Gabriel & Lang, 1995: 174):

The notion of citizenship has as its core a ‘bond’, as T.H. Marshall noted, ‘a direct sense of community membership based on loyalty to a civilisation which is in common possession’.

Divine, through its product packaging, seeks to engage with the consumer in both of these capacities. The gold and silver wrapping conveys the product’s luxuriant and self-indulgent qualities. The strapline reminds consumers that this is not simply a “heavenly” product, but one “with a heart”.¹⁹ This is reinforced by the narrative and logos.

¹⁸ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

¹⁹ Leaflet available at POS, see Appendix I.

Interestingly, the narrative explaining the social proposition of FT is ‘hidden’ beneath a layer of foil. As with the advertising strategy, the marketing approach appears to privilege the pleasures of consumption and hence individual utility. The objective is to appeal to the consumer first and foremost as a “chocolate-lover”.²⁰ This could see the individualisation of the notion of citizenship “as if becoming a citizen is a matter of individual choice alone” (Gabriel & Lang, 1995: 182), which, again, could potentially degenerate into tokenism. FT would then be unlikely to serve as a catalyst for change in international production and trade relations.

Website

The Divine website seems to redress the suggested imbalance of emphasis in terms of FT’s dual aspect. Its analysis alongside the advertisements and POS information reveal synergies with important implications for the marketing of FT’s interrelated dimensions.

Prima facie, the website for the Divine brand represents a marked contrast to the preceding marketing materials in its overwhelming emphasis on the communication of FT’s social proposition. Just one short section of the site is dedicated to promoting the conventional, commercial dimensions of Divine products;²¹ the site’s primary function is pedagogical.

The website, both as a marketing medium and also a new medium for information exchange (Chaffey *et al.*, 2003), is particularly conducive to the fulfilment of this pedagogical function. It confers a unique advantage in the form of user-control. In accessing the site, it is the consumer who initiates the contact; consumers have to actively seek and extract information about DCC for themselves. This is characteristic of a “pull mechanism” as opposed to the “push mechanism” of conventional media (such as the ads and POS information for Divine), where the marketing message is pushed onto the target audience (Chaffey *et al.*, 2003: 28; O’Connor *et al.*, 2004). This element of user-control leads Chaffey *et al.* (2003: 314) to describe it as a “lean forward” (as opposed to a “lean back”) medium for exchange, where the marketer will have the user’s undivided attention.

²⁰ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

²¹ This section of the site is perhaps analogous to O’Connor *et al.*’s (2004: 336) description of websites as “brochureware”; its primary purpose appears to be advertising DCC’s range of products.

The Divine website, it seems, is designed around this strength. It enables the consumer to navigate themselves around a multitude of educational resources of varying levels of complexity and detail. It includes, for example, detailed exposition of the production process from “bean to bar”, the history and current status of Ghana’s cocoa industry, the functioning of the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative and “The Divine Story”, a comprehensive narrative detailing the founding role of Kuapa Kokoo and the organisation’s social and political *raison d’être*. This variation in complexity and detail, when coupled with user-control, serves to maximise audience appeal; the website appeals to those with a more superficial interest without alienating the core of what DCC term “ethicals”.²²

Thus, user-control, it seems, renders the website more suitable than conventional media for the “window” function of FT marketing; that is, the provision of information to “close the loop in the supply chain, acting as a bridge between producers and consumers” (Zadek *et al.*, 1998: 28). FT seeks to re-embed production and consumption relations in the larger social economy, repairing ties severed by the impersonal dictates of conventional marketing. FT discourse suggests the *extant* marketing and society relationship resembles a “one-way mirror”; it absorbs information about the consumer, reflecting back an image of consumers and the relevance of a given brand to their lifestyle” (Golding & Peattie, 2005: 157). The conditions endured by producers and other externalities have remained in shadow (Golding & Peattie, 2005). In contrast, this website serves as an “open window” onto the production process which allows consumers to comprehend the social and environmental impacts of production and consumption and the prices paid for commodities (Golding & Peattie, 2005: 157). It ensures Divine products arrive at the marketplace embedded with information thereby “removing the veil” of commodity fetishism (Hudson & Hudson, 2003b). Equipping consumers with this information and revealing the producers’ story serves to re-establish a direct connection between these two groups.

This ethical relationship could be further strengthened by capitalising on the website’s potential for interaction (Chaffey *et al.*, 2003; O’Connor *et al.*, 2004). The Divine site goes some way to harnessing this potential through its permission-based email marketing and opt-in email

²² Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

campaign. Consumers are also able to send feedback and unanswered questions to an address posted on the site. Both should facilitate the creation of a long term bond with customers, enabling them to feel a connection to the business (Harris, 2002). Such interaction could however, be taken a stage further.

Currently, the website as an exchange mechanism seems to have been constructed around the needs of the consumer. This leaves it vulnerable to accusations, such as those voiced by Wright (2004) in relation to Cafédirect, that relationship formation is one-sided. Describing a Cafédirect ad featuring Leonard Navarro Bustinza, a coffee grower from Peru, Wright (2004: 671) argues that the relationship established by the ad is “visual, virtual and entirely one-way”. She writes:

I may ‘know’ Leonardo’s face through the advert but I don’t know him and he knows nothing about me (2004: 671).

A similar criticism could be levelled at the producer’s story as presented by the Divine website since “whatever the potential consumer may know about producers, producers know nothing about specific consumers, this is a far cry from the ‘mutual relations’ envisaged by Marx” (Wright, 2004: 671). The Web seems particularly conducive to the formation of such relations. The use of the site to facilitate direct interaction between producers and consumers could serve not only to redress the persistence of certain power asymmetries in the FT model, but also encourage the necessary levels of consumer engagement to ensure the preservation of FT’s capacity to fulfil its SD goals.

Conclusions: The ‘Divine’ Communications Portfolio: A Synergistic Effect

Analysis of DCC’s marketing communications demonstrates the use of multiple communication channels to sell both the Divine product and convey the Divine message. It is impossible within the scope of a short paper to present analyses of DCC’s full complement of marketing materials, but an overview of the materials presented here reveals a synergistic effect with implications for the theory and practice of FT.

The advertising campaign has sought to reconcile the demands of FT’s dual aspect through “punning” (Goldman, 1992). While this certainly seems to have created a distinctive image for

Divine products that appeals to the lifestyle aspirations of the target segment, the apparent reduction of FT's social proposition to a style, that is, its apparent 'commodification', could see little more than tokenistic consumption behaviour as opposed to active engagement with FT's sustainability message. This, in turn, could limit FT's sustainability potential within the confines of a passing fad.

However, consumers themselves exhibit an apparent predisposition to the commodity fetish (Hudson & Hudson, 2003; Johnston, 2002) which is reinforced by the constituent effects of commodity markets (Hudson & Hudson, 2003b; Schroeder & McEachern, 2004; Allen & Kovach, 2000; Klooster *et al.*, 2005) and the increasing influence of retail capital (Renard, 2005). FT's *modus operandi*, namely its reliance on the consumer choice mechanism, when combined with its need to penetrate mainstream markets, means this is a reality marketers cannot ignore; they must appeal to the consumer in his or her capacity as a "chooser" (Gabriel & Lang, 1995; 175). Committed ethical consumers aside, it remains improbable that ethical aspects will be the core product sought by consumers (Crane, 2001).

This suggests a need for marketing strategies which might stimulate a shift in quality conventions from preoccupation with market and industrial conventions inherent in the commodity fetish to simultaneous consideration of domestic and civic conventions rooted in non-market values (Daviron & Ponte, 2005). That is, "norm change" (Levi & Linton, 2003) which addresses the "culture of price-only buying, ... changing the way people perceive the shiny goods on their supermarket shelves" (Harrison, 2006: 28). Synergies inherent in DCC's communications portfolio indicate one possibility.

DCC's marketing strategy explicitly recognises the hierarchy of consumer preferences implicit in the commodity fetish, that is, prevailing quality conventions:

We *first* seek to engage with consumers on the basis that it is a good product. Then we can educate them about the [FT] element and they might buy other [FT] products.²³

²³ Interview with Senior Manager (2005).

Primacy is granted to the consumption process in the ads; they appeal first and foremost to the consumer as a “chooser” (Gabriel & Lang, 1995: 175). This, however, is counterbalanced by the increasing emphasis on FT’s pedagogical function seen in the company’s POS information and website. Indeed, this might be characterised by a continuum.

This gradual shift in emphasis, from conventional notions of quality to the non-market values embedded in the process characteristics of Divine, demonstrates a clear departure from the literature’s polarisation of choices for FT as it enters the mainstream. It is indicative of a marketing strategy that combines a “mirror” and “window” function (Zadek *et al.*, 1998) to reap synergies which potentially provide a key to shifting consumer quality conventions.

The ads and product packaging appear to serve primarily a “mirror” function which is complemented by the “window” function of the brand’s website (Zadek *et al.*, 1998). The brand glamour and consumer escapism portrayed in the ads and packaging can be seen as an attempt to ‘reflect-back’ the lifestyle aspirations of the female target segment. This emphasis on self-reward represents acceptance of the market reality that is the need to engage with the “chooser” (Gabriel & Lang, 1995: 175) and the significance of market and industrial conventions. At the same time, the ethical values embodied in the ads’ provocative straplines and the wrappers’ enable these same consumers to admire their reflection as ‘ethical’ consumers. This arguably comprises another form of self-reward, but can also be seen as the first stage in facilitating a shift from what Hudson and Hudson (2003a: 1) term “passive consumerism” to a notion of citizenship rooted in domestic and civic conventions and active engagement with the social proposition that is FT. This is encouraged further by the “open window” (Golding & Peattie, 2005: 157) onto the production process provided by the information portal that is the Divine website. In this way the portfolio seeks to engage with both the “chooser” and the “citizen” (Gabriel & Lang, 1995: 175), to mainstream its product and communicate a social proposition; that is, to balance FT’s myriad conventions.

DCC’s navigation of the polar demands of FT marketing highlights the challenges FT faces at this critical juncture. The synergism inherent in its communications portfolio suggests a way forward out of the impasse which stems from the polarisation of FT’s choices. One potential

drawback of the analysis is that it proceeds from the perspective of the communicator and the nature of their marketing materials. The real meaning of any communication, however, rests with the indigenous conceptions of the target audience. As Krippendorff (2004: 33) argues, “texts acquire significance (meanings, contents, symbolic qualities and interpretations) in the context of their use”. The marketing materials of DCC have no “reader-independent qualities” (Krippendorff, 2004: 22). The next phase of this research project, therefore, entails in-depth consumer interviews, a process already begun.

Furthermore, the relevance and explanatory power of the aforementioned analysis will, of course, require exploration in alternative contexts. Studying a single case provides the depth of insight and richness of description necessary for commencement of the process of theory building. The concepts and conclusions emerging from this first phase of the process must, however, be regarded as tentative, for they fall between the twin poles of the nomothetic and the idiographic. Further case study research along these lines is required to refine the theoretical insights gleaned and provide the grounds for an effective synthesis of marketing and social goals and so the integration of market realities with sustainability issues.

Appendix I

Point of Sale Leaflet (Outer)

HEAVENLY CHOCOLATE WITH A HEART

Chocolate Fun & Facts:

The Aztecs used cocoa beans for money. 10 beans would buy a rabbit!

Chocolate starts to melt at 34 C (93 F) which is body temperature - that is why it melts in your mouth.

Cocoa beans grow in yellow rugby ball shaped pods, which grow directly off the tree trunk.

Buying Fairtrade chocolate means that farmers are guaranteed a fair price for their cocoa beans and the chance for a better future.

Cocoa beans are usually bought and sold on the international financial markets. Sometimes the price goes so low that it costs a farmer more to grow the cocoa than they get for selling it.

When cocoa beans first come out of their pods they are in squishy white pulp which tastes a bit like lychees!

Chocolate contains a chemical that is called phenylethylamine which is found in the brain when you're in love.

There are 11 million cocoa farmers in West Africa. It's the top cocoa producing area in the world.

The average British chocolate lover spends £65 a year on chocolate! The average cocoa farmer earns just £150 a year to live on.

Most Ghanaian cocoa farmers have never tasted chocolate! It costs too much for them to afford and is only available in towns and cities.

Become a Divine Supporter

By choosing Fairtrade products you are helping thousands of producers around the world have a chance for a better future.

Would you like to receive regular Divine updates, hear about the producers who are benefiting from your chocolate choice and be the first to hear of Fairtrade news and the latest products? If so why not fill in the form and become a Divine Supporter. You can make a difference!

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Tel:

Age:

e-mail:

Have you ever bought Fairtrade food and drink? Y / N

Have you ever bought Divine chocolate? Y / N

Other comments:

Send to: The Day Chocolate Company, 4 Gainsford Street, London, SE1 2NE. Tel: 020 7378 6550 e-mail: info@divinechocolate.com

Stock the Choc!

Dear Shop Manager

I am a chocolate lover and love delicious Divine with a heart!

"Please stock Divine Fairtrade chocolate and help guarantee a fair deal for cocoa growers - I guarantee I'll buy it!"

Signed

For more information on how to stock Divine Fairtrade chocolate please contact: The Day Chocolate Company, 4 Gainsford Street, London, SE1 2NE.
Tel: 020 7378 6550 e-mail: info@divinechocolate.com

Appendix I

POS Leaflet (Inner)

Become a Divine Supporter

By choosing Fairtrade products you are helping thousands of producers around the world have a chance for a better future.

Would you like to receive regular Divine updates, hear about the producers who are benefiting from your chocolate choice and be the first to hear of Fairtrade news and the latest products? If so why not fill in the form and become a Divine Supporter. You can make a difference!

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

Tel:

Age:

e-mail:

Have you ever bought Fairtrade food and drink? **Y/N**

Have you ever bought Divine chocolate? **Y/N**

Other comments:

Divine

Chocolate Fun & Facts:

Buying Fairtrade chocolate means that farmers are guaranteed a fair price for their cocoa beans and the chance for a better future.

Cocoa beans are usually bought and sold on the international financial markets. Sometimes the price goes so low that it costs a farmer more to grow the cocoa than they get for selling it.

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There are 11 million cocoa farmers in West Africa. It's the top cocoa producing area in the world.

Divine

HEAVENLY CHOCOLATE WITH A HEART



Stock the Choc!

Dear Shop Manager

I am a chocolate lover and love delicious Divine with a heart!

"Please stock Divine Fairtrade chocolate and help guarantee a fair deal for cocoa growers - I guarantee I'll buy it!"

Signed:

For more information on how to stock Divine Fairtrade chocolate please contact: The Day Chocolate Company, 4 Gainsford Street, London, SE1 2NE. Tel: 020 7378 6550 e-mail info@divinechocolate.com

Send to: The Day Chocolate Company, 4 Gainsford Street, London, SE1 2NE. Tel: 020 7378 6550 e-mail info@divinechocolate.com

Appendix II

Divine Product Wrapping

Inside of Wrapper reads:

“Divine fairly traded chocolate is produced by the Day Chocolate Company using cocoa bought from the Kuapa Kokoo Co-operative in Ghana which means the small scale cocoa producers in villages all over Ghana receive all the important benefits that Fair Trade brings. In a unique step for fair trade the farmers of Kuapa Kokoo are shareholders in the Day Chocolate Company so they have a meaningful input into how the company is run and how Divine is sold and a share of the profits. Kuapa Kokoo also sells their cocoa beans for numerous other fair trade cocoa products such as drinks, biscuits and cosmetics.

Fair trade builds dignified trading relationships between consumers in Europe and producers in developing countries. This involves changing the way that conventional international trade works so that poorer producers receive a fair and guaranteed price for their goods, have the security of long terms trading contracts as well as more control over the marketing of their products.

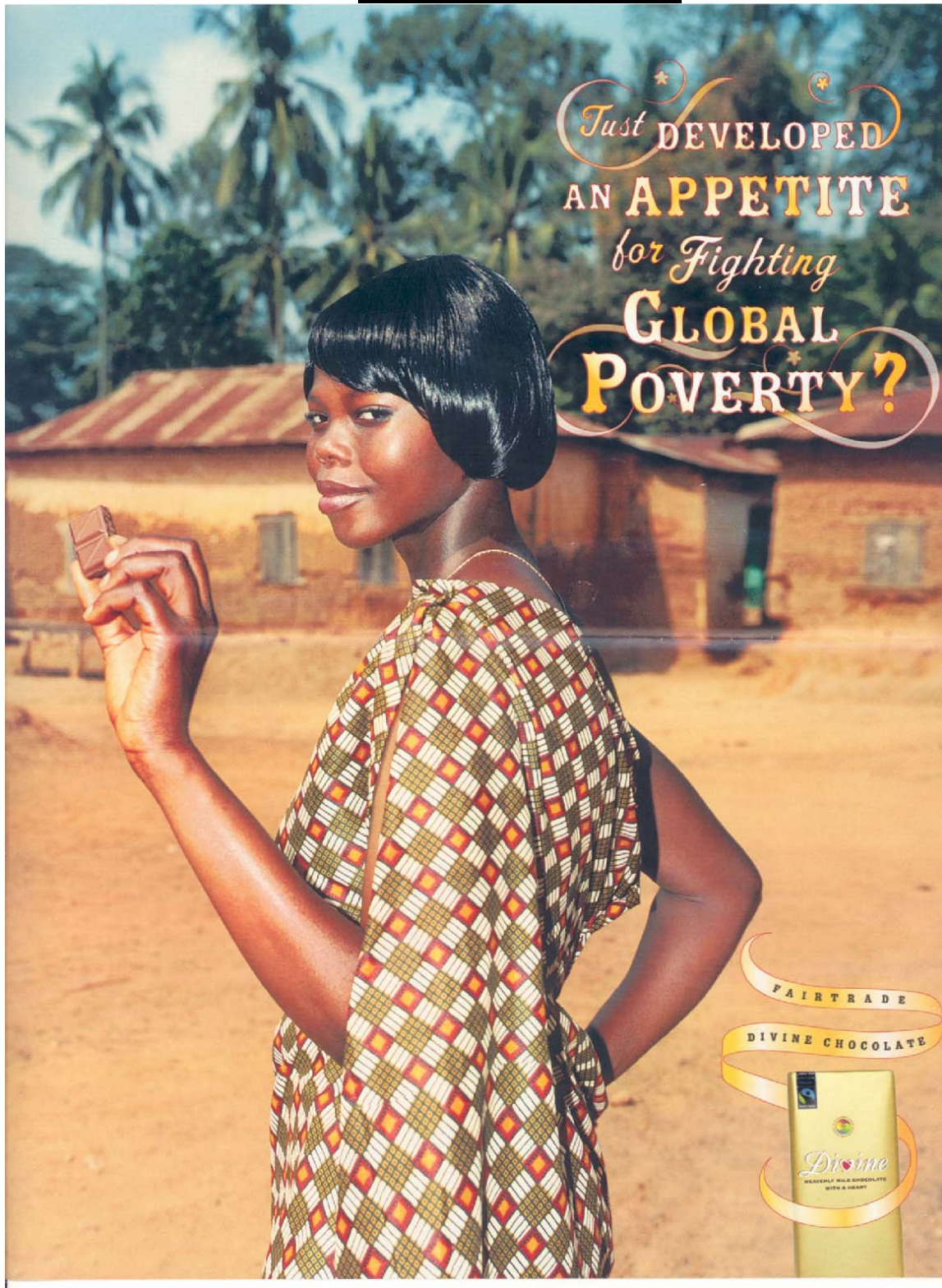
Most importantly this secure, guaranteed price paid to suppliers for their cocoa beans means that have money to invest back into their business and the community, to make their agriculture more sustainable and to build projects such as village schools and clean water supplies, facilities we take for granted.

So when you treat yourself to a Divine white chocolate bar you are participating in this unique trading chain. If you encourage everyone you know to buy Divine the trade will grow and will have a real impact”.

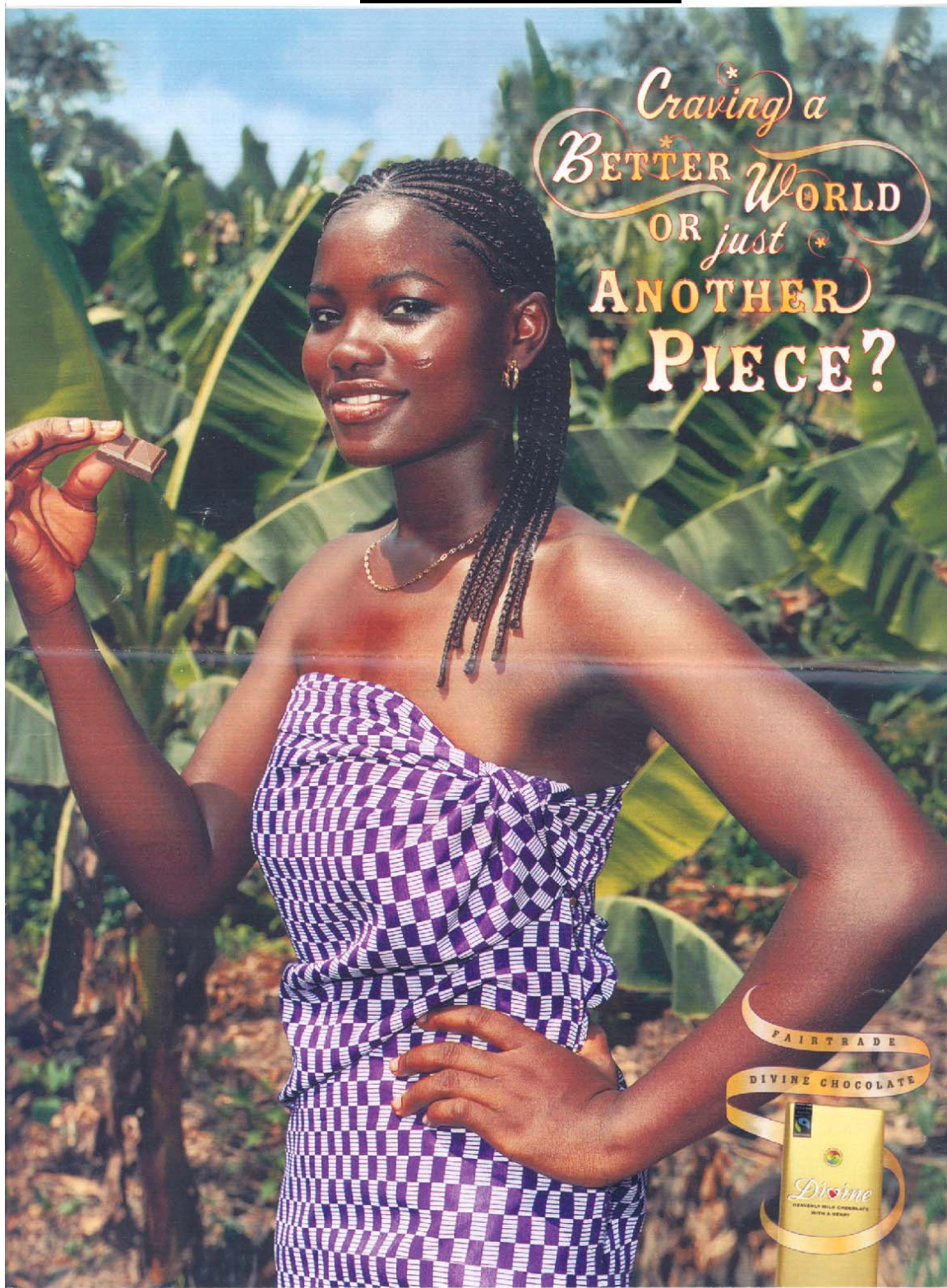
Outer Wrapper

Silver, Divine brand label, Fairtrade Mark, Comic Relief and Christian Aid logos. Address for more information. “Support Small-Scale Farmers in Ghana”.

Appendix III: Ad 1



Appendix IV: Ad 2



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